

Isaiah 48

Just as the book of Deuteronomy is an overview of the events of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, much of Isaiah 48 can be considered an overview of Isaiah 40:12-47:15. This chapter completes the section of Isaiah (40:12-48:22) which addresses the phrase from Isaiah 40:2, *“that her warfare has ended.”* God’s prophecies in this section of Isaiah (40:12-48:22) basically addressed two major topics: 1-Israel’s future deliverance from Babylonian through Jehovah’s servant Cyrus, a short-term prophecy which will transpire approximately 150 years after Isaiah’s ministry is completed; 2-The coming of Jesus, God’s Servant, a long-term prophecy which will begin being fulfilled at Christ’s First Coming. The major emphasis of this section (Isaiah 40:12-48:22) has been on Cyrus; but the emphasis will shift to the Messiah, God’s Servant, beginning with this chapter. He will remain the emphasis throughout Isaiah 49:1-57:21, the next section of this book (refer to the notes associated with Isaiah 40:2 for additional input).

Is. 48:1 "Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are named Israel And who came forth from the loins of Judah, Who swear by the name of the Lord And invoke the God of Israel, But not in truth nor in righteousness.

Isaiah looks into the future and describes the state of the Jewish nation after she has been delivered by Cyrus at the end of the Babylonian captivity. Jehovah, through Isaiah, calls the nation *“Jacob”* rather than *“Israel”* for a specific purpose. *“Jacob”* means *“to supplant”* or *“heel catcher,”* confirming that Jacob’s character was initially less than desirable. After wrestling with God in Genesis 32:24-30, however, the physical injury *Jacob* received not only resulted in a change of character, but in a change of name as well. Jacob’s name from then on was *“Israel,”* meaning *“power with God,” “prince with God,”* or *“God’s fighter.”* The Hebrew nation at the end of the Babylonian captivity was grossly deficient in character, as confirmed by Isaiah 48:1; so the name *“Jacob,”* not *“Israel,”* was the better fit in this instance.

Is. 48:2 "For they call themselves after the holy city, And lean on the God of Israel; The Lord of hosts is His name.

The Jews gave lip service to *God* at the end of the Babylonian captivity, even calling *themselves* after Jerusalem, *the holy city*. However, their hearts were far from Him.

Is. 48:3 "I declared the former things long ago And they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaimed them. Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.

The Jews at the end of the Babylonian captivity, even though walking in a place of compromise, would have understood well that what Jehovah had prophesied through His prophets had come to pass. After all, Cyrus had come through just as predicted. This has been one of Isaiah's main arguments against idolatry since Isaiah 40:12—that Jehovah fulfills the words of His prophets, while no idol, even if it could speak, could so much as predict the future, much less bring it to pass. Therefore, if Jehovah's prophecies had come to fruition, why weren't the Jews responding in obedience to the God responsible for their fulfillment? Isaiah's words of Isaiah 48:3, hence, are a rebuke directed toward a nation that had disregarded the obvious—that a God who could fulfill His predictions was worthy of, not only their time, but their hearts as well. It is amazing what can happen (in a negative sense) when morality is allowed to dictate theology.

Is. 48:4 "Because I know that you are obstinate, And your neck is an iron sinew, And your forehead bronze,

The harshness and stubbornness within the Hebrew nation, a condition which had caused them to reject Jehovah and serve the idols of Babylon, caused Jehovah to state and fulfill prophecies which validated His sovereignty. The intriguing fact is that the Jews will continue to walk in disobedience until they are humbled by means of the judgments of the Great Tribulation (read Daniel 12:7).

Is. 48:5 Therefore I declared them to you long ago, Before they took place I proclaimed them to you, Lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, And my graven image and my molten image have commanded them.'

God's ability to predict and fulfill future events prevented the Jews, in their rebellious condition, from crediting their idols with what had transpired.

Is. 48:6 "You have heard; look at all this. And you, will you not declare it? I proclaim to you new things from this time, Even hidden things which you have not known.

Because the Jews had *heard* Jehovah's prophecies of the past and witnessed their fulfillment (especially in relation to the coming of Cyrus), they were duty-bound to *declare* that the idols of Babylon were useless. After all, such idols had predicted nothing concerning Cyrus or any other future event. Given that God had predicted and fulfilled these short-term prophecies, He could be trusted to fulfill every long-term prophecy He had given to date. He could also be trusted to fulfill additional long-term prophecies should He choose to state them. This is why the last half of Isaiah 48:6 speaks of *new things*. These *new things* point to the new prophecies that would find their fulfillment in the distant future, such as the Servant's mission in bringing *salvation* to both Jews and Gentiles (Isaiah 49) through His personal suffering and *death* (Isaiah 53). A wealth of additional prophecies would be stated during the remainder of Isaiah's ministry, as well as through the prophets who prophesied after him (such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Habakkuk, Zechariah and etc.). Jehovah, being the faithful God that He is, will see to it that each prophecy is fulfilled in accordance with the terms described in Deuteronomy 18:20-22.

