

ISAIAH – LESSON SIXTEEN

ISAIAH 42-48

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Jehovah's Servant and Israel's Punishment

Vv. 1-9 – Jehovah's Ideal Servant

The servant of which Isaiah spoke in 41:8 was Israel. The servant of whom he now speaks is a person. Isaiah's description of the servant included two major aspects. First, he described the servant's ministry and the servant's faithful execution of it. Second, he described the servant's Lord, who would empower him for that ministry.

a) Description of the Servants (vv. 1-4)

The servant's ministry was marked by the presence of God by whom he was upheld and who delighted in him. The Spirit of God whom God will place upon him will enable the servant. His ministry will include bringing justice to the Gentiles (1).

Second, the servant's ministry will be characterized by startling contrast (3). The contrast lay between the servant's quiet demeanor and his significant accomplishments. He did not announce his coming with loud pomp and was so gentle that he would not even crush a bruised reed or extinguish the smoldering wick of an oil lamp. Nonetheless, he would bring forth justice with perfect faithfulness. "Justice" here does not refer to our primary use – redressing crime. It designates a society that functions according to God's design (see discussion of societal rejuvenation, 32:1-8) (2-3).

Third, the servant's ministry was marked by relentless determination (4). He would stay the course¹ until he established justice upon the earth. Even the coastlands (see comments on 41:1) would place their hope in his instructions (law), a reference to the extent of his leadership.

b) The Servant's Lord (vv. 5-9)

God is speaking. The creator God who made the earth, all that is in it and all that comes from it, the One who gives breath to the people whom he created and gives the spirit to walk upon the earth created for them, fully endorses his servant (5). Moreover, that God pledges to support his servant. His ministry shall be in righteousness, God will hold his hand and keep him, and he shall be a covenant to the people and a light to the Gentiles (6).² The covenant and the light would bring special blessings – the blind would see and captives released from prison (7). By now we have learned that this language describes the spiritual blessings that will come with the Messiah.

Who had planned his servant's special ministry? It was the Lord himself (8). His very name, *Yahweh*, emphasized his presence with his people. Jehovah would not share his glory with another. He and only he had proclaimed the events that now had happened, and he continued to announce the new things that he would do (9).

Vv. 10-17 – A New Song of Praise to Jehovah

The remaining themes of ch. 42 are triumph, judgment, and indictment. God had triumphed and deserved his people's praise (10-13). Yet God had judgment left to

1. Isaiah writes, "he will not fail." All of this language clearly speaks to the coming of the Messiah and his public ministry recorded in the New Testament. Premillennialists assert that Jesus came to establish a kingdom, but failed because the Jews rejected him and he could not accomplish what he was sent to do. God, speaking through Isaiah, says that he would not fail. Which will you believe?

2. The latter two phrases are parallel. The servant will mediate God's special covenant relationship with his own; he will shine the light of God's truth on peoples who had not yet experienced it.

administer to those who persisted in idolatry (14-17). Finally, God chastised his wayward servant, describing the sin that had led to the exile (18-25). The first two themes are covered in these verses.

The good news of 42:1-9 led to Isaiah's command to "sing unto the Lord a new song (42:10). The inclusion of "the end of the earth" as well as "coastlands" (those that go down to the sea, the isles, and the inhabitants thereof) once more emphasizes the intended extent of God's kingdom and that more than Judah's return is included (10). All of these should praise God, including the villages that Kedar inhabits.³ They are all to unite to give glory to Jehovah and declaring his praise (11-12).

One of the reasons that they should give him glory is that God will go forth as a warrior and his triumph over his enemies was certain (13). He has held his peace for a long time and refrained himself, but now he will cry out like a woman in labor (14). He will make waste, destroy, and dehydrate the land of his enemies (15). But those who trusted in him he would lead and never leave (16). Those who persisted in idolatry would experience shame and devastation. Their molten images cannot help them and those who bow before them are an abomination (17).

3. Kedar is a confederation of Arab tribes based in the north Arabian desert. In Gen. 25:13 and 1 Chron. 1:29 Kedar is one of the twelve sons of Ishmael. The Kedarites were a major force from the late eighth century b.c. until the rise of the Nabateans in the fourth century b.c. and are frequently mentioned in Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian sources. They raided lands on their eastern and western borders and controlled the eastern trade route from Arabia to the Fertile Crescent. The later extent of their influence is illustrated by a silver bowl dated to the fifth century b.c. from modern Tell el-Maskhuta in the eastern Nile delta dedicated to the goddess Han-llat by 'Qaynu the son of Gashmu the king of Kedar'; this Gashmu is the same as 'Geshem the Arab' of Neh. 2:19 and 6:1.

