

**Idols and Stubborn Bull-Headed People
And Yet, the Lord Still Loves Israel, and Us Too!
Isaiah 46:1–13**

June 10, 2021

Scripture quotations are taken from the following translations:

ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

**Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB),
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973,
1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation
Used by permission. www.Lockman.org**

Scripture quoted by permission. Quotations designated (NET) are from the NET Bible® copyright ©1996-2016 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. <http://netbible.com> All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

The Good News Translation Bible (GNB) text used in this product is being used by permission. Copyright © American Bible Society, 1966, 1971, 1976, 1992

Scripture taken from the Holy Bible: International Standard Version® Release 2.0. (ISV) Copyright © 1996–2011 by the ISV Foundation. Used by permission of Davidson Press, LLC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED INTERNATIONALLY.

We know (Isaiah 45:9-10) that the Jews of Isaiah's time did not agree with God's plan to use Cyrus. No matter, God continues with His plans, to be completed by Cyrus.

Now we read of judgment. This is judgment upon a government, that of Babylon and reflects what will be taking place as a result of Cyrus but then pops out to the final destruction of Babylon at the end of the Tribulation. This is, ultimately, judgment on a nation, a way of life, a government that has fully embraced the call of the no-gods.

The message of the next two chapters begins with the Lord letting us know what He truly thinks of the no-gods.

Those who will bow to YAHWEH and will confess Him are not likely to follow large hard to move idols. Unlike YAHWEH, who can be talked to from anywhere and who desires and is the initiator of a relationship with His people, these are gods who must be placed in carts in order to go out and see those who worship them. YAHWEH does not have to do that.

We will also be talking about the gods of Babylon. That city state that is currently in rebellion to the Assyrian Empire and, at present, is hardly a world power. Babylon becomes, in the Bible, a picture of the City of Man ultimately destroyed in Revelation 17 & 18.

Isaiah 46:1–2

“Bel has bowed down, Nebo stoops over; Their images are consigned to the beasts and the cattle. The things that you carry are burdensome, A load for the weary beast. They stooped over, they have bowed down together; They could not rescue the burden, But have themselves gone into captivity.” (NASB95)

Yes, the Lord knows how to use satire. Here He produces the image of heavy idols being carted away by cattle as the gods try to escape from Cyrus. This was a common thing at that time in history. When an invading army showed up, the first to head for the hills was usually the god(s) of the city in order to prevent their capture by the enemy.

If the gods were not removed and the city fell to the invaders, then the invaders would take the gods captive and cart them home to be held as a captive in the temple of their god. This was done to show that the god(s) of the invader were more powerful than the god(s) of those who had just been captured. This is the normal way things were done, at least under the Assyrian empire and the Babylonian Empire.

We see the evidence of this in Jeremiah, first when he discusses the coming invasion of Moab.

Jeremiah 48:7

“Moab, you trust in the things you do and in your riches. So you too will be conquered. Your god Chemosh will go into exile along with his priests and his officials.” (NET)

Moab would join Judah in rebellion against Babylon. It would not end well for them.

The powerlessness of the gods of the nations is a well-worked theme in the OT. Kemosh, the god of the Moabites, is referred to on the Moabite Stone as Ashtar-Kemosh. Ashtar in Canaan was the god of the morning star, so that Kemosh may have been associated with astral deities. (Thompson 1980, 704)

Another example comes from the northern Kingdom. Hosea gives us that story.

Hosea 10:5–6

“The inhabitants of Samaria will lament over the calf idol of Beth Aven. Its people will mourn over it; its idolatrous priests will wail over it, because its splendor will be taken from them into exile. Even the calf idol will be carried to Assyria, as tribute for the great king. Ephraim will be disgraced; Israel will be put to shame because of its wooden idol.” (NET)

Any Jew who is reading this knows that is what happens. The only difference is with the people of YAHWEH. When they took a city, they were to destroy the entire pagan system of that city (Numbers 33:51 – 53). That is one of the places they failed.

