# Isaiah – Chapter 46

February 23, 2020 · AM · https://letgodbetrue.com/sermons/2020/isaiah-chapter-46/

**Theme:** God comforted the captive Jews in Babylon that He was superior to idols in very glorious ways.

**Outline:**

1-2 Idols Are a Burden to Idolaters in Trouble

3-4 God Bears His People and Delivers Them

5-8 God Is Far Better than Idols By Nature

9-11 God Is Far Better than Idols By Prophecy

12-13 God Is Far Better than Idols By Salvation

**Preparatory Reading:** Isaiah chapters 13-14, 19, 39, 41, 43-45; Jeremiah 25, 27, 50-51; Daniel 2, 5, 7.

**Related Links:**

1. Exposition of Isaiah 13 *(Babylon beat)*.
2. Exposition of Isaiah 14 *(Belshazzar)*
3. Exposition of Isaiah 19 *(Egypt judged)*
4. Exposition of Isaiah 41 *(Cyrus foretold)*.
5. Exposition of Isaiah 43 *(Babel beat)*.
6. Exposition of Isaiah 44 *(Cyrus called)*.
7. Exposition of Isaiah 45 *(Cyrus called)*.
8. Babylon: History-Prophecy.
9. Glory of Fulfilled Prophecy.
10. Cyrus Decree to Rebuild.
11. Knowing God *(extensive attributes)*.
12. *God Is Author of Confusion*.
13. I Gave Egypt for Thy Ransom.
14. Boasting of God – Isaiah.
15. The Dominion of God.

**Introduction:**

A. This chapter, seventh in the comfort section of Isaiah, should build faith and apologetic confidence.
   1. **Comfort**. To strengthen (morally or spiritually); to encourage, hearten, inspirit, incite. To minister delight or pleasure to; to gladden, cheer, please, entertain.
   2. Isaiah 41 had God mocking idolatrous nations about the rise of Cyrus to save and promote Israel.

3. Isaiah 43 had God mocking idolatrous nations about His defeat and sacrifice of Babylon for Jews.
4. Isaiah 44 had God naming Cyrus and exalting fulfilled prophecies over the insanity of idolaters.
5. Isaiah 45 had God naming Cyrus and guaranteeing his success for God's universal glory and praise.
6. It is our duty in scripture to work hard for God's approval by applying the words to the right event.
7. Though there are wonderful words in these chapters, we want the sense of them not just the sound.
8. Therefore, it is key to carefully analyze the context and the content to apply it to the right event.
9. The chapter divisions are not inspired, but God has providentially preserved them with some value.
10. Keep in mind when reading that Isaiah moves all over the timeline e.g. Rome (Is 6:9-13), Assyria (Is 7:2), Messiah (Is 9:1-2,6-7), Assyria (Is 10:1-34), Messiah (Is 11:1-10), Babylon (Is 13-14).
11. Isaiah already foretold Babylon's ruin (Is 13-14; 21:1-12; 41:1-9; 43:14-18; 44:24-48; 45:1-6).
12. Though the event is near 160+ years away, God here proves He is God by this incredible prophecy.
13. The reason for the event is His glory above all else (Isaiah 46:5:9,11,13 compared to Is 48:9; etc.).
14. Christians should never fear political events or false religion, for our God is fully in charge of both.

B. This chapter follows the previous six with more details justifying comfort for Israel after chastening.
1. After 39 chapters, many of which foretold terrible judgments, Isaiah began a section of comfort.
2. From the first chapter to the historical section (36-39), Assyria and Babylon would ravage Judah.
3. Assyria's war with Judah was repeated for being in Isaiah's time, but Babylon's war is also told.
4. But notice the very last prophecy before chapter 40 – Babylon would take all captive (Is 39:6-7).
5. The comfort here identifies God's power over idols to fulfill His covenant promises to the Jews.
6. He called on Israel to be His witnesses to the world that He had foretold about Cyrus far in advance.
7. Fulfilled prophecies – like this – are one of the greatest proofs of God's existence and Bible truth.
8. The amount of prophetic and historical space given to Cyrus and Babylon prove its value to God.

