

Judah's Return from their Babylonian Captivity Isaiah 48

Isaiah 48:1-5 - *"Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and have come forth from the wellsprings of Judah; who swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth or in righteousness; ² For they call themselves after the holy city, and lean on the God of Israel; The Lord of hosts is His name. ³ "I have declared the former things from the beginning. They went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass. ⁴ Because I knew that you were obstinate, and your neck was an iron sinew, and your brow bronze, ⁵ even from the beginning I have declared it to you. Before it came to pass I proclaimed it to you lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, and my carved image and my molded image have commanded them.'"*

Background Notes

In our Talk on Isaiah 46 and 47, we discussed Isaiah's prophecy of God's judgment on Babylon. Isaiah prophesied around 700 BC, while the Assyrians were in power. Babylon had not yet arrived on the scene as a world empire, and they would not take the Jewish people into captivity for another 100 years. So the prophecies in Isaiah about God's judgment of Babylon are quite amazing, in view of the historical context.

Besides the historical aspect of these prophecies, we should remember that there is an eschatological (future) aspect to these prophecies as well. According to Revelation 17-18, there will be an "End-Time Babylon" that will arise in the last days. Just as historical Babylon was judged and brought down because of her arrogance and defiance of God, so the End-Time godless Babylon will be judged and destroyed. *"After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen... In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.' Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her"* (Revelation 18:1-2 & 7-8).

In chapter 48 Isaiah predicted that the coming captivity of the Jews in Babylon would end with God's judgment of the historical Babylon. The release of the Jewish captives and their return to Jerusalem was an amazing prophecy of the ancient world. It happened exactly as Isaiah predicted, when the Persian king, Cyrus, conquered Babylon in 539 BC.

Doctrinal Points

1. God is great in His predictions for His people.

The people of Israel were hypocrites throughout Israel's history. They gave lip service to the Lord, but in their daily lives they did not obey God, or worship Him in truth, and certainly not in righteousness. They would acknowledge that they were privileged to live in the holy city of Jerusalem with the Temple - but their hearts were not aligned with the heart of the Lord. In verses 1-2 they were rebuked for the sin of hypocrisy.

But in spite of Israel's hypocrisy and sin, God graciously continued His relationship with His people, and He made predictions about the future of the nation (v3-5).

One reason why God deliberately predicted ahead of time what would take place in Israel (both the good and the bad) was so that rebellious Israel could not give credit to their idols for controlling the future. *"Even from the beginning I have declared it to you; before it came to pass I proclaimed it to you, lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, and my carved image and my molded image have commanded them.'"*

Isaiah 48:6-8 - *"You have heard; see all this, and will you not declare it? I have made you hear new things from this time, even hidden things, and you did not know them. ⁷ They are created now and not from the beginning; and before this day you have not heard them, lest you should say, 'Of course I knew them.' ⁸ Surely you did not hear, surely you did not know; surely from long ago your ear was not opened. For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, and were called a transgressor from the womb.*

In verses 6-8, the Lord said that although Israel would not admit that God's word was true and prophetically accurate, He would proclaim "new things" to them through Isaiah, so that they could not say that they had heard all of this before.

What were the "new things" that Isaiah would proclaim - news hadn't been proclaimed before? The new things were details about the coming restoration of Israel. Israel's ultimate restoration had already been proclaimed in a general way in passages such as Deuteronomy 30. However, details about the Babylonian captivity and return (like the predictions of Cyrus the Persian by name) had not been revealed before Isaiah's time.

Furthermore, before we finish the book we'll see that Isaiah made other prophecies about the future restoration of Israel, the coming millennial kingdom of Christ, and the new heavens and the new earth. These "new things" had not been revealed before Isaiah's time. So Isaiah did indeed proclaim new things!

Isaiah 48:9-11 - *"For My name's sake I will defer My anger, and for My praise I will restrain it from you, so that I do not cut you off. ¹⁰ Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver. I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. ¹¹ For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it, for how should My name be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another.*

In verses 9-11 the Lord emphasized that it was for His own name's sake that He continued to tolerate rebellious Israel. When the Lord said, *"Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver"* (v10), the idea was that if He had refined Israel as silver, nothing but dross would have been left.

