

Isaiah Chapter 46

Verses 1-13: “Bel” and “Nebo” were two of the most prominent Babylonian deities. The name Bel is derived from Baal and refers to Marduk, the patron deity of Babylon. Nebo (or Nabu), was viewed as the son of Bel (Marduk). His name is found in the name of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The idea in this passage is that the Babylonian deities will one day fall before the Lord (Nebuchadnezzar’s confession in Daniel 4).

The rhetorical question “To whom will ye liken me?” implies the obvious answer, no one! “I am God, and there is none like me.” Yahweh is the unique and incomprehensible God. His uniqueness is found in His “declaring the end from the beginning.” His singular distinctiveness is His ability to predict the future with complete accuracy. Since He alone knows the future, the “salvation” of the Lord “shall not tarry” (Hab. 2:3; Heb. 10:37). In the timetable of God, all things are proceeding on schedule.

Isaiah 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]."

“Bel ... Nebo”: The two most prominent gods in Babylon. “Bel” is another spelling for “Baal,” the Phoenician chief god of Babylon. That “Nebo” was extensively worshiped is shown by the proper names compounded from his: Nebuchadnezzar, Nabopolassar, and Nebuzaradan.

Bel and Nebo were both false gods worshipped by the Babylonians. They believed in many false gods, of which these are just two. Belshazzar's name was an extension of Bel. Nebo was the false god of learning.

These idols were so heavy they had to be carried by beasts of burden. They were probably made of some heavy metal such as gold.

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

“Gone into captivity”: When Cyrus came; even the gods were taken into exile. These idols couldn’t save themselves from being laid down on the backs of beasts and hauled away, let alone save the people who worshiped them.

It appears that these figures of the false gods were taken as spoil when the Babylonians were overthrown. As we said above, these idols were often made of gold and would make them desirable to the captors for the amount of gold in them.

This would, also, make a terribly heavy load for these beasts of burden to carry very far.

Verses 3-4: "All the remnant of the house of Israel": The God of Israel is not helpless like idols. In His strength, He has sustained and will sustain helpless Israel through every circumstance. (In verse 4), the Lord uses the first person pronoun 6 times to emphasize His personal involvement in delivering Israel.

Isaiah 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:"

Hearken means to listen carefully. They must see that these idols are of no help in times of trouble. Israel became a nation, because God called them to be His people. He was their Father. There had been a remnant that had not bowed their knees to false gods.

God wants them to learn a lesson in all this. When they are faithful to Him, He blesses them. When they follow false gods, He will not protect them.

Isaiah 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]."

God will be with them all of their lives. He will never abandon His own. God reminds them again that He is their Maker and He will protect them all of their lives, from infancy to death.

"Hoar hairs" is speaking of grey hair of old age. He is a very present help for His children.

Verses 5-8: The human origin and utter impotence of idols renders them unfit for comparison with the God of Israel (40:18-20).

(In verse 8), the prophet calls on the readers to recall the impotence of the idols they worship in transgression of God's law.

Isaiah 46:5 "To whom will ye liken me, and make [me] equal, and compare me, that we may be like?"

God alone is God. There is no other. To compare God to an idol, or false god, would be blasphemy. It appears that some of God's people had wandered into idolatry in Babylon. They did not stay true to faith in the One True God.

To be unfaithful to God with these false gods is to commit spiritual adultery.

Isaiah 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."

We have said this many times before, but it is worth repeating. These idols of silver and gold were the creation of man. They are not the Creator. In fact, they have no power to do anything. They are not alive and never have been.

The Creator of the universe, and everything, and everyone in it, is the one to be praised. God is the Creator. The Word of God created everything and everyone, and He alone should be worshipped.

Isaiah 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."

God lifts the burdens of His people. These idols are a burden to the people who worship them. The greatest example of this that I can think of is when the prophets of Baal were challenged by Elijah. Read with me the story of what happened.

1 Kings 18:17-39 "And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, [Art] thou he that troubleth Israel?" "And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim." "Now therefore send, [and] gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table." "So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel." "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD [be] God, follow him: but if Baal, [then] follow him. And the people answered him not a word." "Then said Elijah unto the people, I, [even] I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets [are] four hundred and fifty men." "Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay [it] on wood, and put no fire [under]: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay [it] on wood, and put no fire [under]:" "And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken." "And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress [it] first; for ye [are] many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire [under]." "And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed [it], and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But [there was] no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made." "And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he [is] a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, [or] peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked." "And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them." "And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the [time] of the offering of the [evening] sacrifice, that [there was] neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded." "And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD [that was] broken down." "And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name:" "And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed." "And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid [him] on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour [it] on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood." "And he said, Do [it] the second time. And they did [it] the second time. And he said, Do [it] the third time. And they did [it] the third time." "And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water." "And it came to pass at [the

time of] the offering of the [evening] sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou [art] God in Israel, and [that] I [am] thy servant, and [that] I have done all these things at thy word." "Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou [art] the LORD God, and [that] thou hast turned their heart back again." "Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that [was] in the trench." "And when all the people saw [it], they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he [is] the God; the LORD, he [is] the God."

