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# THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. ISAIAH

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## CHAPTERS 40-66

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### Lesson 4: 44:1-45:25 - God works in mysterious ways?

#### Introduction

Perhaps, you have heard the statement “God works in mysterious ways.” What do you think of that statement?

#### Lesson Goal: To see that God works through his chosen means

#### Don't look to the wrong means (44:1-20)

People may be tempted to look to false gods, especially when they feel the true God did not help them. Perhaps, this is how those in exile would have felt. With this in mind, what words in verses 1 through 5 would be particularly comforting?

In this section, God asserts clearly that there are no other gods. Then, he, in a comical way, confronts idols. Compare God's confrontation of idolatry with the acceptance of false religions promoted among some 'Lutherans' today:

*The Bible contains no uniform perspective regarding people of other religions. In some cases, the leaders of Israel try to draw a sharp line between the Israelites and their neighbors. In other cases, God is portrayed as working through neighbors who practice other religions. There are numerous examples:*

- *Moses receives valuable advice from Jethro, a priest of Midian, not an Israelite, who also happens to be his father-in-law (Exodus 18).*
- *Cyrus of Persia, who did not worship the God of Israel, is “anointed” by God to deliver the Israelites from exile (Isaiah 45:1).*
- *Jesus encounters a Canaanite woman and is moved by her faith to heal her daughter (Matthew 15:27).*
- *Jesus responds to the needs of a Roman centurion, a commander within the occupying forces—not likely a person who practiced Judaism (Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10).*
- *In the story of Abimelech, Abraham, and Sarah, it is the outsider Abimelech who listens to God and does what is right (Genesis 20).*
- *The Canaanite named Rahab hides the two spies Joshua sent to find out about Jericho prior to its conquest (Joshua 2).*
- *And the magi from the east, who likely did not practice Judaism, visit and honor the infant Jesus (Matthew 2:1-12).*

*These are but a few examples of how God loves and works with, in, and through people of various religions. These passages reveal the surprising truth that God at times invites Christians to learn from and even emulate people of other religions. These scriptural*

*stories invite us to listen, ponder, and discover, from a position of humility, how God might use inter-religious relations to instruct us and challenge our faith to grow today.<sup>1</sup>*

React to this statement. (Are there positives? What are the negatives?)

Agree or Disagree: Because you cannot know someone's personal relationship with God, you should not condemn those who are not connected to God through the means of grace.

## God restores (44:21-27)

In encouraging Israel to remember what he has done; God points to his forgiveness in a beautiful picture. In this proclamation of forgiveness, what does God call Israel to do? (v.22)

Considering verse 22, read the following excerpt from our Lutheran Confessions.

*God the Holy Ghost, however, does not effect conversion without means, but uses for this purpose the preaching and hearing of God's Word, as it is written Rom. 1:16: The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.<sup>2</sup>*

Basing your answer on what you read, how can a person return to God?

## God works through an unexpected person (44:28-45:14)

Years before Cyrus was even born, God called him by name to free his people from exile. Compare Ezra 1:1-4 to Isaiah 45:5. Should someone consider Cyrus to have been a believer in the true God? Why or why not?

According to verse 6, why did God use Cyrus to free his people?

According to verse 14, what do the people, who weren't from Israel, end up confessing?

## The Hidden God is revealed (45:15-25)

"Indeed, you are a God who hides himself." Where alone is the Hidden God revealed?

Read verses 24 and 25; then, consider the follow statements from the Dogmatics Notes of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

The sacraments create and strengthen saving faith. This power they have in common with the Word. The sacraments differ from the Word only in form.<sup>3</sup>

How does someone become part of the true seed of Israel?

## Conclusion

Agree or Disagree: God works in mysterious ways.



<sup>1</sup> A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment: A policy statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
<sup>2</sup> Art. II, FOC, Epitome, paragraph 4  
<sup>3</sup> p. 171-173 of WLS Dogmatics Notes