

Thursday Evening Bible Study  
**Series: The Book of Isaiah**

Teaching Summary for Week 89

**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 remnant of the house of Israel. Though He is unhappy with them, 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:** Marduk and Nebo were the principal false gods 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).

"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 to join his father Marduk.

These gods are powerless to prevent the destruction 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 heavy 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 idol worship during the reigns of two kings of Judah.

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

Back in Isaiah 46:1, the idols of Marduk and Nebo were placed in carts and hauled off by beasts and cattle. These animals quickly grew weary from the heavy burden of these clunking hunks of metal.

**Verse 2:** The gods couldn't even rescue their own images!

In verse 2, "they" refers to the false gods Bel and Nebo. The burden consists of their heavy, cumbersome idols.

The Babylonians gods were powerless to save their idols. Now, with their worshippers vanquished, they have been unmasked as frauds. They are seen for what they have always been: insubstantial, deaf and dumb, without power, without life. 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).

**Verses 3 and 4:** This is the second stanza. 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.

He also speaks to generations and to individuals. His words are emblematic of their 40 years in the desert, during which time many children were born, grew up, grew old, and even died.

These words would sustain the faithful remnant in Babylon during 70 years of captivity, when two generations of children would grow old waiting for the deliverance of the LORD.

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

He did so at their birth, see **Exodus 19:4**; and during their childhood, **Deuteronomy 1:30-32; 32:9-12**. He promises to do so in their adulthood and old age also, **Isaiah 40:10-11, 27-31**.

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.

**Daniel 2:36-45; 7:1-8, 15-27; 8:19-22; 9:23-27; Ezekiel 38-39; Luke 21:20-24; Revelation 13:1-10, 17:13-16, 19:11-21; Zechariah 14:1-5.**

Refer to *two handouts* on the Gog invasion of Ezekiel 38 & 39.