Isaiah 46:8 "Remember this, and show yourselves men: bring [it] again to mind, O ye transgressors."

God is stating that they must be men enough to decide between Him and these false gods. Many of the troubles of these Israelites was because they fell away from God.

Isaiah 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,"

“Remember the former things of old”: The readers are to recall:

- (1) All the past history of fulfilled prophecies; as well as
- (2) Miraculous deliverances such as that from Egypt; and
- (3) Providential blessings Israel has experienced.

All of these are ample evidence that He alone is God.

This had been shown over and over by God to these faithless people. God proved Himself, as we just studied above, showing Baal to be nothing. He discredited the false gods of Egypt, when He brought the 10 plagues against them.

They must now look back at their own history and see that there is but One God. He is the I AM. There are no other gods.

Isaiah 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:"

With God there is no time limitation. He lives in eternity, which has no time separation. The beginning of creation until the end of everything is one eternal day. It is not difficult for God to know what the future holds, because He is the future as well as the present.

He is “I AM”. Whatever God says is fact. It will happen, if He declared it, because He is absolute Truth.

Isaiah 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."

“Man ... from a far country”: Cyrus was this man whom God summoned to conquer Babylon and return a remnant of Israel to end the 70 year captivity a century and a half after Isaiah wrote this prophecy (44:28; 45:1).

Cyrus was called a “bird” for his swiftness, and “ravenous” for his fierceness, and victories over his enemies. The “east” here means Persia. Cyrus was called a "bird" for his swiftness, and "ravenous" for his fierceness, and victories over his enemies. The "east" here means Persia. The word 'ravenous bird' is rendered 'fowl' (in Job 28:7); “bird” or “birds” (in Jeremiah 12:9); “fowls” (in Genesis 15:11; Isaiah 18:6); and “ravenous birds” (in Ezekiel 39:4).

Isaiah 46:12 "Hearken unto me, ye stouthearted, that [are] far from righteousness:"

Those who believe in their own strength, have difficulty listening to the Words of God. Their strength will pale by comparison to the power of God. The stouthearted need a Savior, the same as all the rest.

Sometimes they are too proud to admit their need. God saves the humble. Even the stouthearted become humble at the presence of Almighty God.

Isaiah 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."

“Righteousness ... salvation in Zion”: At God’s appointed time, the salvation of Israel will become a reality and result in the Messiah’s righteous kingdom (61:3; 62:11; Joel 3:17; Zech. 12:10-13:1; Romans 11:25-27).

"Zion" symbolizes Jerusalem and the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation comes through belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation became available in Jerusalem, when Jesus was crucified on the cross. Again, physical Israel belongs to the Hebrews. Spiritual Israel belongs to the believers in Christ Jesus.

Romans 9:6 "Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they [are] not all Israel, which are of Israel:"

Isaiah Chapter 46 Questions

1. Who are Bel and Nebo?
2. Belshazzar was an extension of _____.
3. Nebo was the false god of _____.
4. Why did the captors desire these false god figures?
5. Hearken unto me, O house of _____.

6. The remnant had not bowed their knee to _____.
7. What does "hoar hairs" mean?
8. To compare God to a false god, or an idol, is _____.
9. Verse 6 says these idols are made of what 2 metals?
10. These idols were the creation of _____.
11. Who created everything and everyone?
12. God _____ the burdens of His people.
13. These idols _____ a burden.
14. Who did Ahab say troubled Israel?
15. What was the truth about this?
16. What mount were Elijah and the prophets of Baal to meet on?
17. How many prophets of Baal were there?
18. Did Baal answer his prophets' requests?
19. How did God answer the prayers of Elijah?
20. What did the people do, when they saw what God did in answer to Elijah's prayer?
21. Was there any question who God is?
22. What does God tell them to do in verse 8?
23. When was another incident when God discredited false gods?
24. The beginning of creation until the end of eternity, is what with God?
25. Who is under the command of God in verse 11?
26. What is wrong with being stouthearted?
27. What does "Zion" symbolize?