In the Bible the military might of the Kedarites is indicated by reference to their archers and warriors (Isa. 21:16-17). Thus, although they dwelt in the eastern desert in dark tents (Isa. 42:11; Jer. 2:10; 49:28; Ps. 120:5; Song of Sol. 1:5) and were herders (Isa. 60:7; Jer. 49:29), their 'princes' traded with Tyre, which lay on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea far to the north and east (Ezek. 27:21). Their being singled out in Isaiah and Jeremiah as objects of oracles shows their importance and corresponds to what is known of them from nonbiblical sources.

Vv. 18-25 – Israel, Jehovah’s Blind and Deaf Servant, to be Punished

Isaiah’s words against God’s servant (18-20) appear startling in light of the glowing description earlier (42:1-4). How could the servant in whom God delighted now be described as blind and deaf to the things of God (18-19)? How could the servant see but pay no attention, have open ears but hear nothing (20)?⁴ The answer is found in Isaiah’s fluid use of the term “servant.” In Isaiah 41:8 and here Israel is called God’s servant. In 42:1-9 the servant is an individual. Note that the servant in whom God delights comes in between God’s promise to his servant Israel that God and his power will be with them to provide strength to do his will (41:8-14) and this passage in which his servant Israel continues in disobedience and rebellion, while rejecting God’s ideal servant who will come one day and bring justice to all the earth (42:1-9). By refusing God’s law they have made themselves the object of plunder and captivity with no one to defend or deliver them (2-22).

Israel had not become plunder of its own accord or by a fluke of history. The Lord had brought judgment upon them for their sin, but they still did not realize it. Not one considered that God had brought their suffering in order to turn them back to him.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

“Ye Are My Witnesses. . . . Besides Me There Is No Savior

Vv. 1-7 – A Renewed Promise to Israel of Deliverance and Protection

A Message of restoration seems unexpected following the strong language of 42:18-25. Isaiah not only follows with language of restoration; he connects it to the prior language with the introductory “but now.” The sudden change to consolation is significant. God tells Israel/Jacob that it should not fear because he has redeemed it.

4. Note the close parallel with the language of 6:9.

The language emphasizes that the redemption is not the result of any act on their part but is the result of God's grace. His promise to be with them confirms that they will be redeemed in the midst of trials (1-2). If God will preserve them through fires and floods, he could and would preserve them through lesser tribulations.

For the first time in the book of Isaiah, God refers to himself as his people's Savior. It is a title that will appear again (43:11; 45:15, 21; 49:26; 60:16; 63:8). God's salvation included Judah's physical deliverance from Babylon, but also a relationship with him. The Lord's judgment on his people was over and now he would judge others (3-4). He would gather his sons and daughters from every direction and their homecoming would bring him glory (5-7).

Vv. 8-13 – A Fresh Challenge to Israel and the Nations

V. 8, blind eyes and deaf ears, parallels 42:18-19. God summoned his people to testify to nations and peoples who also assembled at his command (9). God repeats his earlier questions (41:22-23, 26). The God who could demonstrate his ability to guide history was alone the true God and Savior. Even though blind and deaf, God's people could be his witnesses. They had in their history experienced God's deliverance and could declare his power to deliver again (10).

God declared his sovereignty and his singularity. No other Savior existed and his people were to testify to that fact. No other god could rescue and save his own as Jehovah had done. Once more it is declared that the captivity and the deliverance prove that he was God because he had prophesied and predicted both (11-13).

Vv. 14-21 – Jehovah's Power to Remove Obstacles in Redeeming His People

God's redemption of his people implied judgment on Babylon that is here described. The Babylonians would flee along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in a futile attempt to escape (14). Could God really fulfill his promise? Undoubtedly! He was Jehovah, the Holy One, the Creator of Israel and its King (15).

Isaiah reminded his people of God's amazing work during the exodus from Egypt (16-17). But they were not to dwell on the past because their Lord was about to perform a new thing⁵ among them (18-21).

