

Thursday Evening Bible Study
Series: The Book of Isaiah

Teaching Summary for Week 100

Isaiah Chapter 46

In **verses 1-2**, Isaiah exposes the impotency of the Babylonian gods and their associated idols. He does so for the benefit of his audience: the people of Israel, not the Babylonians.

In **verses 3-13**, the LORD addresses His people Israel directly: the house of Jacob, the remnant of the house of Israel. He makes clear His unhappiness with Israel, calling them stubborn-minded transgressors. Despite this, He will grant salvation to Zion. He has spoken, and He will bring it to pass.

Here is the outline of the whole chapter:

Verses 1-2	Bel has bowed down	Isaiah is speaking
Verses 3-4	"Listen to Me"	The LORD is speaking
Verses 5-7	"To whom will you liken Me?"	The LORD is speaking
Verses 8-11	"Remember this and be assured"	The LORD is speaking
Verses 12-13	"Listen to Me"	The LORD is speaking

Verse-by-verse

Verse 1: Who were Bel and Nebo? They were the principal deities of the Babylonian state.

But these gods are powerless to prevent the conquest of Babylon. Their images (idolatrous statues) have been removed from their pedestals and carted off by beasts and cattle.

Verse 2: The gods couldn't even rescue their own images! Now, with their worshippers vanquished, they have been unmasked as frauds. They are nothing but wood and metal. So, the "gods" are now captives right alongside their worshippers -with their sorceries, spells, and astrologers .

We now pick things up where we left off to do our mini-series on Ezekiel 38-39.

Verses 3 and 4: The LORD is now speaking to His people Israel. He implores them to listen to Him. He is about to tell them something that they desperately needed to know.

Until now, they had not been listening to Him. They had forgotten about Him and were convinced that they would not hear from Him again.

His words encompass the past, present, and future life of the nation of Israel: from her birth to her old age.

Unlike Babylon's false gods, the LORD has always carried and delivered His people, and He always will.

Saying that He will always deliver them implies that they will always need to be delivered, from the oppression of powerful Gentile nations. It was so in 700 BC; in 540 BC; in the first century. It remains so to this very day and will continue to be so until the last day.

Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, the times of the Gentiles, Gog and Magog, the beast with 10 horns and 7 heads, all the nations.

Ezekiel 38-39 describes a future fulfillment of this promise from the Lord in verses 3 and 4.

Verses 5-7: Once again, the LORD draws an absolute contrast between Himself and the idols.

This has been a major theme in the past few chapters of Isaiah, and we have studied it in some detail. So this time we will take a different tact. We are going to observe a historical event that drives home the point in a memorable way.

The event in question occurred during the reign of perhaps the most evil king in the history of Israel: Ahab. Ahab was king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel from 874 – 853 BC. **1 Kings 16:30-32.**

Ahab married Jezebel. I'm guessing you've heard of her. She built a temple to Baal in Samaria. Jezebel maintained 850 prophets of Baal (the god of rain and agriculture) and Ashtoreth (the goddess of fertility. Jezebel put God's prophets to death, and tried to abolish the worship of the Lord.

The LORD raised up the prophet Elijah to eradicate Baalism and restore the hearts of the people of Israel to the LORD. And the LORD performed miracles in answer to Elijah's prayers. For one thing, God gave Elijah power to prevent any rain for 3 ½ years. **1 Kings 17:1; 18:1-2. James 5:17-18.**

But none of these things moved the heart of Ahab to repentance.

Baal was the rain god. The fertility of the land was vital to the very survival of Israel. Israel and her pagan neighbors lived in a dry climate. They needed the right amount of rain at the right time to grow sufficient food for the people. Who controls the rain: Yahweh, or Baal?

Again and again, Israel's kings and people were unfaithful to the Lord. They worshipped Baal. They violated the command of the Lord. See **Deuteronomy 6:4-15.**

The people of Israel did not completely stop worshipping Yahweh. They worshipped Baal along with Yahweh. They shared altars. They conducted Baal worship in the Temple of the Lord. They paid lip service to the Lord, but their deeds showed what was in their hearts. **Isaiah 29:13, Titus 1:16.**

They were on the fence. They wanted to worship both Baal and Yahweh. They wanted Yahweh to be their god of power and deliverance, and they wanted Baal to be their fertility and rain god.

1 Kings 18:21

Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people did not answer him a word.

The people did not want to choose. But the Lord will tolerate no rival. As Jesus put it:

Matt 6:24

24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

Elijah forced the people to decide: will it be the LORD, or will it be Baal?

So the LORD moved to place before the eyes of the nation of Israel a miracle that would convince them that the LORD was the only true God, and Baal was impotent.

This event is described **1 Kings 18:17-40**.

Notes: Verse 26 is akin to Isaiah 46:7. In verses 38-39, this is miraculous fire from heaven, similar to what the Lord did in **Leviticus 9:24**.

In Jeremiah's time, the people of Judah had not mended their ways either. **Jeremiah 10:1-16**.

Verses 8-11: The LORD continues to address the remnant of the house of Israel. He makes it crystal clear that that they have transgressed His law. And He implores them to recall three things to mind:

- 1. Remember the former things long past.*
- 2. I am God and there is no other.*
- 3. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass.*

1. Remember the former things long past:
 - a. Creation: **Isaiah 40:21-22.**
 - b. The election of Israel: **Isaiah 41:9.**
 - c. The Passover: **Exodus 12:23-27.**
 - d. The Promised Land: **Deuteronomy 32:6-14.**

2. I am God and there is no other, **Deuteronomy 32:36-41.**
 - a. Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done: **Genesis 15:13-16** (Exodus 12:32-40); **Deuteronomy 17:14-15** (David); **28:36-37** (Assyria), **49-50** (Babylon), **64-68** (70 AD); **30:1-10** (2nd Coming); **31:16-18, 29** (Judges 2:11-14, 19); **Isaiah 14:24-27** (Assyria); **34:1-5; 35:1-10** (Tribulation and Kingdom).
 - b. “My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure”: **Psalms 33:6-12.**
 - c. Calling a man of My purpose from a far country: **Isaiah 41:1-4, 21-26** (Cyrus).

3. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass, **Numbers 23:19.**

Verses 12-13: The Lord ends by repeating His command to listen to Him. He tells the house of Jacob that they are stubborn-minded, and far from righteousness. Yet He will bring His righteousness near, and grant salvation. **Isaiah 51:5-7, 56:1; 61:10-11; Jeremiah 23:5-6** (Messiah’s reign).

This is the good news of redemption. Only the Lord God can accomplish this. Salvation is from the Lord alone (**Jonah 2:9**). Righteousness is from the Lord alone (**Isaiah 45:8,24**). **Psalms 98:1-2.**