



## ISAIAH 44

### YAHWEH, THE ONLY TRUE GOD ~ GOD NEVER FORGETS ISRAEL ~ GOD IS IN CONTROL

Idol worship takes many forms. Historically, people have worshiped trees, rivers, hills, stones, the sun, moon, and stars. It can also be the undue worship of people-heroes. In our nation, we have music idols, fashion idols, TV and movie idols. We also worship money, sex, drugs, and whole lot more. In fact, an idol is anything that occupies the place of God in our life. It is why all through the Bible, God repeatedly warns us about allowing things and people to take the place that only He deserves. God is never silent when it comes to idol worship!

No one could paint a more accurate picture of what idol worship really looks like than God, Himself. He obviously takes idol worship very personally. It might feel like someone beginning to worship your spouse, right in front of your eyes. We're not talking about admiring your spouse, but actually placing them in a position of honor, right before *their* eyes, gazing at them with a longing that could only be described as worship. None of us would put up with that. Neither does God!

English Standard (ESV)	Passion Notes	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p>Isaiah 44:1 But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen!                  2 Thus says the LORD who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you: Fear not, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen. 3 For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. 4 They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams. 5 This one will say, 'I am the LORD's,' another will call on the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, 'The LORD's,' and name himself by the name of Israel."</p>	<p><b>a</b> 44:1–2 There is no verse in the Bible that speaks of God as our mother, but there are frequent metaphors that imply God gave us birth (and new birth), nurtured us “in his love, and even formed us in his womb. The love God has for us is similar to a mother’s love. The Hebrew concept of compassion carries this thought, for compassion (racham) is the same word as “womb.” God has a womb-love for each of us. This thought resurfaces more than once in these later chapters of Isaiah.</p> <p><b>b</b> 44:1–2 Or “Jeshurun,” a symbolic name for Israel showing her unique, intimate relationship with God. It is taken from the root word yashar, “to please.” Others translate this endearing term for Israel as “upright one.” God will straighten out the crookedness of Jacob. Jeshurun is found only here and in Deuteronomy (Deut. 32:15; 33:5, 26).</p> <p><b>c</b> 44:3 See Ps. 68:5–6.</p> <p><b>d</b> 44:3 See Acts 2:12–17.</p> <p><b>e</b> 44:4 Or “like a binu-tree” (Dead Sea scroll 1QIsaa).</p>	<p><b>Yahweh, the Only True God</b></p> <p>Isaiah 44:1 Now, listen to me, my servant Jacob, Israel, my chosen one. I am Yahweh, your Creator, who shaped you in my womb. <b>a</b> Hear what I have to say to you: ‘Don’t fear. I will help you, O Jacob my servant, Do not fear, my pleasing one, <b>b</b> Israel. 3 I will pour refreshing water on the thirsty and streams on the dry ground. <b>c</b> I will pour out my Spirit on your children, <b>d</b> my blessing upon your descendants. 4 They will spring up like grass blanketing a meadow, <b>e</b> like poplars growing by gushing streams. 5 One will say, “I belong to Yahweh.” Another will be called Jacob. Yet another will write on his hand “Property of Yahweh.” Another will adopt the name Israel.’”</p>

<sup>6</sup> Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. <sup>7</sup> Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. <sup>8</sup> Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.” <sup>9</sup> All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit. Their witnesses neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame.

<sup>10</sup> Who fashions a god or casts an idol that is profitable for nothing? <sup>11</sup> Behold, all his companions shall be put to shame, and the craftsmen are only human. Let them all assemble, let them stand forth. They shall be terrified; they shall be put to shame together.

<sup>12</sup> The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over the coals. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm. He becomes hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. <sup>13</sup> The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house.

<sup>14</sup> He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. <sup>15</sup> Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. <sup>16</sup> Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, “Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!”

<sup>17</sup> And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my god!”

<sup>18</sup> They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. <sup>19</sup> No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, “Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?” <sup>20</sup> He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?”

**f** 44:6 See Matt. 27:42; Mark 15:32; John 1:49; 12:13.

**g** 44:6 Or “I am the First, and I am the Last.”

**h** 44:7 “Everlasting” is *olam*, and there are nine more everlasting things found in Isaiah: (1) Everlasting God (40:28; 63:12), (2) Everlasting Covenant (55:3; 61:8), (3) Everlasting Kindness (54:8), (4) Everlasting Salvation (45:17), (5) Everlasting Majesty on God’s people (60:15), (6) Everlasting Joy (51:11), (7) Everlasting Name (56:5), (8) Everlasting Light (60:19–20), and (9) Everlasting Sign (55:13).

**i** 44:7 The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. “from my placing an eternal people and things to come.”