Is. 48:7 "They are created now and not long ago; And before today you have not heard them, Lest you should say, 'Behold, I knew them.'

God will state these new prophecies so the Jews will be incapable of saying, at any point in the

future, that they had *heard* them beforehand through their idols.

Is. 48:8 "You have not heard, you have not known. Even from long ago your ear has not been open, Because I knew that you would deal very treacherously; And you have been called a rebel from birth.

The second reason these new prophecies would be given (the first reason having been stated in verse 7) was due to Israel's previous treachery (her tendency to reject God's authority while submitting to Gentile idols). She has *been called a rebel from birth*, a condition that has described Israel throughout her history—and continues to describe her today. A good example is the building of the golden *calf* at the base of Mount Sinai and crediting it with delivering her from *Egypt* (read Exodus 32:4). Her worship of the *bronze serpent* of *Moses* (read Numbers 21:4-9 and 2Kings 18:4) is another instance; a wealth of other sources could be cited as well. This rebelliousness will not subside until the end of the Great Tribulation when Israel sees her error and submits to Christ.

Is. 48:9 "For the sake of My name I delay My wrath, And for My praise I restrain it for you, In order not to cut you off.

Israel has been chastised repeatedly for her persistent rebelliousness, being the only nation to receive *Double for all her sins* (Isaiah 40:2). However, God has chosen not to destroy the nation in the past, nor will He do so in the future. He has stayed His hand due to His unconditional promises to the nation, promises that guarantee eternal blessings during the Millennium. One fact is certain. If Israel is destroyed, God is proven to be a liar, incapable of fulfilling what He has promised to the nation. This is why the enemies of Jehovah have repeatedly attempted to exterminate the Jews; for, in doing so, they would obliterate His reputation, proving Him incapable of fulfilling His word. The great news is that nothing can annihilate the Jews (read Jeremiah 31:35-37 and Jeremiah 33:20-21).

Is. 48:10 "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.

God has *refined* and *tested* Israel through her sufferings in the past, and continues to do so today. However, it will not be until the Great Tribulation that she reaches her final state of refinement, a refinement that will cause every Jew on the earth to be spiritually regenerated through accepting Jesus as Messiah.

Is. 48:11 "For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.

Jehovah has always protected the Jews, even during times of intense maltreatment (such as the Babylonian captivity and Holocaust). Should Israel become extinct, the enemies of God could credit their gods with accomplishing the work, totally discrediting Jehovah in the process.

Is. 48:12 ¶ "Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last.

Jehovah describes Himself in verses 12-16. Note that He again calls Israel "*Jacob*" (meaning "heel" or "supplanter") due to her rebelliousness. He first describes Himself as "*the first*" as well as "*the last*," meaning that He alone is God. He has no competition, for He is the sovereign Ruler over all the affairs of man. Yet in all His sovereignty, He has given man a free will,

allowing man to choose what he desires while on earth—including where he will spend eternity. Surely He is a God of love (1John 4:8), never forcing Himself on anyone; for love is negated when choice is eliminated.

Is. 48:13 "Surely My hand founded the earth, And My right hand spread out the heavens; When I call to them, they stand together.

Jehovah is also Creator, as is also addressed in Isaiah 40:12. Nothing on *earth* or in *the heavens* is outside the realm of His sovereignty, yet He gives man a free will to choose as he pleases.

Is. 48:14 "Assemble, all of you, and listen! Who among them has declared these things? The Lord loves him; he shall carry out His good pleasure on Babylon, And His arm shall be against the Chaldeans.

God is sovereign; He can therefore predict future events and bring them to fruition. Such was the case with Cyrus, who accomplished *His good pleasure on Babylon* by defeating *the Chaldeans* (the Babylonians). We should note that the phrase, "*And His arm*" (NASB), is rendered, "*and his arm,*" in the RSV, ASV, as well as the KJV. Therefore, the "*arm*" apparently points to Cyrus, the man who not only defeated the Babylonians but also allowed the Jews to return home at exactly the right time—at the end of the seventy years addressed in Jeremiah 25:11.

Note: Even with man possessing a free will, God can still fulfill that which He prophesies. Had God created mankind void of an ability to make choices, it would be much less a feat for Him to predict the future and bring it to pass. To allow mankind freedom of choice and still accomplish His purpose is sovereignty indeed.

Is. 48:15 "I, even I, have spoken; indeed I have called him, I have brought him, and He will make his ways successful.

As is confirmed by verse 14, God is sovereign. He had *called Cyrus* (Isaiah 41:2; 45:1-2) to overthrow Babylon, and He would do everything necessary to *make his ways successful*, all along giving him a free will to choose as he pleased.

Is. 48:16 "Come near to Me, listen to this: From the first I have not spoken in secret, From the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord God has sent Me, and His Spirit."

The *Lord* can state prophecies because He has the ability to fulfill what He has prophesied. Therefore, He has no need to speak *in secret* or covertly.

