

Thursday Evening Bible Study
Series: The Book of Isaiah

Teaching Summary for Week 88

Introduction to chapters 46-48 of Isaiah

In chapters 46-48, the LORD once more implores His stubborn, rebellious chosen people, Israel, to LISTEN to HIM!

Don't let the first two verses of chapter 46 throw you off. In these chapters, Babylon and her false gods are simply pieces on the LORD's chessboard. They exist only to magnify the greatness of Yahweh. The LORD doesn't speak to Babylon until chapter 47.

In the day of crisis, when the LORD wipes out the prideful Babylonian empire and erases them from human history, their idols and magicians will be exposed as total frauds.

The LORD will be vindicated in every respect. He is the sovereign, all-powerful God, and there is none other like Him. He knows the end from the beginning.

He will accomplish all His good pleasure. He predicts the future and brings it to pass. He keeps every one of the promises that He has made to His people.

He will redeem His people, even though they don't deserve it. He will do it for His own sake, that He might be glorified. The remnant of His people will be saved. They will be righteous, and the LORD's name will be glorious.

These three chapters are marked according to the audience to whom the LORD speaks.

Chapter	Audience	Message
46	The remnant of the house of Israel	I will grant salvation in Zion (46:13).
47	The virgin daughter of Babylon	Destruction will come upon you suddenly (47:11).
48	The house of Jacob	The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob (48:20).

Isaiah Chapter 46

Isaiah 46 is a poem with two parts and 5 stanzas.

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.

This is the first part, and the first stanza.

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.

This is the second part. It consists of four stanzas. Each stanza starts with either a command or a question that the LORD gives to His people.

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? Marduk and Nebo were the principal deities of the Babylonian state.

BEL — the Aramaic form of the Canaanite Baal. It is a title; it means “lord”. Here, Bel refers to Marduk ,the national god of the Babylonians (Isa 46:1; Jer 50:2; 51:44- Jeremiah’s prophecy against Babylon).

NEBO - the son of Marduk, Nebo was the patron saint of nearby Borsippa. He was the god of wisdom, a patron of learning, and the keeper of the tablets of the gods. The name Nebu-chadnezzar shows that Nebo was his guardian god.

"Bel bows down, Nebo stoops, their idols are on beasts and cattle," was an ironic allusion to the New Year procession in which the image of Nebo was brought to Babylon from his temple in Borsippa. He joined his father in the procession, where he wrote on “tablets of destiny” what the coming year held for Babylon. He clearly got it wrong in the year when Cyrus attacked Babylon!

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. This could either be an attempt by the Babylonians to protect them, or theft by the conquering army.

Idols are heavy in two senses. First, they are physically heavy, as we see in verses 6 & 7.

Second, those who worship them carry the burden of religious duties. This is akin to what the Lord said about the Pharisees in Matthew 23:1-4.

“You” here in verse 1b refers to the Babylonians. But the Jews also worshipped idols during Isaiah’s ministry and afterward.

Let’s look at the reigns of two kings of Judah during this period.

1. Ahaz (731-715 BC): 2 Kings 16:1-6; 2 Chronicles 28:1-4, 22-25
2. Menasseh (695-642 BC): 2 Chronicles 33:1-20.

Verse 2: The gods couldn’t even rescue their own images! Now, with their worshippers vanquished, they have been unmasked as frauds. In fact, they are not even real. They are nothing but wood and metal. So, the “gods” are now captives right alongside their worshippers -with their sorceries, spells, and astrologers (we’ll see more on this when we get to chapter 47).