**j** 44:11 Or “those who produce them.”

**k** 44:13 Or “rounds it with his instruments.”

**l** 44:20 Or “the shepherd of ashes.”

<sup>6</sup> The words of Yahweh, Israel’s true King **f** and Kinsman-Redeemer, Yahweh, Commander of Angel Armies, says: “I am the Beginning and I am the Ending, **g** and I am the only God there is. <sup>7</sup> Who is like me? Go ahead, stand and speak up. I’ll wait for him to announce it and explain it all to me! Who else has announced from everlasting **h** what is to come? **i** Let him prophesy what is yet to be. <sup>8</sup> Do not fear nor be shaken! Haven’t I foretold it, announcing it to you ahead of time? You are my witnesses, so tell me, is there any god besides me? “There is no other Rock of shelter; I know not one.” <sup>9</sup> Idol-makers amount to nothing, and the things they treasure can do no one any good. They are witnesses with blind eyes who know nothing; they will be disgraced. <sup>10</sup> What kind of person would form an idol-god or cast an image with no ability to do any good? <sup>11</sup> No wonder those who worship them **j** will be put to shame. Their craftsmen are only human beings. Let them all come together and take their stand. They will all be terrified and put to shame!

<sup>12</sup> The blacksmith takes his tongs and heats it over the coals, forming it with hammers, forging it with his strong arm. But when he gets hungry, his strength ebbs away, and if he doesn’t drink water, he quickly grows weary. <sup>13</sup> The woodworker stretches out a measuring line, then marks it and fashions his idol-god with his carving tools. Then he uses a stylus to trace it out on the wood **k** and shapes it into the figure of a man, trying to make it look like a beautiful human to be displayed somewhere in a shrine. <sup>14</sup> He chooses a cedar or a cypress or a cypress or an oak, but first lets it grow strong in the forest. He plants a pine tree, and it is nourished by the rain. <sup>15</sup> The wood serves man for fuel; some he uses to warm himself and with some he bakes his bread. But from this same wood he also makes a god to worship and bows down to the idol he formed. <sup>16</sup> Half of the wood he burns in the fire to roast his meat. Then he eats his fill and is satisfied. Part he uses to warm himself and says, “Ah, I’m warm and cozy sitting by the fire.” <sup>17</sup> With the rest of it he makes his idol-god, bows down to it, and worships it! He prays to it, saying, “Save me, for you are my god!”

<sup>18</sup> They have no clue what they’re doing and don’t comprehend how absurd it is! For they shut their eyes so they cannot see. They close their hearts so they cannot understand. <sup>19</sup> They have no knowledge, no understanding, no discernment to say, “Half of the wood I burned in the fire. I roasted meat and cooked my dinner. Now should I take the rest of the wood and make it into an abomination? Should I bow down and worship a block of wood?” <sup>20</sup> He feeds his spirit on ashes! **l** His deluded heart leads him astray. He can’t even ask himself, “Is this thing I’m holding in my right hand a fraud?”

English Standard (ESV)	Passion Translation (TPT)	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p><sup>21</sup> Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you; you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me.</p> <p><sup>22</sup> I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you. <sup>23</sup> Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it; shout, O depths of the earth; break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel.</p> <p><sup>24</sup> Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: “I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, <sup>25</sup> who frustrates the signs of liars and makes fools of diviners, who turns wise men back and makes their knowledge foolish, <sup>26</sup> who confirms the word of his servant and fulfills the counsel of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be inhabited,’ and of the cities of Judah, ‘They shall be built, and I will raise up their ruins’; <sup>27</sup> who says to the deep, ‘Be dry; I will dry up your rivers’; <sup>28</sup> who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose’; saying of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be built,’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid.’”</p>	<p><b>m</b> 44:22 This “thick cloud” of our sins was a barrier between God and man. Grace has swept it away so that we can freely come before him.</p> <p><b>n</b> 44:22 See Gal. 3:13–14.</p> <p><b>o</b> 44:27 This actually happened at the taking of Babylon by Cyrus. See Jer. 50:38; 51:31–36.</p> <p><b>p</b> 44:28 Cyrus, king of Persia, reigned from 559–529 BC. He permitted the Jews to return from captivity to Jerusalem and issued a decree to authorize the temple to be rebuilt (2 Chron. 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–4). Even though Isaiah prophesied 150 years before Cyrus became king, he calls him by name. This is one of the greatest proofs of God’s omniscience and sovereignty as well as the supernatural aspect of prophecy.“</p> <p><b>q</b> 44:28 Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote that “when Cyrus read this (Isaiah’s prophecy), and admired the Divine Power, an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfill what was so written.” These verses in chs. 44–45 convinced Cyrus to issue the decree to rebuild the temple. See Josephus Ant. XI. 1.2 and Ezra 5:13.</p>	<p><b>God Never Forgets Israel</b></p> <p><sup>21</sup> “Remember these things, O Jacob’s tribes, and Israel, you are my servant. I created you to be my servant, and I will never forget you! <sup>22</sup> I have swept away your sins like a thick cloud. <b>m</b> I have made your guilt to vanish like mist disappearing into thin air. Now come back, come back to me, for I have paid the price for you.” <b>n</b> <sup>23</sup> Sing! Starry sky above, break loose with singing, “for Yahweh has finished it! Shout! Earth deep below, give up your shout! Mountains high, break out with joyous songs of praise! Let the forest choirs join in, with every tree singing its notes! For Yahweh has paid the ransom price for Jacob’s tribes, and he will be glorified in Israel!</p> <p><b>God Is in Control</b></p> <p><sup>24</sup> Here is what Yahweh, your Kinsman-Redeemer, who formed you in his womb, has to say: “I am Yahweh, Creator of all. I alone stretched out the canvas of the cosmos. I who shaped the earth needed no one’s help. <sup>25</sup> Now I make fools of fortune-tellers and frustrate astrologers’ predictions. I confuse the wise, who think they know it all, and make their ‘knowledge’ into foolishness. <sup>26</sup> I confirm the word of my servants and fulfill the prophecies of my messengers. I say to Jerusalem, ‘Many people will live in you again,’ and to the cities of Judah, ‘I will raise up your ruins; you will be rebuilt!’ <sup>27</sup> I say to deep waters, ‘Dry up!’ and to rivers, ‘Become dry!’ <b>o</b> <sup>28</sup> I say concerning Cyrus, <b>p</b> ‘He is my shepherd, and he will carry out all the purposes I have for him,’ saying to Jerusalem, ‘You will be rebuilt and flourish again!’ saying to the temple, ‘You will be reconstructed!’ <b>q</b></p>