C. To fully appreciate the value and power of this chapter, a person needs to learn about Cyrus the Great.
1. He is the main character in these 40's chapters of Isaiah, for God used him greatly (Is 44:28; 45:1).
2. His commandment to rebuild Jerusalem is what started Daniel's crucial timeline (Daniel 9:24-27).
3. His proclamation for Jews to return to Jerusalem is huge in history (II Chr 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4).
4. Skeptics and students resent Cyrus, for this supernatural prophecy and/or denying Ussher/Ptolemy.
5. The overthrow of the mighty city of Babylon in one night and release of the Jews is clearly epic.
6. God loved this event and spends these 40's chapters of Isaiah to boast about His prophecy of him.
7. Though the name Cyrus is in the pages of scripture nineteen times, most Christians know nothing.
8. When a man denies the supernatural about Cyrus and/or starting Daniel's prophecy, he is ignorant.

D. What do we want to get from this chapter? There are many goals and reasons to learn it; here are some.
1. It should build our pleasure in God that He rejoices to destroy idolatry and also to mock its futility.
2. It should build our confidence in God that He will personally take care of us from birth to death.
3. It should build our faith in God and our religion as far superior to any religion, especially idolatry.

# Idols Are a Burden to Idolaters in Trouble – Verses 1-2

***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.***

A. The hauling away of Babylon's gods by a foreign invader would comfort captive Jews.

B. Babylon, like all the nations God had destroyed by or for Israel, had pagan idol gods.
   1. *Bel* = Jupiter Belus, maybe Baal, was a chief idol of Babylonians (Jer 50:2; 51:44).
   2. The Chaldeans made compound names like Bel-shazzar, like the Jews' Jehovahjireh.
   3. *Nebo* = Mercury; the Chaldeans created compound names like Nebu-chadnezzar.
   4. They had Merodach, with compound names Evilmerodach and Merodachbaladan.

C. God had promised and prophesied overthrow of their false gods (Is 21:9; Jer 51:47,52).

D. Isaiah creatively mocked and ridiculed Babylonian idol gods as impotent against Cyrus.
   1. Bel and Nebo, idols gods of Chaldeans, were usually sitting or standing for worship.
   2. But when Cyrus took Babylon, he hauled their idol gods on beasts and in wagons.
   3. The materials of the idols were valuable, so conquerors might move them as spoil.
   4. Being moved either way, the two idols were bowed down in their physical position.
   5. Whereas worshippers previously bowed down to them, now they bowed to Cyrus.
   6. In wagons, these heavy statues tested the wagon's limits and draft animals' strength.

E. The pronouns move from third (*their*) to second (*your*), from Babylonians to Persians.
   1. Or, the pronoun *their* could be the Babylonian gods distinct from their idols, though this distinction is not common, but may be found with Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 46:12).
   2. Some of these pronoun antecedent relationships are obscure and allow some latitude.

F. Recall how Dagon of the Philistines bowed down before Jehovah's ark (I Sam 5:1-5).

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

A. The two idols are stooping and bowing by the parallelism with the earlier verse (Is 46:1).
   1. They were carried by draft animals and wagons as spoil of Persia defeating Babylon.
   2. They stooped and bowed by their position for transport, no longer erect for worship.

B. The Chaldeans could not rescue their burdensome idols; they themselves were captives.
   1. For pronouns, note *their* for Babylonians, *your* for Persians, *they* for idols (Is 46:1).
   2. The Babylonians had to watch their gods stolen, and they were captured with them.
   3. Latitude can be allowed for the third *they* and *themselves* for Chaldeans or the idols.
   4. The intensive pronoun *themselves* may very well refer to the idols taken as captives.

