The tension in these readings is between truth and politics. The strength and the grace sought are remaining true without the support of human opinion, human political support; to remain true, even when remaining true makes one feel powerless. Second-Isaiah felt powerless, when, out of God’s goodness, Cyrus arose, as the messiah, politically correct, though not in terms of institutional religion, but in terms of God’s own design. Accepting God’s power takes faith.

Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

Verse 1 Thus says the Lord to his anointed, Cyrus, whose right hand I grasp subduing nations before him, and making kings run in his service, opening doors before him, and leaving the gates unbarred:

One scholar observes:

According to Dan 9:25, seven weeks of years would elapse between the time the word went forth to restore the city until the time of an "anointed one." The identity of that “anointed one” is also debated. Nominees include Cyrus (on the basis of Isa 45:1), Zerubbabel [sic] (on the basis of passages like Ezra 5:2; Hag 1:1; Zech 4:6-10), and Joshua the high priest (on the basis of passages like Zech 6:11-12). While Cyrus is certainly called God’s “anointed one” in Isa 45:1, the more natural reading of Dan 9:25 is that the “anointed one” would flourish in Jerusalem. Scholars who understand the high priest Onias III as the second “anointed one” mentioned in Dan 9:26 often choose Joshua over Zerubabbel [sic] because similar statements are made about the two. Scholars who see the time frame beginning in 458 or 445 interpret the forty-nine years as the time that generation took to rebuild Jerusalem and get its affairs in order again after the exile. In that case, of course, the identity of the first “anointed one” remains unknown.


Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., remarks,

Within Chaps. 41—48 … the strongest statement about Yahweh, Creator of the universe, occur either in the solemn enthronement poem honoring Cyrus (44:24—45:7) or in the decisive confrontation between Dt-Isa and the people of Israel (45:9-13) or in the concluding summary, chap. 48. Therefore, they appear late in the first period of Dt-Isa's career.

We are assisted in our interpretation of 44:24 by recognizing the strong inclusion between 44:24 and 45:7. We find the repetition of the hymnic participle *** [*** stands for Hebrew ellipsis] and also the phrase:

44:24 ***
45:7***

Verse 4 For the sake of Jacob, my servant, of Israel, my chosen one, I have called you by your name, giving you a title, though you knew me not.

Stuhlmueller continues,

This inclusion leads us to interpret *** or *** as referring to all those events within the poem. The poem begins with Jerusalem’s destruction and leads to Cyrus’ part in the reconstitution of Israel. Chaos and re-creation, precisely in that order, epitomize the international scene so far as Israel is involved. Yahweh’s motive for acting is not to be found in his power to create but in his position as *** (44:24) who acts *** (45:4). Compassion and kinship prompted the Lord to re-create his chosen people Israel. Moreover, we note that the creative act is presented with participial forms, i.e..., ***, so that even these divine acts consider God as creating now. The participles touch upon the memory of Israel’s liturgical worship where redemptive acts were relived.

Participles, moreover, direct emphasis personally upon Yahweh as Creator and not upon creation, the thing done by Yahweh.

Even if the momentum of Dt-Isa’s mind converges upon Israel’s separation from the gentile nations, still the passages which sing hymnically of Yahweh as Creator of the cosmos contain hints and allusions that reach beyond Israel to the world. The fact that participial phrases like *** and *** became fixed formulas in postexilic liturgy shows the mighty potential of Dt-Isa’s language.⁴

… d. Chaps. 41—48 stylistically is dominated by many exalted but scattered hymnic participles, by sustained trial speeches against the gods of the nations and crypto-Israelites, and by an increasing disputation against the ***. These chapters were composed before the fall of Babylon and represent a fully developed “theology.” e. In chaps. 49-55 the style is more somber, often that of lament or a sober proclamation of salvation. The prophet is not disputing with Israelites but encouraging the remnant of his followers over the meager results of the new exodus. Zion, he insists, will have a glorious future. f. The Servant Songs begin with the strong chords of lament but end in a psalm of thanksgiving as the isolated and persecuted Dt-Isa finds peace and dignity in the Lord alone. g. Each of the two major sections were edited with a sense of chronological sequence: chaps. 41—48, from ebullient hopes in Cyrus to sarcastic opposition from his own people; chaps. 49-55 and the Servant Songs, from lamentation to new hopes.⁵

Verse 5  
**I am the Lord and there is no other**, there is no God besides me. 
It is I who arm you, though you know me not,

In another place, Stuhlmueller writes,

Yet as the prophet of the Isaiah tradition declares, all remains in God’s control:

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I am the Lord, and there is no other.…
I form light and create darkness,
I make weal and create woe;
I the Lord do all these things (Isa 45:5, 7).

Second Isaiah summarizes, by the words “darkness” and “woe,”
the destruction of the nation of Israel and the exile of its
inhabitants under the fierce anger of the Babylonians, as declared
earlier in Isa 44:24-28, a situation of *** about to be corrected. 6

Psalm 96:1, 3, 4-5, 7-8, 9-10

Verses 7-9a Give to the Lord, you families of nations, give to the Lord glory and
praise; give to the Lord the glory due his name! Bring gifts, and enter
his courts. Worship the Lord, in holy attire.

Stuhlmueller also writes about Psalm 96.