## Bible Knowledge Commentary

JOHN A. MARTIN

- **Israel again exhorted not to fear (44:1-5)**
  - 44:1-2. Again the prophet emphasized God’s choosing (see comments on 41:8-9) and forming (cf. 43:1, 7, 21; 44:24) Israel. (On the word listen, see comments on 46:3.) Since God promised to help her, she need not be afraid (cf. 41:10, 14; 43:5; 44:8; 54:4). (On Jacob as God’s servant see comments on 41:8.) Jeshurun, meaning “the upright one,” is a poetic synonym for Israel, used elsewhere only in Deuteronomy 32:15; 33:5, 26.
  - 44:3-5. The Lord will revive Israel physically and spiritually. He will pour water on the ... land, making it well watered (cf. 35:6-7; 41:18; 43:19-20) and He will pour His Holy Spirit (cf. 32:15) on their descendants. This outpouring of the Spirit will occur when the people have returned in belief to the land (cf.

Ezek. 36:24, 27; Joel 2:25-29) just after the Messiah's second coming to establish the Millennium. Redeemed Israel will prosper numerically like grass and poplar trees, and they will want to be known as righteous individuals (Isa. 44:5), unashamed of Him and their nation.

- **THE LORD'S UNIQUENESS AS THE ONLY GOD** (44:6-45:25) This section emphasizes that the Lord is the only God and that therefore idol-worship is illogical and absurd. His uniqueness and sovereignty are (a) contrasted with the idols (44:6-23), (b) revealed by His prophesying the coming of Cyrus (44:24-45:8), (c) shown by His having created everything (45:9-13), and (d) demonstrated by the fact that eventually Gentiles will proclaim Him to be the Lord (45:14-25). Addressed primarily to Gentiles, 44:6-45:25 would also have encouraged the covenant people, especially those in captivity, as they would read that their captors would someday acknowledge the true God of Israel.
  - **God's sovereignty over nonexistent idols** (44:6-23)
    - **The uniqueness of God.**
      - **44:6-8.** Several titles stress God's sovereignty: Israel's King (cf. 43:15), Redeemer (cf. 43:14; see comments on 41:14), the LORD Almighty God, and the First and the Last (i.e., the eternal One; cf. 48:12; Rev. 1:17; 2:8; 22:13). The Lord argued for His uniqueness (apart from Me there is no God; cf. Isa. 43:11; 44:6; 46:9) by challenging anyone to tell of the past and the future (44:7; cf. 41:22-23). Since His knowledge of the future (from long ago) proves His uniqueness, His people should not be afraid (cf. 41:10, 14; 43:5; 44:2; 54:4). They themselves are witnesses (cf. 43:10, 12) to His uniqueness, strength, and stability (Rock; cf. 17:10; 26:4; 30:29).
    - **The Unprofitableness of Idols.**
      - **44:9.** Idol-worship does nothing for those who practice it; it only shows them up as being spiritually blind and ignorant. Pagans view their worship of idols as meritorious, but it will ultimately bring them shame (cf. v. 11; 42:17; 45:16).
    - **The Weakness of Idol-Makers.**
      - **44:10-14.** People who make idols will experience shame (cf. v. 9) and disrepute. The fact that craftsmen are nothing but men (cf. 40:19) epitomizes the foolishness of idol-worship. A blacksmith who gets hungry while making an idol from metal, and a carpenter who has to outline his idol on wood, do not inspire confidence in their idols. The gods themselves have no life for they are made from metals or from trees which ironically the true God made.
    - **The Material Nature of Idols.**
      - **44:15-20.** From the same piece of wood a workman makes an idol and bakes bread. What folly to bow down to wood, part of which is used to cook one's food and to keep himself ... warm! People who pray that an idol—mere wood—would save them (v. 17) are ignorant and have no spiritual sight or comprehension (v. 18; cf. 6:10). Having their eyes ... plastered over may refer to a religious rite in which mud was applied to worshipers' eyes. Idolaters do not think of the incongruity of using part of a piece of wood for fuel for baking and roasting and making an idol (sarcastically called by Isaiah a detestable thing) from what is left. To worship wood is to feed on ashes (cf. Ps. 102:9), that is, to trust in something totally worthless, something that deceives.
    - **The Joy of the Lord's Redeemed.**
      - **44:21-23.** The contrast between Israel and deluded people who make and worship idols (vv. 9-20) is striking. Believers in Israel were redeemed but idol-makers were deceived. Israel was to remember that God can foretell the future (vv. 6-8) and that idols are really nothing (vv. 9-20). Therefore she should worship the Lord who has forgiven her sins (cf. 43:25) and redeemed her. Some, however, think these things refer to what follows and that Israel

