

Isaiah 46

Is. 46:1 Bel has bowed down, Nebo stoops over; Their images are consigned to the beasts and the cattle. The things that you carry are burdensome, A load for the weary beast.

This chapter confirms that Cyrus would destroy the Babylonian gods when he delivered the Jews from Babylon. *Bel* and *Nebo* were the two principle gods of the Babylonians. *Bel* is the same as *Baal* of 1Kings 16:31-32, which King Ahaz and his Phoenician wife *Jezebel* brought into the northern kingdom of Israel. It is, from all indications, the god to which the *tower of Babel* was dedicated in Genesis 11:1-9 (also read notes associated with Isaiah 45:16).

The *Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament* records the following concerning *Bel* and *Nebo*:

Beel was the Jupiter of the Babylonians and, as Bel-Merodach, the tutelary deity of Babylon; Nebo was Mercury, the tutelary deity of the later Chaldean royal family, as the many kings' names in which it appears clearly show (e.g., Nabopolassar, etc.). The pyramidal heap of ruins on the right bank of the Euphrates, which is now called Birs Nimrud, is the ruin of the temple of Bel, of which Herodotus (a historian of the fifth century BC) gives a description, and probably also of the tower mentioned in Gen 11, which was dedicated to Bel, if not to Saturn. Herodotus describes two golden statues of Bel which were found there, but the way in which Nebo was represented is still unknown.

According to Isaiah 46:1, Cyrus would destroy both *Bel* and *Nebo*, both of which would be carried away on carts drawn by *beasts*. Based on the mindset of that day, this would prove that the gods of the Persians were greater than the gods of the Babylonians (we know, however, that there is no God but Jehovah). This would result in the Jews discarding all Babylonian idolatry, understanding well that Jehovah alone had brought deliverance through His servant Cyrus.

Is. 46:2 They stooped over, they have bowed down together; They could not rescue the burden, But have themselves gone into captivity.

Isaiah sees the gods of Babylon as *stooped over...*, *bowed down*, and taken *into captivity*. This would be accomplished when the Persians overthrew the Babylonians.

Is. 46:3 ¶ "Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, And all the remnant of the house of Israel, You who have been borne by Me from birth, And have been carried from the womb;

Jehovah reminds the Jews that He has *borne* them *from birth*. Therefore, unlike the gods of Babylon, which must be carried (as was confirmed in verse 1 and will again be confirmed in verse 7), Jehovah has *borne...Israel...from birth, And...carried her from the womb*.

Is. 46:4 Even to your old age, I shall be the same, And even to your graying years I shall bear you! I have done it, and I shall carry you; And I shall bear you, and I shall deliver you.

God promises that, just as He has borne Israel in the past, He will do so in the future. This has been proven time and time again; for the existence of the state of Israel today is explained only in terms of what God has done for, and promised to, the nation. We know as well from our study of Isaiah that God will continue to *bear* the nation, even regenerating her spiritually at the end of the

Tribulation and protecting her throughout the Millennium.

Is. 46:5 ¶ "To whom would you liken Me, And make Me equal and compare Me, That we should be alike?"

Jehovah asks if any Babylonian god is His *equal*. His question is not so someone might argue the point; for He stands alone as the one Sovereign of the universe—as these verses confirm.

Is. 46:6 "Those who lavish gold from the purse And weigh silver on the scale Hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; They bow down, indeed they worship it."

Babylonians idols (gods) were made of materials created by Jehovah, such as *gold* and *silver*. Because the created is never greater than the Creator, no manmade *god* can compare.

Is. 46:7 "They lift it upon the shoulder and carry it; They set it in its place and it stands there. It does not move from its place. Though one may cry to it, it cannot answer; It cannot deliver him from his distress."

Babylonian gods had to be carried, could not *move* on their own, were incapable of answering when addressed, and were powerless to *deliver...from...distress*. Not so with Jehovah. He carries the Jews, moves very well (He is everywhere at once—omnipresent), answers when consulted, and delivers with amazing consistency (due to His omnipotence). What idol can compare?

Is. 46:8 ¶ "Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors."

Israel is called to *Remember* the events of the past, verses 9-10 explaining why they are to do so.

Is. 46:9 "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me,"

Jehovah encourages Israel to *Remember* that He had predicted beforehand what the nation had experienced in the *past*. No Babylonian idol had done so.

Is. 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';

The God of Israel had *established* and accomplished everything the prophets had stated concerning past events.

Is. 46:11 Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it."

Just as God had fulfilled prophecies relating to events of the past, He would also fulfill that which He promised concerning Cyrus, a man *from a far country* who would deliver Israel approximately 150 years later.

