

Gods that Fail and Bring Destruction – Isaiah 46-47

Introduction – In chapter 46 the Lord speaks to Israel and in chapter 47 He speaks to Babylon. In both chapters He continues the same message: the gods of Babylon, like all idols, cannot save; they only bring destruction upon themselves and those who follow them. But salvation is near to all who come by faith to Zion and Zion's God. Because the New Testament teaches the fulfillment of this in Jesus Christ, we learn that all ways other than a life of faithfulness, following God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, leads to catastrophe – for individuals, for cultures, and even for the mightiest nations.

Bel and Nebo (46:1-7) – These were Babylon's pagan gods. Bel was another name for Marduk, the god of the city of Babylon, and Nebo was the son of Bel Marduk who wrote the tables of destiny and the fates decreed by the gods for the coming year. During an impressive festival at New Year's these gods would be carried through the streets as they processed to a great shrine proclaiming good fortune for the year to come. Isaiah uses this picture to make his points even more clear. These gods simply weary their followers (v2). And while these gods require to be carried, the LORD will carry Israel as He always has been (vv3-4). The gods will not save anyone, but the LORD will save out of trouble (vv5-7).

Now think about it. Who remembers anything about Bel and Nebo today? As opposed to the name of Jesus, known over all the nations? Isaiah names specific deities, false gods, not just idolatry in general – and they are not identified in any way as just another way to worship the same God. So it is and so it will be with every false god, every false religion, as the name of Jesus spreads over the earth – even the ones who appear so popular in our day.

Idolaters Carry Their gods; The God of Scripture carries His people – *Deut 1:31, Psalm 28:9, Ex 19:4, Isaiah 63:9*. If a god has to be carried, what kind of god is that? If God carries His people through all circumstances, what kind of God is He?

Salvation is in Zion (46:8-13) – Afraid of evil? Scared in your circumstances? Anxious about tomorrow? God confronts your fears by reminding you of Who He is and exhorts, “*show yourselves men,*” also translated, “*be men, take courage,*” or, “*stand firm.*” This same command would come from Paul (“*Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong*” – 1 Cor 16:13) and from Peter (“*Resist the devil and he will flee from you*” – James 4:7). “*Recall to mind...*” that there is no other like our God (v9) Who holds the future in His hands (v10), Who directs the movements of kings and kingdoms for His own sake (v11). Faith in that God brings confidence in life. To those who will not believe, God calls them “*transgressors*” (v8), “*stubborn-hearted*” and “*far from righteousness*” (v12). God's Word-promises are right before Israel to receive and believe (v13) but they would not turn to Him and believe. Ultimately, this is exactly what God said to Israel in their rejection of Jesus (Rom 10:8-11, 16) – and to anyone who will not confess Jesus as Lord. So go back to v7 – stand firm, get your mind around this, you will need to meditate on this time and time again. It is when life makes you feel helpless and hopeless that you will need this faith. Salvation is here – in Zion – in Jesus.

The Humiliation of Babylon (47:1-15) – Babylon is pictured as the pampered, self-indulgent, spoiled girl who always got her way (vv1-9). She is one who is “*given to pleasures*” living in a false security saying, “*I am, and there is no one else besides me*” (v8). Her hidden impurities, immoralities, and wickedness will be revealed by the Lord (vv2-3, 10). And, as Daniel records, in a day, it all came to an end when Cyrus the Persian came to town (v9, Dan 5:30-31).

Babylon: Defiant and Doomed – The city of Babylon is a classic study in worldly power and arrogance. We learned in from our study of Babylon in Isaiah 13-14 that she is the city of rebellion, the city of man, the city of pride and arrogance, the city of perversions unleashed. Ultimately, Jerusalem and the old Temple had become that Babylon and were utterly destroyed when Jerusalem and the temple were decimated in 70AD. But the Babylon-principle remains in nations of pride and rebellion. Their doom is sure. She is the city-nation that trusts in herself, that deifies herself, that trusts in her wickedness and thinks of herself as full of wisdom and knowledge (vv8-11). Sound familiar?

When she hears these words of condemnation, she turns to her enchantments, her multitude of counsels, her economic forecasters, her man-made sciences, and laughs off the threat of the judgment of the God and Father of Jesus Christ (vv12-13). Sound familiar? Nobody remembers Bel and Nebo. Studies in Babylonian history are pretty scarce.

America is not Babylon and we do not have any direct word of prophecy declaring the fall of our nation. But we are like the foolish man who builds his house on the sand (Matt 7:26-27), we are like the rich man who refuses to reckon what the night would bring (Luke 12:20). God explains what happens to such. And Isaiah 47:15 ends with this: “*No one shall save you.*”

Don't be that man! Don't be that culture! Don't be that nation! But there is one more chapter in this section (48). There is a way out. Jesus will be remembered and worshipped forever.