God also confirms in this section that He is Trinity, that three Persons make up the Godhead—*Lord God* (the Father), *Me* (the Son), and *His Spirit* (the Holy Spirit). Although the three are one in essence, they vary in function, confirming that unity can live alongside diversity with amazing effectiveness. In fact, the three Persons who make up the Trinity have never bickered among themselves. Why? Each makes decisions for the good of the other two Persons who form the Trinity. What a way to live!

It is obvious that unity can exist among beings who are equal, but differ in function, so long as each views life from the Godhead's perspective. One such example is the marriage relationship, where a *man* and his *wife...become one flesh* (Ephesians 5:31), and are therefore equal, but fill different rolls within the home. Can you imagine what would occur if every husband and wife entered into marriage solely for what their spouse received? Unity would reign and divorce

would become a word to strike from the dictionary.

It is important to note that the “*Me*” of verse 16 is also the “*I*,” the “*I am*,” and the “*My*” of verses 12-16. Therefore, the second Person of the Trinity (Jesus, the Son) is the “*I am*” (v.12; John 13:19, along with a hoard of other verses in the New Testament), “*the first*” and “*the last*” (v.12; Revelation 1:12-18; 2:8; 22:13), Creator (v.13; Colossians 1:16), *Prophet* (vv.14-16; Deuteronomy 18:18-19), and He who raised up Cyrus to dethrone the Babylonian Empire (vv.14-15).

There is no doubt that Isaiah 48:16 is the best verse in the Old Testament to prove that three distinct Persons make up the Godhead. In fact, this verse adds an incredible amount of insight into Jesus’ words of John 8:12-59 (and other similar verses in New Testament Scripture). Now that Isaiah has dealt with the Trinity, he no longer gives input concerning Cyrus, but discusses Jesus the “*Servant*,” the “*Me*” and the “*I*” of Isaiah 48:16 through whom Israel’s *iniquity* of Isaiah 40:2 will be removed.

Is. 48:17 ¶ 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 in the way you should go.

Jehovah (Jesus) is the *Redeemer* of Israel in the physical sense in that He raised up Cyrus to free the Jews from Babylon. He is also the spiritual *Redeemer* of the Jews, the suffering Savior of Isaiah 53 who died for the sin of man. When Israel listens (which has not been often), Jehovah *teaches her to profit* spiritually as well as physically, leading her *in the way she should go*. Verses 18-19 describe what could have been had the Jews chosen to obey.

Is. 48:18 "If only you had paid attention to My commandments! Then your well-being would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.

Had Israel listened to Jehovah on a consistent basis, her *will-being would have been like a river* and her *righteousness like the waves of the sea* (rivers and seas function very efficiently so long as they remain within their prescribed boundaries). One only has to read Deuteronomy 28-29 to discover what might have been versus what has actually taken place. Isaiah 48:19 gives input relating to the same subject.

Is. 48:19 "Your descendants would have been like the sand, And your offspring like its grains; Their name would never be cut off or destroyed from My presence."

Because the Jewish nation is the only nation to receive *Double for all her sins* (Isaiah 40:2), Israel has suffered terribly at the hands of the Gentiles. Many Jews have lost their lives; and the nation has been exiled from God’s *presence* in Jerusalem, not only on numerous occasions, but in humiliating fashion—the Babylonian captivity being just one example. This is very sad, especially considering that her descendants could *have been like the sand* and her *offspring like its grains*. Had she obeyed, she could have lived in perfect peace in her own *land*, never once suffering defeat at the hands of her *enemies* (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). It is hard to imagine the number of Jews that would populate the earth today had Israel but walked in obedience. Instead, her numbers are not only small in comparison to other nations, but scattered throughout the earth.

Is. 48:20 ¶ Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! Declare with the sound of joyful shouting, proclaim this, Send it out to the end of the earth; Say, "The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob."

The Jews delivered from the Babylonian captivity (by Cyrus) were to *Flee from* Babylon with joy and, at the same time, proclaim the truth of Jehovah's redemption to the Gentiles. Again, we see that Isaiah was directing these prophecies to Jews who would live some 150 years later.

Is. 48:21 And they did not thirst when He led them through the deserts. He made the water flow out of the rock for them; He split the rock, and the water gushed forth.

The Jews who chose to leave Babylon and travel to Jerusalem (a treacherous journey) were miraculously provided for by the God of Israel. These miracles are mentioned no other place in the Scriptures, not even in Ezra and Nehemiah (the books that cover their return from Babylon); but we can know they occurred because of these verses. When we see the Lord, it will be interesting to find out if they were similar to those performed when Israel fled from Egypt.

Is. 48:22 "There is no peace for the wicked," says the Lord.

Peace would accompany the Jews who departed from Babylon in obedience to Isaiah's counsel of verse 20. This was not so with the Jews who rejected Isaiah's counsel and remained in Babylon.

Most definitely, *There is no peace for the wicked*, which is confirmed by the last verse of each of the last three sections of Isaiah (read Isaiah 48:22, Isaiah 57:21, and Isaiah 66:24). The notes associated with Isaiah 40:2 might be helpful to read for additional input.