Is. 46:12 ¶ "Listen to Me, you stubborn-minded, Who are far from righteousness."

Even though Israel was *stubborn-minded* and unrighteous, she was to listen to what Jehovah stated in the following verse, verse 13.

Is. 46:13 "I bring near My righteousness, it is not far off; And My salvation will not delay. And I will grant salvation in Zion, And My glory for Israel.

Because Jehovah is righteous, He is always right, always doing the right thing. Therefore, He will fulfill what He has promised concerning Israel by using Cyrus to bring it about. Their *salvation* from Babylon would *not delay*, a *salvation* for the *glory of Israel* that would confirm God's commitment to the nation—a commitment unique to the Hebrew people alone. It is interesting that *Israel*, the lone nation to see God's *glory* at Mount Sinai, is the nation that would be glorified through Cyrus' conquest of Babylon. Therefore, it was not Persia who received glory as Cyrus overthrew Babylon, but rather *Israel*. Why? The events themselves confirmed that Israel's special relationship with Jehovah was unrivaled by any other nation. Her return from Babylon fulfilled Jeremiah 25:11 and prepared the way for *Israel* to be the conduit through which the Messiah would later be born. How much more *glory* could the nation receive than to have Jesus, the very glory of God (John 1:14; Colossians 1:27), born as a member of the Jewish race?

Isaiah addresses the fall of Babylon in chapter 47; so it ties in well with what is addressed in Isaiah 46.

Isaiah 47

Is. 47:1 "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 longer be called tender and delicate.

Verses 1-5 give input concerning the fall of *Babylon* at the hands of the Persians. The inhabitants of *Babylon* ("daughter" points to the population of *Babylon*) would lose their *throne* of power (authority over the nations) and *no longer* live a life of ease. This occurred when Cyrus overthrew *Babylon* in Daniel 5, seventy years after the Babylonian Empire had become the dominant power on the earth. The phrase, "O virgin daughter of *Babylon*," probably points to the fact that the city of *Babylon* was a beautiful city filled with delicacies.

Is. 47:2 "Take the millstones and grind meal. Remove your veil, strip off the skirt, Uncover the leg, cross the rivers.

The population of *Babylon* would become a subjugated people, involving themselves in tasks normally performed by ordinary slaves.

Is. 47:3 "Your nakedness will be uncovered, Your shame also will be exposed; I will take vengeance and will not spare a man."

The population of *Babylon* would be physically abused and mistreated.

Is. 47:4 Our Redeemer, the Lord of hosts is His name, The Holy One of Israel.

The *Redeemer* of the Jews, *His name* being *the Lord of hosts*, is also *The Holy One of Israel*. Therefore, the judgment against the city of *Babylon* is brought about through Cyrus, God's man of choice whom He would use to redeem the Jews from *Babylon* (the notes associated with Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1 give more details concerning Cyrus).

Is. 47:5 "Sit silently, and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans; For you will no more be called The queen of kingdoms.

Babylon would *no longer be called The queen of the kingdoms*, but would be totally dethroned. In fact, the city of Babylon was eventually destroyed and has, for centuries, been uninhabited. Her destruction was so complete that, for a season of history, the location of the original city was uncertain.

Is. 47:6 "I was angry with My people, I profaned My heritage, And gave them into your hand. You did not show mercy to them, On the aged you made your yoke very heavy.

Verse 6 confirms that Babylon went further in her destruction of Judah than Jehovah had desired, just as *Assyria* had done earlier with the northern kingdom of Israel (read Isaiah 10:5-7). The prophet Zechariah, who prophesied after the destruction of Babylon and during the rebuilding of the second temple in the book of Ezra, states the same in Zechariah 1:15. Even 2Kings 24-25 and 2Chronicles 36 agree. Thus, even though God selects certain nations to perform specific tasks, the individuals within those nations can choose to abuse their privileges. Babylon would reap grave consequences at the hands of the Medo-Persian Empire as a result of overstepping her God-ordained boundaries.

Is. 47:7 "Yet you said, 'I shall be a queen forever.' These things you did not consider, Nor remember the outcome of them.

Because Babylon viewed herself as ruling *forever* upon the earth, and totally autonomous, she lived a life void of restraint. This way of thinking would result in judgment, for she overstepped her boundaries while overthrowing the southern kingdom (Judah). Therefore, God would see to it that she was repaid for her misdeeds. After all, God had promised to *bless* those who blessed the Jews and *curse* those who cursed the Jews (Genesis 12:3), a promise that interprets much of what has transpired historically since the days of Abraham.

Is. 47:8 ¶ "Now, then, hear this, you sensual one, Who dwells securely, Who says in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one besides me. I shall not sit as a widow, Nor shall I know loss of children.'