Cyrus was totally different in this regard. He was after the loyalty of those people he conquered, and he knew a step to achieve that loyalty would be to allow those who had been conquered by Babylon, to return home and take their gods with them. This is reflected in a press release we have from that time, the Cyrus Cylinder.

All the kings of the entire world from the Upper to the Lower Sea, those who are seated in throne rooms, (those who) live in other [types of buildings as well as] all the kings of the West land living in tents, brought their heavy tributes and kissed my feet in Babylon (Š u. a n. n a). (As to the region) from ... as far as Ashur and Susa, Agade, Eshnunna, the towns Zamban, Me-Turnu, Der as well as the region of the Gutians, I returned to (these) sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which (used) to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I (also) gathered all their (former) inhabitants and returned (to them) their habitations. Furthermore, I resettled upon the command of Marduk, the great lord, all the gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidus has brought into Babylon (Š u. a n. n aki) to the anger of the lord of the gods, unharmed, in their (former) chapels, the places which make them happy. May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities ask daily Bel and Nebo for a long life for me and may they recommend me (to him); to Marduk, my lord, they may say this: “Cyrus, the king who worships you, and Cambyses, his son, ...” ... all of them I settled in a peaceful place ... ducks and doves, ... I endeavoured to fortify/repair their dwelling places.... (Unknown, ANET 1969, 316)

In 703 BC when Sennacherib attacked Babylon, Merodach-Baladan organized just such an evacuation of the 'gods'. It is thus within his own times that Isaiah finds the components of this picture. (Motyer 1999, 331)

One should note that Marduk's idol itself was captured several times throughout the centuries. The Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244–1208 BCE) removed the idol from Babylon following his invasion. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar I (1126–1103 BCE) retrieved Marduk's idol from the Elamites, who carried it off in 1189 BCE. And Sennacherib (705–681 BCE) brought the statue to Assyria in 689 BCE. (Paul 2012, 274)

The "Verse Account of Nabonidus" provides some detail of the rescue of Bel (Marduk).

[The images of Baby]lon(ia), male and female, he returned to their cellas, [The ... who] had abandoned their [cha]pels he returned to their mansions, [Their wrath] he appeased, their mind he put at rest, [... those whose power was] at a low he brought back to life [Because] their food is served (to them) [regular]ly. (Unknown, ANET 1969, 315)

Considering this history, the satire is well deserved. Who is Bel (Marduk) and Nebo?

Bel answers to the Tyrian Baal, and to Zeus and Jupiter; and Nebo to Anubis, Hermes, or Mercurius. These are named as the two chief idol gods of Babylon. In like manner Zeus and Hermes are joined in the veneration of the men of Lystra, Acts 14:12. In the ruin of the empire these idol gods bow down, like those wounded, or decrepit with age. Their images, once raised aloft for worship, are placed on beasts of burden, and carried away in disgrace. The gods stoop, like the beasts that pant under their idols; and "their souls," an ironical phrase, the divinities themselves, are gone into captivity. (Birks 1878, 232)

Incredibly ironic, these are supposed gods, who are taken captive and wear out the animals tasked to help them flee. The supposed heads of the Babylonian pantheon were placed in carts and off they went, possibly running away from Cyrus. He did bring them back by the way.