C. The hauling away of Babylon's gods by a foreign invader would comfort captive Jews.

D. False religion cannot save its followers, and it will be exposed by God (II Tim 3:8-8).

E. The following contrast between Babylon's gods and Israel's God is glorious indeed.

# God Bears His People and Delivers Them – Verses 3-4

***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:***

A. The following contrast between Babylon's gods and Israel's God is glorious indeed.

B. God by His prophet called the remnant Jews in Babylon to listen to His great comfort.
   1. They had the previous prophecy that the Chaldeans and their gods would be taken.
   2. They now would hear God's glorious comfort of how He would take care of them.
   3. The glorious God of Israel was also its loving Father, far different from pagan idols.

C. Babylon's idols gods had to be carried, but Israel's Jehovah carried the Jews Himself.
   1. Our God Jehovah here declared that He carries His people Himself from their birth.
   2. The history of the Jews from Abraham to Babylon confirms God's kind providence.
   3. And God did not forsake the Jews in Babylon, but brought them back home to stay.

D. If you briefly think – count your blessings – connect your dots – God has carried you.
   1. Think of all the natural blessings you have e.g. nation, job, spouse, privileges, etc.
   2. How many times were you rescued from various forms of natural trouble and pain?
   3. Think of all the spiritual blessings you have e.g. five phases, full conversion, etc.
   4. How many ways were you rescued from ignorance and sin for gospel pleasures?

***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.***

A. Note the creative and fabulous contrasts between Babylon's idol gods and Israel's God.
   1. The Chaldeans *made* their gods; Jehovah made the Jews individually and as a nation.
   2. The Chaldeans had to *bear* their gods (Jer 10:5); Jehovah *bore* the burden of Israel.
   3. The Chaldeans had to *carry* their gods (Is 46:7); Jehovah Himself carried the Jews.
   4. The Chaldeans vainly hoped to be *delivered* by idols; Jehovah delivered by Cyrus.

B. God had made them. Think past bare creation to His gracious adoption as His church.
   1. Jews captive in Babylon did not have to worry at all; He would take care of them.
   2. He not only preserved them in Babylon but also prospered them before their rescue.
   3. He then raised up a savior in Cyrus to send them back home with many blessings.

C. God not only carries His people from their birth, but He keeps carrying to the very end.
   1. God Jehovah is our Creator, Deliver, Provider, and Sustainer for all the years of life.
   2. While old age brings forgetfulness and insignificance, God does not change His care.
   3. Old age thins and grays hair, but the mirror of the Bible trumps a bathroom mirror.

D. We can look back and see how He cares for us, and we can count on it for the future.
   1. If He has made us for Himself, then He will not forsake us or fail to fully keep us.
   2. The grace we have after justification leads to experience, hope, love (Rom 5:1-5).

3. He will bear us; He will carry us; He will deliver us. So that we may boldly say!

E. We can look forward and confidently know He will take full care of us forever and ever.
   1. He promised to never leave nor forsake us, and He did so (Heb 13:5-6; II Tim 4:17).
   2. He declared that He will freely give us all things after giving us His Son (Rom 8:32).
   3. He made us for Himself, so we can count on Him to glorification (Romans 8:28-30).

## God Is Far Better than Idols By Nature – Verses 5-8

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

A. Isaiah began this comfort section with a very similar rhetorical question (Isaiah 40:18).

B. God by Isaiah continued to comfort His people against their captors the Babylonians.
   1. It is obvious by the next verse's *they* He intended to mock the Chaldeans for idolatry.
   2. It is also obvious He intended to rebuke and warn Israel for a past fault (Is 46:8,12).
   3. So the rhetorical question here corrects Babylon's present idolatry and Israel's past.

C. Our glorious God has no equal or peer for any form of comparison or alternative faith.
   1. By every measure, the LORD Jehovah is infinitely superior to every form of God.
   2. The issue is especially the inability to form any image to properly represent Him.

