



ISAIAH 46

THE OVERTHROW OF BABYLON

Having led up to God’s final triumph in chapter 45 we are suddenly faced with the opposite side of the picture. Yahweh is on the road to His triumph, but in contrast the greatest of the gods, the gods of Babylon, are in total disarray, being taken away on carts, or on the backs of asses, to disgrace. They are on the road to humiliation. Their makers are confounded (Isaiah 45:16). This is the way it must be when Yahweh triumphs. It is a necessary part of the picture. Babel’s growth right from the beginning meant that the world had turned away from God and set itself up in opposition to Him (Genesis 10:9-12; Genesis 11:1-9 : Isaiah 13-14). So God’s triumph (Isaiah 45:22-25) must result in Babylon’s disintegration, and the humiliation of their gods. This is the reversal of Genesis 11.

Isaiah here brings out the strong contrast between Babel’s gods and Israel’s God, and is preparing the way for the rise of God’s Servant and its consequences. Babel’s gods are probably to be seen as representative of all the idols that he has been deriding, the ones about whom the greatest boasts have been made. All men revered the gods of Babylon. And it is these very gods which will be humiliated and shamed.

English Standard (ESV)	Passion Notes	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p>Isaiah 46:1 Bel bows down; Nebo stoops; their idols are on beasts and livestock; these things you carry are borne as burdens on weary beasts. ² They stoop; they bow down together; they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity.</p> <p>³ “Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; ⁴ even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.</p>	<p>a 46:1 Bel means “lord,” a title that was associated with the god Enlil, known in Babylon as the chief of the gods. The Greeks called him Zeus and the Romans, Jupiter. Eventually, the title Bel was transferred to Marduk. See Jer. 50:2.</p> <p>b 46:1 Or Nabu or Celestial Scribe, known as the god of intellectualism (literacy, wisdom). The Greeks called him Hermes; the Romans, Mercury; the Egyptians, Anubis.</p> <p>c 46:1 Or “Their idols are beasts and cattle.”</p> <p>d 46:2 Or “their souls.”</p> <p>e 46:2 These false gods and their idols are like captives carried off by their conquerors.</p> <p>f 46:3 See Ex. 19:4; Deut. 1:31; 32:11; Ps. 28:9.</p>	<p>The Overthrow of Babylon</p> <p>Isaiah 46:1 The gods of Babylon, Bel, a and Nebo b are bowed down and lowered to the ground. They haul away on ox carts their wobbling idols. c ² They both stoop and bow down, and they are powerless to rescue their own images. There they d go—carried off into captivity! e</p> <p>³ “Listen to me, O Jacob’s tribes, all the remnant of Israel. You never had to carry me, but I have carried you from birth. I supported you from the moment you left the womb. f ⁴ Even as you grow old and your hair turns gray, I’ll keep carrying you! I am your Maker and your Caregiver. I will carry you and be your Savior.</p>

English Standard (ESV)	Passion Translation (TPT)	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p>⁵ To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike? ⁶ Those who lavish gold from the purse, and weigh out silver in the scales, hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! ⁷ They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble.</p> <p>⁸ “Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, ⁹ remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ ¹¹ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.</p> <p>¹² “Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness: ¹³ I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.”</p>	<p>g 46:6 Or “those who pour out gold from their purses.</p> <p>h 46:11 See Isa. 41:2–3; 44:28–45:1.</p>	<p>⁵ To whom can you compare me, the incomparable God? Have you found someone else like me? ⁶ The wealthy pour out their gold, g weigh out their silver in the scales, and hire a goldsmith who crafts it into a “god.” Then they bow down before it to worship it. ⁷ They lift it up to their shoulders and have to carry it. They set it on a stand, and there it sits, unable to move from its place. When someone cries out to it, it never answers nor saves anyone from trouble.</p> <p>⁸ Keep this in mind and don’t forget it! Take this to heart, you rebels! ⁹ Remember the miracles of long ago. Acknowledge that I am God, and there is no other. I am God, and there is none like me. ¹⁰ I declare from the beginning how it will end and foretell from the start what has not yet happened. I decree that my purpose will stand, and I will fulfill my every plan. ¹¹ “I called that bird of prey h Cyrus, swooping in from the east; from a distant land he came, the man of my purpose. I have spoken, and yes, I will bring it to pass. I have formed my plan, and yes, I will do it.</p> <p>¹² “Listen to me, you stubborn ones who are far from righteousness. ¹³ I am bringing my righteousness closer to you; it is not far off. My deliverance will not be delayed, for I will set my salvation in Zion for Israel my glory!</p>