These two verses are also reflective of the manner in which these two idols were paraded around Babylon annually. "Cyrus, who captured Babylon in 539 BCE, reinstated Marduk as the head of the Babylonian pantheon, thus restoring Marduk's lost glory. The second deity, Nabu (or Nebo; Akk. nabû), serves as the theophoric element in the names of three Neo-Babylonian kings: Nabopolassar, his son Nebuchadnezzar, and finally, the last king, Nabonidus; cf. also the names of two of Nebuchadnezzar's ministers (2 Kgs 25:8; Jer 39:9), Nebuzaradan and Nebushazban (Jer 39:13). Nabu, whose cultic center was in the city Borsippa (a few kilometers south of Babylon), was the patron god of writing and during this period was worshiped as Marduk's son. During the Akitu (the Babylonian New Year) ceremonies, which were celebrated between the second and eleventh of Nisan, Marduk and Nabu were paraded around as part of the festivities." (Paul 2012, 275)

Nabonidus had actually dethroned Bel (Marduk) and Nebo and became a devout follower of the god Sin. "Sin is the name of the Babylonian moongod, attested as theophoric element in Assyrian and Babylonian personal names." (Stol 1999, 782)

This was one of the reasons why there was cooperation within Babylon to allow Cyrus to take the city.

Ultimately though, "They have stooped and crouched together, i.e. have crumbled to pieces entirely, in that they are either completely destroyed, or the two have fallen side by side. The verbs appear asyndetically, and this lends vividness to the expressions." (Young 1972, 221)

If the great gods cannot protect themselves from destruction, neither can all the minor ones either. They all go off into captivity ultimately. (Psalm 82, Revelation 20:1 – 3)

God then turns to His people with a command – listen. This is a serious contrast to the gods in carts unable to speak.

Isaiah 46:3–4

“Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, And all the remnant of the house of Israel, You who have been borne by Me from birth And have been carried from the womb; Even to your old age I will be the same, And even to your graying years I will bear you! I have done it, and I will carry you; And I will bear you and I will deliver you.” (NASB95)

And there it is, bang. God has been talking about gods who must be carried around and He points out that it is He who has been carrying around and supporting His people, not the other way around. Remember, Hezekiah is King, and Judah is still a nation, but here are two terms, house of Jacob and remnant of the house of Israel pointing to all of the Jews who remain.

What remnant are we talking about here? The one who will witness the festivals in Babylon and physically see Bel and Nebo in carts falling over as they are paraded around, or is this a different remnant further in the future?

He is talking first of all to those who will be rescued by Cyrus. Yes, even though there is disagreement in Judah about using a Gentile, when the time comes, God will still carry through with His plan and rescue the remnant that remains faithful to Him. He is the one who has carried them, and the good news is His grace does not change.

There will never be a time when God’s people outgrow their need to rely completely upon Him for everything.

Psalms 28:6–9 “Blessed be the LORD! For he has heard the sound of my supplications. The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I received help. My heart rejoices, and I give thanks to him with my song. The LORD is the strength of his people; he is a refuge of deliverance for his anointed. Deliver your people and bless your inheritance! Shepherd them and lift them up forever!” (ISV)

God repeats his promise: “I [myself] have made you and I [myself] will carry you” to make it 200 percent sure. Although at this point there should be no doubt about God’s determined will, for the third and final time God shouts his promises, “I [myself] will sustain you and I [myself] will rescue you.” The audience should be absolutely assured that his care will never end and that it will always be available. (Smith 2009, 289)

The contrast is now clear. God is the Creator, and He is the one who cares for His people. Anything or anyone else is false and subject to failure.

God speaks to the nation as though it is an individual growing old and whose hair is turning gray. He promises here that he will support them forever. The Hebrew word rendered gray hairs can also mean “old age.” ...There is a wordplay here since the Hebrew word for gray hairs is sebah and the word for “captivity” in verse 2 is shebi. Yahweh is hinting that he will support his people even while they are in exile. (Ogden and Sterk 2011, 1282)

Isaiah 46:5–7

“To whom would you liken Me And make Me equal and compare Me, That we would be alike? Those who lavish gold from the purse And weigh silver on the scale Hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; They bow down, indeed they worship it. They lift it upon the shoulder and carry it; They set it in its place and it stands there. It does not move from its place. Though one may cry to it, it cannot answer; It cannot deliver him from his distress.” (NASB95)

Once again YAHWEH makes fun of the no-gods as well as those who manufacture them. He is God, they are created fallen beings who have lost even the access to God that they used to have. Worse yet, they insist on being represented by wood or gold statues.