A phrase in verses 8 and 10 of this chapter gives a second reason as to why Babylon would receive God's punishment. Note the phrase, "*I am, and there is no one besides me.*" Babylon, due to her sensuality, viewed herself as the one true deity and totally indestructible. On the other hand, God's word teaches that Jehovah is "*I Am*" (Exodus 3:14). Because Babylon viewed herself as such, Jehovah would prove, as He did with *King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon* (Daniel 4:28-33), that He alone *is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes* (Daniel 4:25 and 32). Babylon would not only *sit as a widow*, but also *know loss of children* (Isaiah 47:8) as a result of her upcoming destruction at the hands of King Cyrus of Persia.

It is interesting that Satan, who is the mastermind of all pride and self deification, was the first to desire to be *like* God (read notes on Isaiah 14:13-14). No wonder Babylon, highly involved with sorcery and occult practices, took on his mindset. Even in Ezekiel's day, *the leader of Tyre* (ruler, prince) desired the same for himself (read Ezekiel 28:1-2). From the events of our day, and all that is transpiring in the realm of the occult, it is obvious that Satan continues to deceive with his age-old lie that man deserves to rule.

Is. 47:9 "But these two things shall come on you suddenly in one day: Loss of children and widowhood. They shall come on you in full measure In spite of your many sorceries, In spite of the great power of your spells.

Loss of children and widowhood would suddenly come on Babylon in full measure In spite of her many sorceries. No sorcerer can predict the future nor give warning concerning impending danger, even though the occult began in Babylon (read Genesis 11). Consequently, Babylon was ill-prepared; putting up no resistance when she was suddenly overthrown by the Persians (read Daniel 5:1-31). How embarrassing! God truly knows how to humble the proud.

Is. 47:10 "And you felt secure in your wickedness and said, 'No one sees me,' Your wisdom and your knowledge, they have deluded you; For you have said in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one besides me.'

Worldly wisdom and knowledge, without spiritual understanding, can greatly delude one's thinking. This is what occurred within Babylon; for her self deification (in believing that she was "I am") resulted in a false sense of security which eventually brought destruction. No doubt, Satan's goal is *to steal..., kill, and destroy* as much of mankind as possible (John 10:10). Oh that all the offspring of Adam could view him as such!

Is. 47:11 "But evil will come on you Which you will not know how to charm away; And disaster will fall on you For which you cannot atone, And destruction about which you do not know Will come on you suddenly.

Verses 11-15 describe the fall of Babylon at the hands of the Persians. The sorcerers of Babylon could not *charm away* the upcoming destruction; in fact, they not so much as gave a warning—*And destruction about which you do not know*. Daniel 5 confirms the truthfulness of Isaiah's words, so a quick read of that chapter would be encouraging.

Is. 47:12 ¶ "Stand fast now in your spells And in your many sorceries With which you have labored from your youth; Perhaps you will be able to profit, Perhaps you may cause trembling.

Isaiah mocks the Babylonians for trusting in the occult, which was birthed in Babylon in Genesis 11 (*With which you have labored from your youth*).

Is. 47:13 "You are wearied with your many counsels; Let now the astrologers, Those who prophesy by the stars, Those who predict by the new moons, Stand up and save you from what will come upon you.

The Babylonians would grow weary of the occult due to its uselessness. It is apparent from Isaiah 47:13 that astrology is condemned by God. From the following definition we can understand why:

Astrology—“A study or science which assumes, and professes to interpret, the influence of the heavenly bodies on human affairs.” (*The American College Encyclopedic Dictionary*)

Therefore, horoscopes are evil and should be avoided at all costs. Note the following definition from *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*:

Horoscope: a diagram of the relative positions of planets and signs of the zodiac at a specific time (as at one's birth) for use by astrologers in inferring individual character and personality traits and in foretelling events of a person's life

Even Daniel, in Daniel 2:27-28 and 5:14-16, declared that God alone is the source of all true revelation and interpretation.

Is. 47:14 "Behold, they have become like stubble, Fire burns them; They cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame; There will be no coal to warm by, Nor a fire to sit before!"

The idols of Babylon were to burn *like stubble* due to their inability to *deliver themselves from the power of the flame*. When they burn, they will not supply heat *to warm by* or *to sit before*.

Is. 47:15 "So have those become to you with whom you have labored, Who have trafficked with you from your youth; Each has wandered in his own way. There is none to save you."

Because the idols of Babylon have proven themselves useless, Babylon will be destroyed because *There is none to save*. Note again that these idols had influenced Babylon *from her youth*—since Genesis 11 in other words.