

Lesson 24
Isaiah 46:1 – 48:22
The Greatness of God (Part 3)

Memory verse: “Listen to me, Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: I am he; I am the first and I am the last.” (Isaiah 48:12 NIV)

The emphasis shifts from God as the true Saviour (Is. 45:20-25) to the idols who cannot save (Is. 46:1-7). It sums up the argument that Yahweh is superior to pagan gods, and expands the idea introduced in Is. 45:20: that a god that people need to carry cannot save.

Bel and Nebo were the two chief gods of Babylonia. Bel ("lord," cf. the Canaanite Baal) was the title of the father of the gods in the Babylonian pantheon, whose name was Enlil. Bel was also later the title of Marduk, the city god of Babylon and the hero of Enuma Elish, the Babylonian Creation account. Nebo was Bel's son, and he was supposedly a wise administrator. The names Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar ("Nebo, protect the boundary"), and Nabonidus, among others, show reverence for Nebo, and the name Belshazzar ("Bel, protect the king") honoured Bel. Nebo was the god of learning, writing, and astronomy. The Babylonians carried images of these prominent gods in their New Year's Day parades.

The last segment of chapter 46 returns to the subject of God as the righteous deliverer (cf. 45:14-19). God assures His people that He cares for them from the beginning to the end. Isaiah 46:4 is the basis for a stanza of the familiar song "How Firm a Foundation" that is usually omitted from our hymnals:

E'en down to old age, all My people shall prove,
My sovereign, eternal unchangeable love,
And then when grey hairs shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs they shall still in My bosom be borne.

RICHARD KEEN

Chapter 47 concludes the theme on "The Lord redemption of His servant (Israel)", by depicting Babylon - the nation from which the Lord would redeem His people from captivity—as a proud woman full of self confidence. In her case, as in so many others, pride goes before a fall. This section is another oracle against a foreign nation (cf. chapters 13-23; Jer. 46-51; Ezek. 25-31) and an oracle of salvation for Zion (cf. Is. 45:14-46:13). The main point of this chapter is not primarily to predict Babylon's fall, however, but to glorify the power and grace of Yahweh, using the destruction of Babylon as a backdrop.

The point of chapters 41-47 is that the entire structure and system of the Babylonian Empire (represented by her idols) was developed by humans [cf. the Tower of Babel, Gen. 11]; Babylon had no lasting divine sanction. Just as an idol is of human fabrication, with no autonomous power or usefulness of its own, so the entire Babylonian system of society, economics, and politics was a human fabrication which in time would collapse. Israel, then, must reserve her worship, her ultimate commitment, for Yahweh. This commitment must stand above all other systems and values. Yahweh may grant these systems (including Assyria, Persia) temporary sanction to do His will, but He also reserves the right to repudiate and destroy them. Only Yahweh deserves worship

Chapter 48 climaxes Isaiah's arguments for Yahweh's superiority over pagan idols. The prophet was led to use the Israelites' exile in Babylon to prove his point. Isaiah had demonstrated God's trustworthiness (chapters 7-39) and had promised that He would graciously redeem His people (chapters 40 - 47). Now it was up to the Israelites to trust Him. Chapter 48 consists of exhortations to the impenitent and unbelieving in Israel, during the captivity, to truly listen to their God.

Scripture reading: Isaiah Chapter: 46:3-10; 47:4-9; 48:12-22

Things to learn: 1) The Sustaining God 2) The Lord God Almighty 3) The True and Merciful God.

Discussion Questions:

Q1. God is greater than the enemies, thus Israel should not be fearful as told in Chapter 46. What else did God want His people and us as Christians to know in this chapter?

Q2. What did Isaiah prophesied about Babylon in chapter 47 and why did God judge the Babylonians?

Q3. Why did God bring up the sinful past of the Jews and yet show mercy to them in chapter 48?