

Awesome salvation discussion guide

based on **Isaiah 45** (Linked to sermon of 26/11/17)

which can be accessed at www.stjamesbythepark.org/current-sermon-series

If you haven't yet looked at <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/isaiah/> for some helpful resources on getting to grips with Isaiah, feel free to!

Intro: What's been the most unexpected way or place you've seen God at work?

It's easy for us to miss the shock of v1. The background is this: Isaiah is writing at a time when the nation is in a poor state. He's already prophesied that the Babylonians will invade and cart off the Jewish people to Babylon in a forced migration. Now he's promising hope for a future beyond that exile – but their rescue will come from a most unlikely source.

Chapter 44 is a strong denunciation of idolatry – yet then the pagan king Cyrus is described as God's shepherd (44.28) and the Lord's anointed (45.1). [Cyrus came from Persia and freed the Jewish people from Babylon, allowing them to repatriate to their homeland.] How would you feel if a very un-Christian ruler today was described in those terms?

Similarly, Pharaoh was told that God raised him up for a specific purpose (Exodus 9.16), and Saul was identified by God whilst an unbeliever (Acts 9.15) – although he did then become a believer. Can you think of times when God has used an unbeliever (or even someone quite anti-God) to carry out his work?

v1-8 introduce Cyrus as the one God would use. Why did God choose Cyrus and not a Jewish leader?

v9-13 picture Judah picking an argument with God over his choice of Cyrus. When do we argue with God?

How would you sum up God's response in your own words?

v14-25 elaborate on God's rescue – both the one through Cyrus, and the bigger one to come through Jesus. What are the implications of v22-25?

Up (love God): Dan talked about our tendency to put God in a box – but that God won't be boxed! Spend some time praising God that he's bigger than our boxes – and that he'd open our eyes to see him at work in unexpected places and in unexpected ways this week.

In (love each other): Sometimes it is very hard to trust that God knows what he's doing with our lives – as it was for the Jewish people facing exile and then the thought of further foreign intervention. Read Romans 8.35-39 and pray those verses for any in your group who are struggling to understand God's purposes at the moment.

Out (reach the world): God lets Isaiah know about Cyrus's coming maybe 150 years in advance – he holds the future. How might that idea help (and/or hinder) your witness to unbelieving friends?