D. Knowing God *(extensive attributes)*.

***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.***

A. Here is another mockery of idolatry by describing what idolaters will do to make a god.

B. Though man must form it from materials taken from the earth, they worship it as a god

C. Many Bible places mock or ridicule idolatry (Ps 115:1-8; Is 44:9-20; Jer 10:1-16; etc.).

***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.***

A. Since an idol is incapable of function, his worshippers must carry him to the right place.

B. Once set up for worship, the idol will never move, never answer, never save from pain.

C. Many Bible places mock or ridicule idolatry (Ps 115:1-8; Is 44:9-20; Jer 10:1-16; etc.).

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

A. God called the remnant Jews to never return to idolatry by weighing His ridicule of it.
   1. Isaiah appealed to Israel this way before – consider the insanity of idols (Is 44:21).
   2. Many Bible places mock or ridicule idols (Ps 115:1-8; Is 44:9-20; Jer 10:1-16; etc.).
   3. He called them transgressors here for their sins of idolatry that put them in Babylon.
   4. Manasseh especially had committed terrible acts of idolatry with the worst idol gods.

B. God called the remnant Jews to act like men – rational, critical, reflective, and wise.

1. Natural men without any blindness should see the folly (Is 44:18-21; Rom 1:21-23).
2. They were to remember His mockery and bring it to mind enough to hate the error.
3. They were to be strong enough not to listen to arguments or intimidation for idolatry.

C. God has called Christians to be men in understanding and strength (I Cor 14:20; 16:13).
1. Some things require little more than common sense e.g. Charismatic gimmicks, etc.
2. Ministers protect and prepare people for false doctrine (Eph 4:11-14; Titus 1:9-14).
3. A church should have emphasis and preaching that reviews common doctrinal errors.

## God Is Far Better than Idols By Prophecy – Verses 9-11

***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,***

A. After remembering the folly of idolatry (Is 46:9), they were to remember other things.
1. They should think back on the 1400 years or more of their history of God's dealings.
2. God had been their God in the most remarkable ways that make up the O.T. history.
3. He had shown great salvations e.g. exodus out of Egypt, defeat of Sennacherib, etc.
4. The escape from Egypt and destruction of Canaanites should have built great faith.

B. No idol god had such a history with its worshippers like Israel had with GOD Jehovah.
1. Even the Philistines remembered Israel's exodus from Egypt hundreds of years later.
2. Rahab confessed that the rulers of Jericho were terrified by Israel due to Jehovah.

C. There is one particular attribute, feature, or trait of God to be remembered above others.
1. Fulfilled prophecy proves the supernatural foresight and power of a Being truly God.
2. As God did by Isaiah throughout these 40s chapters, He exalted fulfilled prophecies.
3. Fulfilled Prophecy.

***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:***

A. This verse should be a favorite about the nature and character of the God of the Bible.

B. Jehovah can declare what will happen at any time due to His power to execute His will.
1. The end of a thing, whether nation or weather, is no more difficult than its beginning.
2. God knows all things that He has purposed to do from ancient times (Acts 15:18).
3. This is much more than omniscience – complete and perfect knowledge of the future.
4. This includes His eternal counsel and omnipotent power to make His will happen.
5. God's counsel determines the future, and His counsel is His pleasure for all events.
6. Create a chance or random event – the outcome is God's eternal counsel (Pr 16:33).
7. Proverbs 16:33 Commentary.

C. This prerogative and power of God is glorious in its holiness, justness, and sovereignty.

1. His secret will includes even the most depraved acts of men (Deut 29:29; Ps 76:10).
2. The worst act of human history was the crucifixion (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; Matt 26:24).
3. All acts flow from His counsel as well (Gen 50:20; Ex 9:16; Jas 4:17; Rev 17:17).
4. Reprobation, or the rejection of some to go to hell, is true (Rom 9:22-24; Jude 1:4).
5. Questioning, complaining, or criticizing is out of line (Is 45:9-10; Rom 9:19-20).