This panders to and feeds the desire of unregenerate man to have an object to worship. Rather than the God of the universe, a substitute is chosen. To connect the demon or fallen angel to the inanimate object, they even had rituals to do this. For example, “the Egyptian Mouth-Opening Ritual. This ritual, literally entitled the Opening of the Mouth and Eyes, was used in various permutations from the Old Kingdom down into the Roman period. Although it was commonly used in funerary contexts to revive the dead, one of its purposes—perhaps its original purpose—was to animate cult statues of gods and kings so that they could breathe, see, and receive food and drink. During the rite, special tools were applied to the mouth and eyes of the image. The most important tool was a ritual knife (the psš-kf), which appears to have been the same instrument used in Egypt to cut the umbilical cords of newborn babies. This suggests that the fashioning of the cult statue may have been understood as a kind of birth or rebirth (Roth), but not all would agree with this assessment (Lorton).” (Sparks 2005, 148)

Our difficulty when reading texts such as the one we are examining from the Bible is the filter of our 21st century rationalistic mind. Someone living in 700 BC has a completely different world view.

We see these as pieces of art and tend to wonder why someone would worship a statue. We have already covered the fun that YAHWEH has with that idea (Isaiah 44:9 – 20).

These are not simply art pieces being made on an assembly line somewhere in the Middle-East. This is all driven by very real visions and visits from very real evil entities intent on deception. Sorcery, which included the use of substances to help the worshipper obtain an altered state of consciousness, was intended to enable the revealing of the fallen entity, who is impersonating a god, to the builder. All on the terms of the builder.

The making of the divine image took place on two levels at the same time: on the one hand, on the pragmatic level of the human craftsmen, and on the other hand, on the theological-transcendental level; both were networked. The pictures were made by the gods of the craftsmen, which were active through the terrestrial craftsmen who “lent their hands” to their gods. Thus, the human artisans were only the hands of the divine artisan-divinities. The “real” creative act happened in heaven.

The production of a cult statue was a ritual action and a supernatural creation procedure. This supernatural origin of the divine statue (which was also claimed for divine symbols) was the point of departure for the mouth-washing and mouth-opening ritual which had to be performed after the completed manufacturing of the statue. This ritual, which can be interpreted as a sequence of several transition rites (rites de passage), consisted of several mouth washings and mouth openings which were repeatedly performed until the statue was completely rid of all traces of the human artisans.

The mouth washings had to make the statue perfectly pure to enable contact between deity and earthly statue. The mouth opening had the task to fill the pure statue with positive powers, senses (e.g. to smell) and life. (Berlejung 2009, 9)

This is nothing less than demon possession. When Paul warned the Corinthians about fellowshiping with demons, he was serious, and he was having a discussion with folks who were fully conversant with that world. This was very real to them.

1 Corinthians 10:19–21

“What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.” (ESV)

For us living in the 21st century, this can become much more complex as evil hiding in plain sight is common. Horoscopes are an easy place to start, but we soon forget that most of our entertainments these days are driven by entities who want to mislead us. But we have the tools provided to help us discern.

The tools that have been provided to us by our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who has already achieved the victory on our behalf, is His Holy Spirit living within us and empowering us and His Word.

Paul calls these items armor. Those of us who have worn body armor know that to put it on is a deliberate action. We know we are engaging the enemy and we want protection from whatever it is the enemy may throw our way. You never went out without your primary means of defense and offense, your rifle. I not only carried a rifle, but a handgun and a few other toys as well. Do we treat our walk day to day with Christ as we take on the world with the same thought in mind?

Ephesians 6:11–20

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.” (ESV)

Jesus achieved amazing things for us on the cross.

Consequently, part of the good news of the gospel to those under the gods’ dominion was that they were free to turn from those gods and embrace Jesus. In fact, God was demanding their return to his family. The breach caused by the Babel rebellion had been closed; the gap between them and the true God had been bridged.