Vv. 22-28 – Israel's Indifference – Jehovah's Grace

In spite of God's declarations and promises, his people were not yet ready to seek God through repentance. Indeed, they were weary of God. They did not offer sacrifices to implore his favor. Their continued conduct had wearied God (22-24).

Nevertheless, the sustaining power of divine love is greater than the gravitating force of divine wrath. God has blotted out their transgressions, a phrase designed to impress upon them that God's act is in no way merited but is a sovereign act of his absolute freedom. The expression "for my own sake" declares that the act has its foundation only in God (25). Israel had been sinful from the beginning, but the remnant had to be returned for God's sake. It was essential to his purpose and plan.

God now takes them to court and calls upon them to bring forth evidence of any merit that they had to establish their justification and to receive his blessing. Their first father⁶ sinned. Their teachers (prophets, priests, and others who should have given proper instruction in the law) transgressed against God (26-27).

Nonetheless, the people are still responsible for their sins. Side by side with the false prophets and teachers were God's faithful prophets, whom the people not only refused to hear; they also killed them (Matt. 23:29-35). Eventually God will make Jacob a curse (consign him to destruction) and Israel a reviling (an object of abusive speech) (28). Although this judgment was in part fulfilled by the Babylonian captivity, the

5. In speaking of his work through the ideal Servant God had said, "New things do I declare; before they spring forth [sprout] I will tell you of them" (42:9). These things are in the distant future. The "new thing" presently in view is more immediate: "now shall it spring forth." The generation addressed will share in it.

6. Commentators have suggested that this refers to Adam, Abraham, Jacob, or even David. Jacob is perhaps the one in view. He was in the line of those who received God's promises (land, seed, and nation), and he stepped into that line by deception, not having been the first-born.

curse and reviling have continued throughout the history of Israel. Some say it was finally fully fulfilled in A.D. 70 while others say that they continue to live under the ban.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

The Folly of Idolatry

Vv. 1-5 – Israel’s Blessings in Spite of the Curse

Isaiah begins with the words, “Yet now, hear,” indicating a connection with what has preceded. What has preceded is a ban and a curse under which Jehovah has placed the nation. In spite of that, Jehovah still has a blessing for Jacob, his servant, whom he had chosen (1). Given Jehovah’s relationship with his “child,” he tells them once more not to fear (2) because the Lord will bring abundant blessings upon them, including the pouring out of his Spirit (3-5).

Vv. 6-8 – Israel’s King – The Only God

God’s sovereignty and singularity is again set forth (6) and God boldly challenges any would-be rival to speak up regarding events either past or present (7). Once more God assures his people that they need not fear which is something that they should know based on his past care and deliverance to which they (and their fathers) are witnesses (8).

Vv. 9-20 – The Shame and Folly of Idolatry

The uniqueness of God having been set forth, Isaiah now turns to the images and the image-makers, overwhelming them with his scorn and ridicule (compare Jer. 10:8-10).

They that make graven images are vanity.⁷ Those who worshipped them revealed their own ignorance and acted to their own shame (9). With that introduction Isaiah proceeds to illustrate the futility of idolatry with a detailed description that included the idol's creation and ended with the worshiper falling before the idol (12-20). The almost comical portrayal brought home the depth of the people's spiritual blindness.

Vv. 21-23 – Pardon and Praise

Israel, having been exhorted never to forget the impotency of idols (“Remember these things.”), is promised forgiveness and deliverance (21-22). Then, heaven and earth are called upon to join in rejoicing over the announcement (ver. 23).

Vv. 24-28 – Cyrus the Deliverer Is Named

Before naming the coming deliverer, Jehovah again declares his own eternal greatness on which the fulfillment of the prophecy rests. The list of the characteristics and accomplishments of God's greatness contains such matters as creation (24), frustration of the signs of liars, making diviners mad, turning wise men backwards, and making their knowledge foolish (25). He confirmed the word of his servants and messengers and predicted the inhabitation of Jerusalem and the building up of the cities of Judah (26).

