

Is. 46:1 *Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: your carriages were heavy loaden; they are a burden to the weary beast.*

Is. 46:2 *They stoop, they bow down together; they could not deliver the burden, but themselves are gone into captivity.*

“Bel” – According to Easton’s and JFB, Bel (Baal) was the chief god of the Babylonians and was also known as the sun god. Both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah practiced Baal worship at times in their history. The most famous story associated with this false god is found in 1Kings 18 when Elijah challenged the priests of Baal to a contest with Almighty God that involved calling down fire from heaven—a challenge that proved God’s sovereignty in spectacular fashion.

“Nebo” – This is another Babylonian deity. He was known as the scribe of the gods. According to Eerdman, “He wrote down the decisions of the gods and kept accounts of human dealings, especially on his “tablet of life” and “tablet of destiny.”

These verses are describing the impotency of these gods. When the huge idols representing these gods were transported (for whatever reason), they proved to be a great burden to the beast and the people trying to move them. The “gods” were unable to lighten the burden of those who worshipped them or to transport themselves.

Verse two indicates that the idols were being “captured” along with the people who worshipped them. I like the phrasing of the NLT: “*The idols of Babylon, Bel and Nebo, are being hauled away on ox carts. But look! The beasts are staggering under the weight! Both the idols and the ones carrying them are bowed down. The gods cannot protect the people, and the people cannot protect the gods. They go off into captivity together.*”

Is. 46:3 *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:*

Is. 46:4 *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.*

YHWH now speaks to His people and reminds them of how He has provided for them in every way.

- They are a nation because He sovereignly chose Abraham and birthed them through Isaac by miraculous intervention when both Sarah and Abraham were past the years of childbearing.
- God has personally been overseeing their well being since their very beginnings through provision, deliverance, judgment and forgiveness according to His purposes for them.
- Verse 4 makes me think of the message in Philippians 1:6 that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it. The Lord is saying that He

will continue to be their God until the end of their days on planet earth. The fulfillment of God's plan is not dependent upon their cooperation. Isaiah paints a word picture of the nation as a weak, old gray-haired man.

The contrast is vivid between the care and provision of YHWH for His people, and the impotence of the false gods in the previous verses.

Is. 46:5 To whom will ye liken me, and make *me* equal, and compare me, that we may be like?

The prophet articulates a rhetorical question from YHWH—"Is there any other being who can compare to me?"

Is. 46:6 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.

Is. 46:7 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.

Is. 46:8 Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring *it* again to mind, O ye transgressors.

The contrast is now driven home. Those who worship the false gods gather great amounts of silver and gold and then hire a goldsmith to make them an idol. Then, they fall down in worship before this manmade, impotent statue. This idol has to be carried by those who worship it if it needs to be moved since it is lifeless. A worshipper will cry out in vain for this "god" to help him since it is lifeless; it cannot hear or speak.

God is trying to get His people to see how foolish anyone is who worships such an impotent "god."

In verse 8 God is calling His people to act like men, not children. Only children will fall for fairy tales or could be deceived into thinking an idol had some kind of power.

"O ye transgressors" – This seems to be a reference to the Jews who were worshipping these idols.

Is. 46:9 Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is none else*; I *am* God, and *there is none like me*,

Is. 46:10 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:

Again, God reminds His people of their history. He has proven Himself to them in so many miraculous ways. Their scripture is full of testimony to His mighty acts. The evidence declares that there is no other GOD, no other being that can compare to YHWH.

Again, He reminds His people of His unique ability to prophesy the future. In fact, He has declared things from ancient times that are yet to be fulfilled. Still, He can confidently declare that every part of His plan and His purpose will be carried out to the smallest detail.

Is. 46:11 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.

Again, the prophet references Cyrus—a man bent on conquering the nations and empowered by YHWH in his battles as part of His plan in accomplishing His purposes for His people. It will be almost 200 years before this prophecy is proven correct, but it will be proven correct. God has spoken and so it shall be done.

Is. 46:12 Hearken unto me, ye stouthearted, that *are* far from righteousness: Is. 46:13 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.

It's always intriguing when God references time from His point of view. What will be thousands of years in earthly history are but a short time in God's economy—near, not far off.

God is speaking to His stubborn, rebellious people—a people evidently deeply involved in practicing sin (far from righteousness). God is going to bring Israel to a position of righteousness and salvation (cf 45:8), and in God's economy of time that time is near. Not only that, their salvation will happen on schedule according to His plan. He will not procrastinate or delay past the appointed time (from the Hebrew for *tarry*). Emphasis is made that the salvation of Israel is connected with the restoration of Zion/Jerusalem. Emphasis is also made that the fulfillment of God's plans for the nation of Israel is for His glory—not theirs. They are the benefactors and will be blessed abundantly to the glory of God.

As I've continued on in these past few chapters, I am amazed at God's consistency of message and patience in presenting it. God knows the end from the beginning. Still He makes every effort to get His people's attention and get them to turn back to Him in repentance and faith.

He does the same with us today. I can't help but personalize this more with my nation—America. We are just as blind and deaf as the Israelites seemed to be. The headlines are screaming the truth of the Word of God, and we are oblivious (or at least pretend to be). We are eager to question why God would allow bad things to happen to our people even as we continue to deny His truth and reject His authority. We want to experience all of His blessings without having to acknowledge Him as the source of those blessings. The body of believers in America need to claim the prayer of 2Chronicles 7:14: "If *my* people, which are called by my name (Christians), shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." If the body of believers would unify

in a passion to love the Savior and serve Him according to His Word half as passionately as those who follow false religions, we could change the world.