That the authority of the rulers and authorities was nullified by the Most High does not mean that the supernatural forces of darkness allotted to the nations surrender their charges.

Paul knew his Old Testament, specifically that the final judgment of the gods was eschatologically connected to the day of the Lord. Nevertheless their demise is in process. (Heiser 2020, 230)

The enemy is very real and very active in these last days. Two things we need to remember: Our foe is formidable. But we do not cower in fear of him. *“...so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.” (2 Corinthians 2:11, ESV)*

We engage in this battle from the position of victory, Jesus has already won. *“Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” 1 John 4:4 ESV*

Creepy demonic manifestations are rare and bizarre, and most of us don’t ever encounter those phenomena. When we read these passages about Satan’s activity, however, it’s clear that the issues are usually things like unwillingness to forgive, bitterness, anger, deceived minds, and any other attitude that can break a marriage, split a church, cause depression, turn people inward, and destroy our bodies with ulcers and anxieties. Those are not rare manifestations. They are the kinds of things we encounter every day. That makes our knowledge of the invisible war a necessary and practical understanding for getting through normal life situations. Paul made it clear that evil spirits have specific schemes and that we need to be intelligent and informed about them. (Ingram 2006, 49)

It is those evil spirits who are behind the idols of Babylon, Egypt, Assyria, Greece, Rome, etc. It is those same evil spirits who are behind governments, business, entertainment and science today. The world's system. A system asserting itself within the next generation with a vengeance.

The younger pair of generations is substantially more likely than their elders to believe the following:

- Horoscopes provide useful guidance for their life
- Getting even with those who offend or harm them is defensible
- God is not involved in people's lives
- Allowing people to own property facilitates economic injustice
- Karma is a viable life principle
- The Bible is ambiguous in what it teaches about abortion
- Human beings have developed over a long period of time from less advanced life forms to our current condition
- The Bible is not the accurate and reliable (i.e., inerrant) word of God (Barna 2021)

Isaiah 46:8–11

“Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors. Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’; Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.” (NASB95)

Another command to “remember.” It appears that the folks in Judah, just like us, tended to allow the worries of day-to-day life to cloud judgement and memories. We forget true reality in favor of pop culture solutions and so did they. Spoilers: pop culture has been and always is on the highway to Hell and the speed limit has just been lifted.

We have reading about idols and discussing how they were being made per direction from fallen entities and demons.

Unlike Judah who knew and realized the supernatural was a part of reality. We discount the existence of the supernatural, so much so that we begin to entertain ideas thrown at us by the world such as UFOs and aliens. Israel embraced idols, but the same spirits that were behind them continue to operate today.

Welcome to the next Great Deception.

Jesus warned us that the days just prior to His return would be days filled with unprecedented deception (Matthew 24:4) from the enemy. Remember, Satan is a liar (John 8:44), it is his nature to deceive.

Based on what Paul told Timothy, the last days would be filled with folks paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Timothy 4:1–3). We tend to think of religion only when we read that, but there is a much darker web of deception being drawn.

There are some secular researchers who have examined a very specific issue in our world and have come to the same basic conclusion that it is spiritual in origin and involves deception.

Our skies are filled with Trojan horses and always have been. They are operating on a mysterious timetable, deliberately sowing confusion and nonsense in their wake. The believers and cultists have been crying for us to throw open the gates of the city and wheel the Trojan horse in. But the governments of the world, and the churches, have been trying to nail the gates shut...The Bible warns us that during “the last days” this planet will be overrun with wonders in the sky and false prophets and performers of miracles. (Keel 2013, 332-333)

Who is it that currently rules the power of the air?

