

The Collapse of the “Queen of Kingdoms”

All through Isaiah, God is presented as the Living God, the Everlasting One, who not only announces the future but who acts to bring about foretold events. In this section, the Lord's redemption of His servant (Israel) includes an announcement of redemption (44:23-28), the identification of the instrument of redemption, Cyrus (45:1-13), and a reminder of the uniqueness of the God of redemption. Now in the concluding section (chapters 46-48), Isaiah pictures the collapse of the mighty Babylonian kingdom, through which He redeems His people.

In chapter 45 the exiles must decide between identifying themselves with Babylon and its gods, or looking expectantly for Cyrus to deliver them. In Near Eastern culture, the pressure to worship idols was felt in every aspect of life. Babylonians ascribed supreme power to their gods, believing that the government of affairs depended on them. At the same time, the God of the Jews was treated with scorn, as if he could not defend His people, or cared nothing about them. It was with these basic issues that the exiles struggled daily.

1. Describe a time when it was difficult for you to live out in your actions what you believe in your heart.

Invitation to Pray: In reverence, bow before the *only God* in whom “we live, and move, and have our being.” Ask God to help you grow in the areas we are studying.

Begin by reading chapter 46. Judgment on Babylon also means judgment on Babylon's gods (vv. 1-2). The scene in the opening verses shows that there will be a great revolution. The gods of the Babylonians, which were elevated so high, will be brought low. They will not be able to save Babylon from being conquered.

2. Describe the scene Isaiah envisions (vv. 1-2). Consult several translations.
3.
 - a. In verses 3-4, God begins to address the remnant of His people. Re-read these verses carefully. What does He say to them first?
 - b. This counsel is repeated several times in chapters 46-48. Take a minute to scan these sections and note other examples or similar reminders. Do you see an application here for modern Christians?

4.
 - a. As we look closer, a striking contrast is evident in verses 1-2 and 3-4. What key word/words in this section underscore the great disparity between Babylon's gods and the God of their covenant faith? (Note 45:20.)
 - b. Recall Isaiah's treatment of idolatry in the book thus far. What further points are made to the exiles in this bold comparison (vv. 1-4)?

5. Have you seen people worn out and let down by the "idols" to which they have devoted themselves? When has this happened to you?

6. By contrast, how have you experienced God as a Father carrying you when you were weak, or sustaining you when you were tired? (Also recall Isaiah 40:11, 28-31.)

"Ever since Isaiah, men have been aware that one of the vital distinctions between true religion and false is that whereas the latter is a dead burden for the soul to carry, the former is a living power to carry the soul." James Stewart

Before dropping the subject, the Lord exposes again the folly of trying to make any creature equal to the Creator (46:5-7). In verses 11-13, the deliverance of Israel by Babylon is again promised. For proof of it, Isaiah invites them to turn their thoughts back to the past, recalling perhaps the Exodus, or other such mighty works of God done for Israel. These works of His demonstrate, as nothing else can, His consistent attitude toward His people, that He has proved Himself to be their God, and there is no other.

The prophecy is now addressed to Babylon itself. **Read chapter 47.** Isaiah describes Babylon's judgment through the effective use of imagery and irony.

7. How is Babylon depicted in verses 1-3?

8. The humiliation of Babylon brings a shout of praise from the prophet! (See v. 4.) What significance do you see in the titles Isaiah bestows upon God? Consider the context of chapter 47.

9. What truths about God are evident in 47:6?

10. Babylon failed to consider that someone more powerful than herself could call her to account for her treatment of the people she had conquered. What sins provoked God to bring this ruin upon “the queen of kingdoms” (vv. 6b -15)?

Babylon felt secure because her great learning and wisdom in the magical arts had led her to conclude that she was superior and invulnerable. Knowledge puffs up, and one of the delusions it spawns in people who know more is that they are not as morally and ethically responsible as everyone else.

11. Recall a time in your life when you felt superior and invulnerable. What in this lesson motivates you to resist this temptation? (Compare 2 Corinthians 7:1 and 1 Thessalonians 3:13.)

God sarcastically challenged the Babylonians to continue to trust in their mediums and horoscopes (47:12-15); however it would be no match for the consuming judgment that was coming upon them. Daniel 5 describes Belshazzar’s feast, which took place on the night Babylon fell. Cyrus took the Babylonian king and his city completely by surprise, and the empire fell suddenly. By morning every citizen of the empire was no longer a Babylonian, but a Persian.

Read chapter 48. The other side of the task of Cyrus now comes into view. Babylon has fallen and now the captives of Babylon must be liberated and sent home. First the Lord turns to the impenitent and unbelieving in Israel, with exhortations to really listen to their God!

12. What are the main points of the Lord’s appeal to His people (vv. 1-6a)?

13. The focus changes in verse 6b from the value of reviewing history to the disclosure of new truth. Even though Israel had given themselves to idolatry and had rebelled from the beginning, God had not cast her off. For what reason does God not destroy His people (vv. 8-11)?

Beginning in verse 12 the Lord states His case more concretely. The people are invited to listen closely to what is said. **Re-read verses 12-17 out loud.** Remember, the invitation to listen is meant for us too!

14. a. What would have been the result if Judah had listened to God (vv. 18-19)?
 - b. In what ways is obedience to God true freedom (Matthew 7:24-27; John 15:10; James 1:25)?

15. Does the Lord do for you what He claims in 48:17? How can you let Him do this?

As we conclude this magnificent section on chapters 40-48, Judah's liberation from Babylon is accomplished by God's redemptive action. In 538 B.C. Cyrus the Persian issued a decree that allowed the Jews to return to their homeland.

16. a. As the people answer the challenge to go forth (v. 20), what are they commanded to do?
 - b. What word of comfort accompanied the word of command (v. 21)?

The book of Ezra supplies a straightforward account of this important event in Jewish history. Look at Ezra 1:1-4 especially. Nehemiah 7:6-69 might also be of interest.

17. How was Israel's *history* a witness to God, even though Israel's *behavior* was a poor witness?

18. From all this, a final lesson is drawn in verse 22—a lesson which is repeated in 57:21. Did Israel belong to the group described in verse 22? Also consider verse 18.

Close by thanking God for all you have learned in chapters 40-48. In prayer ask God to give you a pure and undivided heart so you can *hear* His voice. Ask Him to tell you the first step He wants you to take. *Fellowship with God through hearing His voice!*