

INITIATION INTO ISAIAH

by

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CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

THEME:

Defeat of the idols of Babylon; declaration to Israel of salvation and denunciation of pan-idolatry.

REMARKS:

This chapter contains one of the finest satires against idolatry that is found in the Word of God. It opens with the announcement of defeat against the idols of Babylon in particular. This seems strange, since Babylon had not yet come to the front as a world power and was not the enemy of Israel, nevertheless Babylon was the source of all idolatry and it is fitting that after announcing the defeat of the idols of Babylon the prophet proceeds to denounce all idolatry with an injunction to Israel not to forsake the true God.

With bitter irony and biting satire the prophet portrays the helpless state of the idol to render any real assistance in times of emergency. This will be seen more clearly as we consider the separate verses under COMMENT.

The sharp distinction between God and idols is clearly made in this chapter. This may be stated in very simple language. God had carried and borne Israel through the long weary centuries of their sinful past. An idol is something you have to bear as a burden and carry if it gets anywhere. The real distinction is this: Does your God (god) carry you or do you carry Him (him)? Is your religion a burden bearer or is it a burden? This is the difference between the true and the false.

OUTLINE:

1. **PRONOUNCEMENT of Judgment Against the Idols of Babylon.** Verses 1-2
2. **PROMISE of Salvation by the Lord God.** Verses 3-4
3. **PROCLAMATION of God against All Idolatry.** Verses 5-13

COMMENT:

Verse 1—**Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: your carriages were heavy laden; they are a burden to the weary beast.**

Bel and Nebo are gods of Babylon.

“**Bel**” is the shortened form of “*Baal*” and it is found in the first part of “*Beelzebub*.” Beelzebub is Satan.

And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges (Matthew 12:26, 27).

“**Nebo**” means “*speaker*” or “*prophet*.”

The natives of Lycaonia mistook Barnabas for “**Bel**” or Jupiter, and Paul for “**Nebo**” or Mercury, for he did the talking. This verse infers that Satan is back of idolatry.

In this modern day we are not given to idolatry of the type of Babylon but Satan is still our enemy and the battle rages on another front.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (I Peter 5:8).

Covetousness is considered idolatry in this day.

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

We are warned “**to try the spirits.**”

This verse announces the defeat and subjugation of Satan as represented in the idols of Babylon. Surely joy and comfort are found here for the child of God in any age.

Verse 2—**They stoop, they bow down together; they could not deliver the burden, but themselves are gone into captivity.**

In the time of crisis the idols could not deliver, but were defeated instead.

Verse 3—**Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb:**

This should constitute a warning and a red light on the highway Israel was traveling. God had been carrying Israel.

Verse 4—**And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.**

Here is the distinction between the true and false. God had not only been carrying the nation, but He had carried each individual from the cradle to the grave.

(1) *God carries our sins*—“**He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.**”

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself (Exodus 19:4).

Our Lord said, “**Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.**”

(2) *God carries our care.*

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you (I Peter 5:7).

(3) *God carries us.*

The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them (Deuteronomy 33:27).

He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler (Psalm 91:4).

Verse 5—**To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like?**

The reason that it is so difficult to explain God is because He is infinite and we are finite and live in a finite universe. There is nothing with which to compare Him, he cannot be reduced to our terminology without losing all meaning, He cannot be translated into human language. This explains one of the reasons that God became a man.

(1) *Jesus revealed God.*

(2) *Jesus redeemed man.*

Verse 6—They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, and hire a goldsmith; and he maketh it a god: they fall down, yea, they worship.

Here begins the satire on idolatry. This is a metallic image that excels the wooden image in beauty and value (Remember the dream of Nebuchadnezzar of a multi-metallic image).

Here the wealth of man is expended in making an idol, the best of materials, the genius of mind, the skill of man's hands and the devotion of his heart. Men worship their own workmanship—actually themselves in so worshipping.

Verse 7—They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove: yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble.

After such an outlay of wealth, time and effort you would think that the idol would reciprocate by doing something for man, at least make the burden a little lighter.

On the contrary the idol becomes a burden and must be carried as an added weight, how utterly ridiculous is idolatry.

We might ask ourselves the question—

- Does our religion carry us; or do we carry it?
- Is it a millstone or a stepping stone?

Verse 8—Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors.

God calls upon men to act as intelligent creatures and not as animals (Isaiah 1:18). If they would only reason out the folly of idolatry that would deter them from committing an abomination.

Verse 9—Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me,

God suggests that they scan their past history containing the unmistakable leading of the Lord. Is that not enough to stir their hearts and encourage them to play the part of a man?

Verse 10—Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

Not only is the past a stimulus to faith, but the future is even more so.

God has moved into the area where no man or idol dares to go, he moves into the future and records prophecy as if it were history. It always comes to pass in just the way God predicted. This reveals the superiority of God.

Verse 11—Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.

This is a strange prophecy. He does not predict a glorious future in the immediate preview. A ravenous bird is coming up against His people. Is this Babylon?

Jesus predicted that birds would roost in the mustard tree and birds would take the sown seed away, he predicted for our day no world wide conversion but a total apostasy.

Verse 12—Hearken unto me, ye stouthearted, that are far from righteousness:

Verse 13—I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory.

However there will also be salvation for Israel and this God will not delay. There is a glorious day beyond the night of weeping. This is sure. Our God has spoken it.

~ end of chapter 46 ~

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