Ephesians 2:1–2 “You used to be dead because of your offenses and sins, that you once practiced as you lived according to the ways of this present world and according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now active in those who are disobedient.” (ISV)

The lie is out there and now even our government is talking about it openly. The idols are no longer heavy and covered with gold, the spirits behind them have moved with the times; now they flit around in the air from place to place breaking the laws of physics.

Keel informed me that he did not consider himself a "ufologist," but a "demonologist." "In his opinion Ufology is just another name for demonology," He stated, "I do not feel the aliens are from other planets, but I believe we are dealing with the Devil, fallen angels and his demons. These evil spirits have been with us as long as recorded history and use deception, trickery, stunts, to make us think they are alien. (Major George Filer 2009)

The thousands of contacts with the entities indicate that they are liars and put-on artists. The UFO manifestations seem to be, by and large, merely minor variations of the age-old demonological phenomenon. (Keel 2013, 326)

A major calling card of the beast and the false prophet is the ability to counterfeit miracles (Revelation 12: 13–15).

Back to Ephesians 2:2 and why our idols are changing. We know that when he fell, Lucifer was removed from the third heaven and cast down to earth (Ezekiel 28:16 – 18).

If, therefore, according to the consistent doctrine of Scripture, the evil spirits must be somewhere, but not in the heaven of the redeemed, and if in this present age they cannot be restricted to hell, is it so strange that Eph. 2:2 speaks about “the prince of the domain of the air”? Is it not rather natural that the prince of evil is able, as far as God in his overruling providence permits, to carry on his sinister work by sending his legions to our globe and its surrounding atmosphere? (Hendriksen and Kistemaker 1953 - 2001, 113)

Is our culture ripe for this deception?

Rather than developing an internally consistent and philosophically coherent perspective on life, Americans embrace points of view or actions that feel comfortable or seem most convenient. Those beliefs and behaviors are often inconsistent, or even contradictory, but few Americans seemed troubled by those failings.

One of the shocking outcomes from the research is that the biblical worldview, at a 6% nationwide incidence, was the most prolific of the seven worldviews tested.

However, with 94% of Americans essentially rejecting the biblical worldview as their preferred way to think and live, placing first in a race in which few people crossed the finish line is hardly a victory. (Barna, American Worldview Inventory 2021, Release #02: Introducing America’s Most Popular Worldview - Moralistic Therapeutic Deism 2021)

So, do I believe in aliens? Not hardly. But I do believe in fallen angels and demons who are actively impersonating them. Welcome to “The Lie.” Or one possible permutation of it.

2 Thessalonians 2:8–12

“And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are

perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (ESV)

Satan is a liar. It is his nature to lie and deceive. He cannot tell the future, God can.

Isaiah 46:10

“Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’;” (NASB95)

God knows the end from the beginning because He is much more than a passive observer of events. His counsel shall stand. His works and plans never fail, because He will do all His pleasure. God isn't just watching the entire parade of history, He is directing the parade. (Guzik 2000, Is 46:8-10)

Nothing catches God by surprise. There is no plan B. Cyrus is the guy.

Isaiah 46:11

“Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.” (NASB95)

The one who God is calling to achieve His purposes on behalf of His people is one who actively hunts down his prey and dispatches them quickly. This is not a ruler feeding on the carcasses of dead empires, but rather one who is actively seeking out smaller prey. This is Cyrus.

But, as we have already seen in chapter 45, there are those who are not in favor of God choosing to use a pagan non-Jewish Gentile to be the Savior of His people.

Israel is both unrealistic and idolatrous in rejecting YHWH's choice of Cyrus to conquer Palestine and rebuild Jerusalem. Idolaters can manipulate their idols to do and symbolize their own will. When Israel insists that YHWH shape the future to fit her beliefs, she is behaving like an idolater. (Watts 2005, 712)

As God says here, "...I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it." "This is a divinely commissioned conqueror whose coming the Lord has foreseen and determined, guarantying his success at the same time." (Leupold 1971, 142)

Isaiah 46:12–13

“Listen to Me, you stubborn-minded, Who are far from righteousness. I bring near My righteousness, it is not far off; And My salvation will not delay. And I will grant salvation in Zion, And My glory for Israel.” (NASB95)

The conversation with those who were arguing with God continues. These are His people, but they sure do not act like it nor are they trusting Him as they should. The accusations against Is people will continue, climaxing in chapter 48.