D. Rather than trust an idol you made to save you, trust the living God that rules the world.
1. This distinguishing trait of the God of the Bible separates Him from all other gods.
2. Proving the existence of God or the truth of the Bible depends on fulfilled prophecy.
3. God used Isaiah's 40s to exalt His ability (Is 41:1-4,21-22; 42:9; 43:9-12; 45:20-21).
4. Prophecy is mainly to confirm and build faith by fulfillment (Jn 13:19; 14:29; 16:14).
5. Fulfilled Prophecy.

E. The Dominion of God.

***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.***

A. The specific event of God's dominion and fulfilled prophecy was Cyrus to rescue Israel.
1. The context is Babylon, and deliverance from Babylon was by Cyrus (Isaiah 46:1).
2. God named and appointed Cyrus to this work for His captive church (Is 44:28; 45:1).

B. Cyrus was a ravenous bird from a far nation in the east – a Persian king to take Babylon.
1. He was ravenous for his great appetite to devour nations and kingdoms for himself.
2. He was a bird for his conquests were fast a bird's flight, especially a bird of prey.
3. He was from the east, for Persia (Iran) is clearly east of Babylon (Iraq) and Israel.
4. He was from a far country, not a close neighbor of Babylon or especially of Israel.

C. Cyrus executed God's counsel, or God's pleasure decreed from ancient times (Is 46:10).
1. God's counsel, among other things, was to punish Babylon for its sins and cruelty.
2. God's counsel, among other things, was to free remnant Jews to return to Jerusalem.

D. When God speaks a prophecy, He will bring it to past; this is more than omniscience.

E. When God purposes a matter, He will also do it; He has no plans without performance.

F. This prophecy of Cyrus, repeated many times, would have greatly comforted Israel.
1. Given 100 years before his birth and 160 years before the event, they waited for it.
2. By Jeremiah's prophecy of 70 years and this prophecy of its end, they could time it.
3. By a spectacular fulfillment and written proclamation, their faith would have grown.

## God Is Far Better than Idols By Salvation – Verses 5-8

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

A. God again addressed His church as He had before, but here He rebuked unrighteousness.

1. He had first called on them to hearken to compare His care to vain idolatry (Is 46:3).
2. He used the third person to describe Babylon's idolaters, not the second (Is 46:6-7).
3. He then called on Jews to remember the folly of idolatry as transgressors (Is 46:8).
4. He told His audience to remember His works, which the Jews knew best (Is 46:9).

B. The Jews were notorious, as recorded in the Bible, for their proud rebellion for sins.

C. Having appealed to superiority to idols by nature and power, He appealed to character.
1. He identified the Jews' pride and rebellion and declared them far from righteousness.
2. He then in the next verse set Himself very different from them in righteous salvation.
3. Though they had repented (Daniel) and He had forgiven them, it was their character.

***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.***

A. Contrary to their character and deserved judgment, God would treat them righteously.
1. Along with promised salvation, He reminded them of sins (Is 42:17-25; 43:22-28).
2. He also declared He had forgiven them their sins to justify rescue (Is 43:26; 44:22).
3. Punishment of Babylon and rescue of His church were both acts of righteousness.
4. It would result in the destruction of the cruel enemy of His church – the Chaldeans.
5. It would result in salvation of His church from their hands – to return home to Zion.

B. Contrary to their character and deserved judgment, God would perform their salvation.
1. He comforted the Jews His righteousness was close and their salvation to occur soon.
2. Though a captivity of 70 years was a long time, Jeremiah had promised it would end.
3. The combined assurance from these 40s chapters of Isaiah should have formed faith.
4. God's planned salvation after 70 years in Babylon was to be back in Zion of Judah.
5. God gets and takes glory in His people, in this case putting them back in Jerusalem.

C. Out of Zion went salvation in the greatest sense – Jesus Christ the Savior of the world.
1. He comforted Zerubbabel that the second temple would provide peace (Hag 2:6-9).
2. He shook the heavens and the earth to reveal His spiritual Zion (Hebrews 12:22-29).