

God's Supremacy and Judgment over Babylon

Isaiah 46-47

Isaiah 46:1-11 – *“Bel bows down, Nebo stoops; their idols were on the beasts and on the cattle. Your carriages were heavily loaded; a burden to the weary beast. ² They stoop, they bow down together; they could not deliver the burden, but have themselves gone into captivity. ³ “Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been upheld by Me from birth, who have been carried from the womb: ⁴ Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you. ⁵ “To whom will you liken Me, and make Me equal, and compare Me, that we should be alike? ⁶ They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver on the scales. They hire a goldsmith, and he makes it a god. They prostrate themselves; yes, they worship. ⁷ They bear it on the shoulder; they carry it and set it in its place, and it stands. From its place it shall not move. Though one cries out to it, yet it cannot answer nor save him out of his trouble. ⁸ “Remember this, and show yourselves men; recall to mind, O you transgressors. ⁹ Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other. I am God, and there is none like Me, ¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,’ ¹¹ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it.”*

Background Notes for Isaiah 46

In the overall outline of the book of Isaiah, chapters 1-39 (the first main division of the book) emphasized denunciation from God because of Israel's sins. Chapters 40-66 (the second main division of the book) emphasized the consolation and comfort of God.

Chapters 40-48 brought comfort to God's people by emphasizing the greatness of God as Creator, and the greatness of God as the Protector and Provider for His people.

In chapters 46 and 47, God's greatness is seen in His sovereignty over Babylon, the enemy of God's people. Babylon's gods and Babylon's godlessness would be judged. In these chapters Isaiah not only envisioned the rise of the Babylonian empire, but he predicted its judgment as well. That would certainly be a comfort to God's people.

Doctrinal Point for Isaiah 46

The Lord carries His people from conception to old age.

“*Bel*” and “*Nebo*” (v1) were the two chief gods of the Babylonians. Bel was Nebo’s father; he was also known as Marduk. Bel was the hero of *Enuma Elish*, the well-known Babylonian account of creation.

In verses 1-2, these Babylonian gods were described as helpless. Their images couldn’t even move on their own – they had to be carried around on people’s shoulders or on carts pulled by beasts of burden. Obviously they were powerless to rescue anyone. They would be helpless when they were carried into captivity by the coming Persians.

In contrast, the God of Israel does not have to be carried around. Instead - ***He carries His people!*** He carries them from conception and birth to old age (v3-4). By the way, what does “old age” mean for Israel? Does it mean that Israel died when the Church was formed? Is the Church the new Israel? No! Israel is still alive. And the Lord is still carrying the Jewish people! As He promised, He will carry them to the end. Israel has been disciplined - but there will be a spiritual restoration of the nation to the Land and to the Lord in the future, according to the prophecies of Isaiah and other prophetic scriptures. Read also Romans 11 in this connection.

Verses 5-7 emphasized the folly of idol worship and the helplessness of the foreign idols. They were made by humans and carried around by humans. They were speechless and powerless – totally unable to help or save. Verses 8-10 compared the great and wonderful one true God to worthless idols. He is the only God! “*For I am God, and there is no other*” (v10). He knows and controls the end from the beginning, in line with His good purposes (v10). God would deliver His people by bringing Cyrus the Persian as the “*bird of prey from the east*” to conquer Babylon and release them from their captivity (v11).

The Lord carries His people from conception to old age.

Practical Application for Isaiah 46

Don’t be stubborn-hearted!

Isaiah 46:12-13 - “*Listen to Me, you stubborn-hearted, who are far from righteousness: ¹³ I bring My righteousness near, it shall not be far off. My salvation shall not linger. And I will place salvation in Zion for Israel My glory.*”

In these verses, God challenged His hard-hearted and unrighteous people to listen to Him, and to turn to Him for salvation because His salvation was not far off. ***It never is!*** Salvation would come to Israel, in line with God’s covenant promises, and they could share in God’s glory for Israel – if only they would stop being so stubborn-hearted!

This is still true today. God's salvation is never far away, but people remain in their unrighteous condition and refuse to turn to the Lord because their hearts are stubborn.

Do you want to know and experience the blessings of God's salvation in Christ? Turn to the Lord now before it's too late. Don't be stubborn hearted!