Again, the command to listen more specifically, to listen to YAHWEH His audience, He tells them what they truly are.

אֲבִירִי (abbire) which comes from two root words. The first means “strong, mighty, used of men commonly as a subst. as, a mighty one, the strong of heart. Poetically used, of a bull; the strong ones, i.e. bulls, of Bashan; powerful, noble, obstinate, stubborn, a man of perverse mind.” (Gesenius and Tregelles 2003, 6)

The second word - heart, seat of vitality, inner self, seat of feelings & impulses, mind, character, disposition, inclination, loyalty, concern, determination, courage, (high) morale, mind, attention, consideration, understanding. (Holladay and Köhler 2000, 171-172)

The meaning here is simple; the Lord is addressing those of His people who are bull headed, obstinate and perversely minded, and stubbornly inclined to be that way too. Totally intractable and set in their ways as He follows up by telling them they are far from righteousness. Not something that anyone who believes they have an in with God because they are part of His chosen people, wants to hear.

Jesus addressed a similar group one afternoon in the Temple. For a week He had been working in the Temple, lives were being changed and miracles were becoming the norm. But there was a group that did not see things that way, they had power, they had religion, and they were JEWS.

Jesus had dealt with their games and so-called traps all week long so by the time He delivers His scathing indictment, He had already been subjected to days and days of religious idiocy. We pick up the rather one-sided discussion halfway through it.

Matthew 23:27–36

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.” (ESV)

It is clear, that in the interim between 700 BC and 33 AD, religion continued to be a problem. Not relationship, religion.

The only people Jesus spoke badly of, and consistently so, were those who thought they had it wired because they were the religious intelligentsia of Israel. The same folks who were disagreeing with the selection of a non-Jewish pagan to deliver His people from Babylon.

These people are still here today. We chatted a bit about them earlier in our study.

They are far from righteousness, from conformity to the will, character and purposes of the Lord, and he will implement his righteousness, all that accords with his will, character and purposes, everything that is ‘right with God’. This is the choice: will they hold to their own sense of what is ‘right’ or bow to his? (J. A. Motyer 1996, 370)

But the grace of God once again steps in, even with those who are bull headed, as He says “I bring near My righteousness.” Whether His people agree or not, God is moving, and His grace will dictate His actions.

His statement is no less than this, that the glory of the Creator of the ends of the Earth, the visible form of the invisible God, will be made manifest precisely through Israel’s resistance to God’s will, and through her rejection of God’s plan, even as it was then working out in contemporary events and in the coming of Cyrus. (Knight 1984, 105)

The shift in the language is suddenly to the future. The future which begins when Emmanuel, the Messiah, the one who has been promised already in Isaiah arrives on the scene bringing with Him salvation in Zion which has already been promised earlier in Isaiah.

Wrapped up in this statement in verse 13 is the first and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The righteousness of God came near yet was rejected the first time by His own people, those who were way too much like the group who questioned YAHWEH why He would ever use a Gentile for deliverance.

But His salvation will not delay, grace for His own people is still paramount as salvation is indeed coming to Zion.

God's glory, as we see in Ezekiel 43 when He enters the Temple never to leave so He can physically dwell with His people, both Jew and Gentile, is indeed coming for Israel and for the whole planet.

Those of us who know Jesus as our savior and Lord will be there to see that, and you can be there too.

Romans 10:8–10

"But what does it say? "The message is near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart." This is the message about faith that we are proclaiming: If you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with his heart and is justified, and declares with his mouth and is saved." (ISV)

His salvation is indeed near and available to all who accept it.