The fabric was Canaanite, as were some of the early designs
which spoke of God as Creator. Yet the intuition of God as Savior
and redeemer, dominant in the Torah (the five Books of Moses),
not only persisted but emerged as a central concept. Marvelous
moments, inspired by Israel’s history, began to control the
psalms and there was even a subtle—or not so subtle—tendency
to make theological corrections in earlier psalms. An example is a
comparison between Psalm 29 and 96:

6 Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., The Spirituality of the Psalms (Collegeville, Minnesota: The
Psalm 29:1-2
Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

Psalm 96:7-9a
Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts.
Worship the Lord in holy splendor.

The much later Psalm 96 not only adapts the lines to include actions within the sanctuary ("bring an offering, and come into his courts"), but unabashedly changes "sons of the gods" to read "families of the peoples." The most serious question is not why later psalm writers dared to correct earlier, inspired text, but rather: Why did God tolerate these expressions of polytheism, small in number as they are? …

Stuhlmueller continues, in another place,

Psalms most fully and formally proclaiming YHWH-King came late, like Psalms 96-99 and 149. Most of these psalms are entitled “a new song,” possibly under the influence of Second Isaiah:

Sing to the Lord a new song,
his praise from the end of the earth!
Let the sea roar and all that fills it,
the coastlands and their inhabitants.
Let them give glory to the Lord,

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and declare his praise in the coastlands (Isa 42:10, 12).

This hymn concludes a major section of the poetry of Second Isaiah (41:1-42:13). The longer poem begins by announcing Cyrus the Great as the champion and liberator of Israel (41:1-20). Cyrus is later to be acclaimed God’s “anointed,” or literally the Lord’s “messiah” (45:1). Cyrus’ conquest of the world provides a panoramic setting for Israel’s salvation and return from exile. This is the “new thing,” unheard of until now (41:21-29). Yet, mysteriously, God really achieves it through “my servant” Israel, silent and humble, the Lord’s instrument for justice (42:1-4). Israel will become “a light for the nations” (42:9). The “new song” in 42:10-12 celebrates this wonder of Israel’s salvation that somehow becomes a light to the nations. 8

This method of the Bible quoting the Bible, so familiar to contemporary readers, was new in biblical times. The first instance of quoting a biblical passage by name occurs when Mic 3:12 is cited by the elders of the land who defended the prophet Jeremiah against the death threats of the priests and temple prophets (Jer 26:18). Up until this time, inspired spokespersons were forming or, better, were creating the Bible new. Only close to the Exile and especially afterward did people begin to view Scripture as set and unchangeable and therefore as something to be quoted.

As was seen in Chapter 2 of this book [the chapter that I intend eventually to quote entirely, principle by principle], in quoting the Bible the people were not historical-critical scholars. They never felt obliged to abide exclusively by what the original author meant in his or her context. If individual verses were lifted out—and changed or corrected, as was seen when Psalm 96:7-8 quotes Psalm 29:1-2—the later authors thought of themselves as members of a living tradition, able to adapt for the benefit of a later assembly of worshipers.

The community of believers are commissioned not only to be thoroughly Bible people but also to be a thoroughly vibrant, dynamic, and sensitive part of their respective churches as they struggle, preach, instruct, and pray within the contemporary world. Communities and churches today are not neatly confined as was ancient Israel, a country of some six thousand square miles, whose interaction with other nations was generally limited to the Near East. Today, believing communities form “world churches,” at home on all continents, where there are many living languages and distinctive cultures. If the YHWH-King psalms, depending upon the prophecy of Isaiah, stressed justice, the task is all the more pressing in today’s world where millions of people are suffering severe forms of oppression. The task of adaptation—in quoting the Bible—is far more complex and demanding but equally as crucial as in Bible times, so that believers may repeat today:

Worship the Lord in holy splendor;  
tremble before him, all the earth.  
Say among the nations, “The Lord is king!  
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.  
He will judge the peoples with equity” (Psalm 96:9-10).  

For purposes of comparison, modern Israel is 8,020 square miles, Virginia 39,704.  

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b

Verse 5a and b For our gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction.

Philippians 2:15d, 16a

[no comment here]

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Matthew 22:15-21

Verse 16 spells out the conflict between truth and politics.

They sent their disciples to him, with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. And you are not concerned with anyone’s opinion, for you do not regard a person’s status. …

Saint Jerome explains the Herodians.

Jerome: For Judea had lately become subject to the Romans, under Caesar Augustus, and when the census had been made of the whole (Roman) world, Judea had been been made a tributary of Rome. And there was great division among the people; some saying they should pay the tribute, in return for the peace and security the Roman arms conferred on all; the Pharisees, on the contrary, who were full of their own righteousness, contended that the People of God, who were wont to pay tithes and also gave first fruits and other offerings contained in the Law, ought not to be subject to men’s laws. Augustus however had made Herod, the son of Antipater, a foreigner and a proselyte, king of the Jews and entrusted to him the raising of the tribute, subject however to the dominium of Rome. So the Pharisees send [sic] their own followers with the Herodians, that is, Herod’s soldiers; whom the Pharisees called Herodians in derision, because they paid tribute to the Romans, and did not give themselves to the worship of God.  

Verse 18 … you hypocrites

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The Greek does not seem quite as harsh, at least when the derivation of the word is explained. The Greek is \( \upsilon \pi \omicron - \kappa \rho \iota \tau \eta \varsigma \). The grammarian explains, “(<\upsilon \pi \omicron - \kappa \rho \iota \nu \omicron \mu \alpha \iota \) pretend, as a part) actor, hence hypocrite.”

What strikes me personally is verse 22, the verse omitted,

When they heard this they were amazed; they left him alone and went away.

This sense of being correct in truth but politically incorrect and, therefore, left alone is a frustration to which I can relate.

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