was to remember she had been redeemed. In either case the nation was to sing. In fact all nature is personified as being asked to sing (cf. the mountains in 49:13) about Him who redeemed Jacob and who displays His glory in Israel (cf. 43:7). In contrast with the other nations' spiritual darkness, Israel will live in the light of God's glory.

- **God's prophecies about Cyrus** (44:24-45:8)

- The fact that God predicted more than 150 years in advance that a man named Cyrus would release the Jewish exiles points to God's uniqueness. To approach the Bible with an antisupernaturalistic bias and say that the references to Cyrus were added later, after he released the captives, causes the passage, as stated earlier, to lose its emphasis on God's uniqueness in predicting the future. This would mean that God is no different from idols—the very point Isaiah is disproving!
- **44:24-28.** The LORD, Israel's Redeemer (see comments on 43:14), who formed her (cf. 43:1, 7, 21; 44:2), is the Creator of all things including the heavens and the earth (cf. 42:5; 45:12, 18; 48:13; 51:13, 16) and the One who makes false prophets ... diviners, and supposedly wise people look foolish. Those who said God could not release His people from Babylon would be proved false when God's predictions were fulfilled. Through the prophets, His messengers, He said Jerusalem would again have people living in it. Cyrus would allow the exiles to go back and rebuild their capital city Jerusalem (cf. 45:13) and the temple. In 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar and his forces broke through Jerusalem's walls, burned the houses and the temple, and carried many captives into exile. Cyrus, founder of the Persian Empire, first came to the throne of Anshan in Eastern Elam in 559. In 549 he conquered the Medes and became the ruler of the combined Persian and Median Empire. In 539 he conquered Babylon (Dan. 5:30) and the very next year issued a decree that the Jews could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4). In doing this Cyrus was serving God's purposes as if he were God's shepherd. Those returnees built the temple, completing it in 515 B.C., and years later (in 444 B.C.) Nehemiah went to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls (see comments on Neh. 1-2; and comments on Dan. 9:25).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Growing up in your family of origin, what were some of the "family idols" you would say your particular family worshipped? Which of these idols did you abandon when you left the security of your family and started life on your own?
2. In your opinion, what are the top three idols Americans worship (No, please resist the urge...you just can't say the TV show, "American Idol!")? If you were going to "knock these idols off their thrones," how might you go about doing that in your own life? At work? In your church?
3. How do you discern the point at which something or someone has becoming an idol in your life? How does this particular behavior change your everyday life? What shifts in you, personally, when you begin to really embrace an idol?

4. In verses 21-23 of Chapter 44, Yahweh reaffirms his faithful love to his people. At the end of that section, God says he “has paid the ransom price for Jacob’s tribes.” What was that ransom and how was it paid? We all know that Jesus paid our ransom with his shed blood. How do you articulate that reality to the unredeemed in a way that makes sense to them?
  
5. The heading over verses 24-28 says. “God Is in Control.” We all know that we’re not talking about a “once, for all time” surrendering control in our lives, but it is an ongoing giving up of control. Personally, what motivates you most to give up control? What changes in your life when you are successful at giving up control?