Salvation is a Gift:

- **Admit** you are a sinner.
- **Believe** in your heart that Jesus died for your sins, was buried and He rose from the dead three days later.
- **Call** on the name of the Lord.

Works Cited

- Barna, George. 2021. "American Worldview Inventory 2021 Release #3: The Seismic Generational Shift in Worldview." *Arizona Christian University*. May 12. Accessed June 9, 2021. https://www.arizonachristian.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/CRC_AWVI2021_Release03_Digital_01_20210512.pdf.
- . 2021. "American Worldview Inventory 2021, Release #02: Introducing America's Most Popular Worldview - Moralistic Therapeutic Deism." *Arizona Christian University*. April 27. Accessed June 9, 2021. https://www.arizonachristian.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/CRC_AWVI2021_Release02_Digital_01_20210427.pdf.
- Berlejung, Angelika. 2009. "Twisting Traditions: Programmatic Absence-Theology for the Northern Kingdom in 1 Kgs 12:26--33 (The 'Sin of Jeroboam')." *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* (Department of Ancient Studies, University of Stellenbosch) 35 (1 & 2).
- Birks, T. R. 1878. *Commentary on the Book of Isaiah: Critical, Historical, and Prophetical*. Second Edition Revised. London: Macmillan & Co.
- Gesenius, Wilhelm, and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles. 2003. *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.
- Guzik, David. 2000. *Isaiah, David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible*. Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik.
- Heiser, Michael S. 2020. *Demons: What the Bible Really Says about the Powers of Darkness*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

- Hendriksen, William, and Simon J. Kistemaker. 1953 - 2001. *Exposition of Ephesians, New Testament Commentary*. Vol. 7. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.
- Holladay, Wiliam Lee, and Ludwig Köhler. 2000. *A Concise Hebrew and Aramiac Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Leiden: Brill.
- Ingram, Chip. 2006. *The Invisible War: What Every Believer Needs to Know about Satan, Demons, and Spiritual Warfare*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Keel, John. 2013. *Operation Trojan Horse: The Classic Breakthrough Study of UFOs*. Kindle Edition. San Antonio, TX: Anomalist Books.
- Knight, George Angus Fulton. 1984. *Servant Theology: A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 40-55, International Theological Commentary*. Revised and update new edition. Edinburgh: Handsel Press.
- Leupold, H. C. 1971. *Exposition of Isaiah*. Vol. 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.
- Major George Filer. 2009. "Weekly Filers Files." *National UFO Center*. July 8. Accessed June 9, 2021. http://nationalufocenter.com/artman/publish/article_287.php.
- Motyer, J A. 1996. *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Motyer, J. Alec. 1999. *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary, Tyndale Old Testament Coomentaries*. Vol. 20. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Ogden, Graham, and Jan Sterk. 2011. *A Handbook on Isaiah, United Bible Societies' Handbooks*. Edited by Paul Clarke, Schuyler Brown, Louis Dorn and Donald Slager. Vol. ! & 2. Reading: United Bible Societies.
- Paul, Shalom M. 2012. *Isaiah 40-66: Translation and Commentary, Eerdmans Critical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Smith, Gary. 2009. *Isaiah 40-66, The New American Commentary*. Vol. 15B. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- Sparks, Kenton L. 2005. *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.
- Stol, M. 1999. "Sin." In *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, edited by Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking and Pieter W. van der Horst. Leiden: Brill.
- Thompson, J. A. 1980. *The Book of Jeremiah, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Unknown. 1969. "Cyrus Cylinder." In *The Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, edited by James Bennett Pritchard. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Unknown. 1969. "The Verse Account of Nabonidus." In *The Ancient Near Eastern Tests Relating to the Old Testament*, edited by James Bennett Pritchard. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Watts, John D. W. 2005. *Isaiah 34-66, Word Biblical Commentary*. Revised Edition. Vol. 25. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.
- Young, Edward. 1972. *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.