Bible Knowledge Commentary

JOHN A. MARTIN

- The Lord’s superiority over Babylon’s gods (chap. 46)

- **46:1-2.** The Babylonian gods would not be able to save Babylon from being conquered. Bel, not to be confused with the Canaanite Baal, was another name for Marduk (cf. Jer. 50:2), god of the sun. Nebo, son of Marduk, was the god of learning, writing, and astronomy. Large images of those gods, carried about on Babylon’s New Year’s Day festival, were [Vol. 1, p. 1101] heavy and burdensome. So those idols could not help relieve the Babylonians’ burden. In striking contrast, the God of Israel sustains and carries His people (Isa. 46:3-4).
- **46:3-4.** God’s admonition to His people to listen to Him is frequent in Isaiah’s prophecies (44:1; 46:3, 12; 47:8; 48:1, 12, 14, 16; 51:4; 52:8; 55:2). Besides caring for and carrying His people (see comments on 46:1-2), God also sustains them throughout their lives. From the time of conception (v. 3) to old age (v. 4) the Lord watches over His own and rescues them from trouble.
- **46:5-7.** Gods of gold and silver (cf. 40:19) cannot be compared (cf. 40:18, 25) to the true God because such gods are incapable of action. Pagans hired craftsmen to make heavy gods out of precious metals and then had to carry them to their resting places, from which they could not move. This is one of several times Isaiah belittled idols (cf. 40:18-20; 41:7; 44:9-20; 45:16, 20; 46:1-2). Unlike the false gods, the true God can answer peoples’ prayers and save them.

- **46:8-11.** The rebels, people of Babylon (cf. v. 12), were to remember that God is the only God; He is unique (v. 9; cf. 43:11; 44:6; 45:5-6, 14, 18, 21-22). Proofs of God's uniqueness include His knowledge and control of the future (cf. 45:21) and His ability to bring Cyrus from the east (cf. 41:2) like a quick bird of prey to accomplish His plans.
- **46:12-13.** The stubborn-hearted and those far from righteousness were the Babylonians (cf. rebels, v. 8), who would be defeated by the Persian Empire. God would bring against the unrighteous Babylonians His righteousness, that is, Cyrus, who would carry out God's righteous will. This would result in salvation for Zion, deliverance from exile for Jerusalem, which would mean Israel would again display God's splendor or glory (cf. 44:23).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When God begins to move out in victory, all his adversaries must yield to him. This is NOT a fair fight. We often think that God fights like we fight, but for him it is a much different story. Let's say Yahweh is about to free his people from Babylonian captivity. He uses Cyrus to bring their deliverance. Does the Lord have a battle strategy? If yes, what is it? If no, why not?
2. Yahweh says in verse 3, "Listen to me, O Jacob's tribes, all the remnant of Israel. You never had to carry me, but I have carried you from birth. I supported you from the moment you left the womb." What is God referring to when he uses the word "carry?" How does he carry us? Why can't we carry him?
3. Have you ever compared Jesus to another God? Think about the mental wrestling most of us go through when we are considering giving our hearts to the Lord right before we believe in Jesus and give our lives to him. What is it that we are comparing the gift of salvation to that forces us to choose? What is it that we put on the other side of the scale that we are wrestling with?
4. In the Passion version of verse 8 the Lord says, "Keep this in mind and don't forget it! Take this to heart, you rebels! Remember the miracles of long ago. Acknowledge that I am God, and there is no other. I am God, and there is none like me. I declare from the beginning how it will end and foretell from the start what has not yet happened. I decree that my purpose will stand, and I will fulfill my every plan." What does it mean to "acknowledge" that he is God? Be specific. What is God asking for?
5. God wants all of your heart. How can you know that you've given your heart to him? What evidence shows that he has all of your heart?