Isaiah 47:1-5 - *"Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon. Sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans, for you shall no more be called tender and delicate. ² Take the millstones and grind meal. Remove your veil, take off the skirt, uncover the thigh, pass through the rivers. ³ Your nakedness shall be uncovered. Yes, your shame will be seen. I will take vengeance, and I will not arbitrate with a man." ⁴ As for our Redeemer, the Lord of hosts is His name, the Holy One of Israel. ⁵ "Sit in silence, and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans, for you shall no longer be called 'The Lady of Kingdoms.'"*

Background Notes for Isaiah 47

In verses 1-5 Babylon was pictured as a smug and arrogant virgin, who was once the queen of all kingdoms, sitting on her throne. But she would soon be sitting on the ground – humiliated, and in mourning. Babylon would be brought down to the shameful place of a slave. When God allowed the Persians under Cyrus to conquer Babylon in 539 BC, the Babylonians (Chaldeans), would be stripped of their fair garments, and be exposed for all the world to see. Why would the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel allow such a sudden fall of the mighty Babylonian? The answer is our doctrinal point.

Doctrinal Point for chapter 47

The Lord judges the instruments He uses to discipline His people.

Isaiah 47:6-11 – *"I was angry with My people; I have profaned My inheritance, and given them into your hand. You showed them no mercy. On the elderly you laid your yoke very heavily. ⁷ And you said, 'I shall be a lady forever,' so that you did not take these things to heart, nor remember the latter end of them. ⁸ "Therefore hear this now, you who are given to pleasures, who dwell securely, who say in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one else besides me. I shall not sit as a widow, nor shall I know the loss of children. ⁹ But these two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day: the loss of children and widowhood. They shall come upon you in their fullness because of the multitude of your sorceries, for the great abundance of your enchantments. ¹⁰ "For you have trusted in your wickedness. You have said, 'No one sees me.' Your wisdom and your knowledge have warped you, and you have said in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one else besides me.'*

¹¹ Therefore evil shall come upon you. You shall not know from where it arises, and trouble shall fall upon you. You will not be able to put it off. And desolation shall come upon you suddenly which you shall not know."

God used both Assyria and Babylonia as His instruments of discipline for His people -- Assyria primarily on the northern kingdom of Israel, and Babylonia on the southern kingdom of Judah. But Isaiah predicted here that Babylon would go too far. In her pride, she showed no mercy to the Jewish people (v6-7). Therefore the queen of all kingdoms would suddenly become as bereft as a childless widow, and her many sorceries would be of no help (v8-9). Babylon fell to the Persians in one night in 539 BC (read Daniel 5).

Like many people today, Babylon felt that because she was so superior to everyone else, she could get away with evil and no one would know (v10). How wrong she was! God said that sudden destruction and disaster would fall on Babylon (v11). Although the Lord used Babylon to discipline His people, they went too far in their arrogant and evil ways. The Lord judges the instruments He uses to discipline His people.

This is still true today - including on the personal level. God can use ungodly people in His discipline of His children - but He will hold those ungodly instruments accountable for their actions, and they will be judged for their wicked deeds. The Lord judges the instruments He uses to discipline His people.

Practical Application for Isaiah 47

Don't get hooked on the horoscope!

Isaiah 47:12-15 - *"Stand now with your enchantments and the multitude of your sorceries, in which you have labored from your youth— perhaps you will be able to profit, perhaps you will prevail. ¹³ You are wearied in the multitude of your counsels; let now the astrologers, the stargazers, and the monthly prognosticators stand up and save you from what shall come upon you.*

¹⁴ Behold, they shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them. They shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame. It shall not be a coal to be warmed by, or a fire to sit before! ¹⁵ Thus shall they be to you with whom you have labored, your merchants from your youth. They shall wander each one to his quarter. No one shall save you."

In these verses, Isaiah predicted that Babylon would continue to use her mediums, astrologers, and horoscopes to predict the future (v12-13) - but to no avail. The astrologers and their predictions would be swept away. What they thought was a warm campfire would turn out to be a wild forest fire - with no escape (v14-15).

Don't confuse *astronomy* and *astrology*. Astronomy is the scientific study of the universe. Astrology is an *occult* use of the stars and constellations to predict the future. Astronomy is not condemned in the Bible, but astrology is. But yet many people, including some Christians, consult the horoscope - which is based on astrology.

Consulting the horoscope is **not** just harmless entertainment, as many people think. It's playing with fire! It's ensnaring, and it can easily be a gateway to further associations and connections with the occult world. Don't get hooked on astrology - or the horoscope!