Isaiah 48:12-16 - *"Listen to Me, O Jacob, and Israel, My called: I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last. ¹³ Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand has stretched out the heavens. When I call to them, they stand up together. ¹⁴ 'All of you, assemble yourselves, and hear! Who among them has declared these things? The Lord loves him. He shall do His pleasure on Babylon, and His arm shall be against the Chaldeans. ¹⁵ I, even I, have spoken. Yes, I have called him. I have brought him, and his way will prosper. 'Come near to Me, hear this. I have not spoken in secret from the beginning. From the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me."*

The good news came in verses 12-15. The Eternal God, the One who created the heavens and the earth, would raise up His people from their future Babylonian captivity.

In chapters 44 and 45 we've already learned that the "him" in verses 14-15 was Cyrus, the Persian king. In 539 BC he issued an edict that allowed the Jews to return home from their Babylonian captivity and rebuild their Temple in Jerusalem.

Verse 16 contains a statement that is **probably the clearest reference to the Trinity in the Old Testament**: *"Come near to Me, hear this. I have not spoken in secret from the beginning. From the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me."*

We believe the "I" and the "Me" refers to the Messiah, the Servant of the Lord, who will be the subject of the next nine chapters. *"The Lord GOD"* is God the Father, *"and His Spirit"* is the Holy Spirit, *"have sent Me"* – sent the Eternal Son: the Servant of the Lord - the Messiah. So the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are mentioned together there at the end of verse 16: *"And now the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me."*

It's probably the clearest indication of the Trinity in the entire Old Testament. God is great in His predictions for His people.

2. God is great in His provisions for His people.

Isaiah 48:17-19 - *"Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go. ¹⁸ Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea. ¹⁹ Your descendants also would have been like the sand, And the offspring of your body like the grains of sand; His name would not have been cut off nor destroyed from before Me."*

God's people could have enjoyed His provisions more fully if only they had obeyed the Lord, and if only they had followed His Law! Provisions were mentioned in verses 17-19.

Verse 19 does not mean that receiving the unconditional promises of the Abrahamic Covenant was contingent on Israel's obedience. However, their *enjoyment* of these great provisions, and their *fellowship* with the Lord, were dependent on Israel's faithfulness.

In the same way, God has made great spiritual provisions for His people today. Read Ephesians 1 in this connection. However, our enjoyment of these spiritual blessings depends on our faithfulness and obedience to Him.

Isaiah 48:20-22 - *"Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! With a voice of singing, 'Declare, proclaim this! Utter it to the end of the earth. Say, "The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob!" ²¹ And they did not thirst when He led them through the deserts; He caused the waters to flow from the rock for them; He also split the rock, and the waters gushed out. ²² 'There is no peace, for the wicked,' says the Lord."*

Why did verse 21 include the reference to God's provision for His people in the wilderness? It was an encouragement! As in the "first Exodus" (the Exodus from Egypt), God continually provided for His people - even though they constantly murmured and rebelled against Him. The mention of God's provision in the first Exodus encouraged the people to trust God's provision when the nation would travel back to the Promised Land in the "second Exodus" - the Exodus from the Babylonian captivity (v20). God would provide for His people - even though they were not perfect.

That message is encouraging to us as well. God is great in His provisions for His people!

Practical Application

Don't let it be said, "If only"!

In verse 18, the Lord said to Israel, *"Oh, that you had heeded My commandments!"* Or, *"If only you had heeded My commandments, then your peace would have been like a river and your righteousness like the waves of the sea."*

As a believer, when you come to the end of your days on this earth, will you have to sadly say, "If only I had done this"? Will you have to regretfully say, "If only I had not done that"? How many of us will have to say "if only" about our lives?

Even more importantly - at the judgment seat of Christ, will the Lord have to say to you and to me: *"If only!* If only you had been more faithful and more obedient, I could have blessed you and rewarded you so much more!"

Don't let it be said, ***"If only."***