V. 27 has divided commentators. Some say that it is a reference to the dividing of the Red Sea that allowed Israel to pass through on dry land, and to the crossing of the Jordan, which “rose up in one heap” (Josh. 3:16), providing dry ground on which the Israelites could cross. Others contend that it is a reference to the taking of Babylon when Cyrus diverted the flow of the Euphrates River in such a way that he was able to use the dry riverbed as a passageway under the wall into the city. A third group hold that Isaiah is speaking metaphorically of God's power to overcome all obstacles that might stand in opposition to the carrying out of his will; there are no obstacles that he cannot remove. This third rule seems to be preferable. It certainly fits into the context

7. Once again Isaiah uses the term *tohu*, which together with *bohu*, describes the primitive chaos in Gen. 1:2.

of God's declaring that which he will do to accomplish his purpose and is consistent with the list of his characteristics, accomplishments, and singularity (24-26) that were described to support his power to do that which he said he would do.

Having declared his purpose proclaimed his power to accomplish it, he identifies by name the instrument which he would use to accomplish that purpose – Cyrus will act as God's shepherd, seeing that Jerusalem and the temple are rebuilt and his clock restored to their homeland. The naming of Cyrus is more than a century before the event. Many modern theologians find such prophecy to be a stumbling block. Being unable to accept the supernatural, they redate this part of the prophecy to the time of Cyrus.⁸ The truth is that it is no more difficult for a God-inspired prophet to proclaim

8. *The Pulpit Commentary* makes a cogent statement concerning this prophecy.

"The mention of Cyrus by name, here and again in ch. 45:1, has no doubt been one of the main grounds on which has been set up the theory of two Isaiahs. It has been thought incredible, or at any rate contrary to the analogy of prophetic revelation, that so minute a matter as the name of a man should have been announced in prophecy more than a century before his birth. There is, however, the parallel case of Josiah, who, according to the author of the Books of Kings, was announced by name more than three centuries before his birth (1 Kings 13:2). And there are the extremely minute facts noted in Dan. 11 which were prophetically declared from two centuries to three centuries and a half before they happened. It is, perhaps, assuming that we know more than we really do know about the object and laws of prophetic utterance, to lay it down that there can be no minute prophecy except when the prophet is living in the midst of the events. It is certainly a very marvellous thing that Isaiah, living at the close of the eighth and the beginning of the seventh century B.C., should mention a king by name who did not ascend the throne till the middle of the sixth; but no one can suppose that God could not have made such a revelation to him if he pleased. An attempt to minimize the marvel, without postulating two Isaiahs, has been made by the supposition that "Cyrus" was not really a proper name, but an old title of the Persian (Achæmenian) kings, signifying "the sun," and that Isaiah, therefore, only meant to point out Persia as the power which would destroy Babylon, which he had already done in effect in ch. 21:2. But, in reality, there is no sufficient ground for either of the two statements (1) that Cyrus meant "the sun," and (2) that it was an old titular name of all the Persian kings. That "Cyrus" meant "the sun," rests upon the weak authorities of Plutarch and Ctesias, and has been disproved by Sir H. Rawlinson ('Cuneiform Inscriptions,' vol. ii. p. 112). That it was an old titular name of all the Persian kings is directly contrary to the evidence. Out of fourteen Achæmenian kings, two only bore the name; and they bore it as their one and only personal appellation. It was also

the future 150 years before the event and no more amazing than proclaiming the future 6 months before the event. Even assuming that Cyrus had conquered Babylon when the prophecy that related to Cyrus was made, how would Isaiah have known that Cyrus would allow the Jews to return and that Jerusalem and the temple would be rebuilt? Modern theologians would assert that Isaiah could not have known that either and resolve the problem by moving the date another 6 months. Sadly, they cannot reject the existence of the supernatural without rejecting the God of the supernatural. More sadly, the God of the supernatural will reject them. After all, is that not what he did with his own children who rejected him?

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

“Unto Me Every Knee Shall Bow”

Vv. 1-7 – Jehovah Addresses Cyrus: His Mission

“Thus saith the Lord to his anointed.”⁹ This direct address of God to a heathen king is without parallel in Scripture. Nebuchadnezzar, Pharaoh, Abimelech, were warned

borne by an Achæmænian prince who had no other name. It is as purely a proper name as Cambyses, or Xerxes, or Darius. The theory of Dean Plumptre (*Biblical Studies*, p. 195) must therefore be set aside as untenable, and we must face the fact that the great Cyrus, who reigned from b.c. 559 to b.c. 529, is mentioned in prophecies attributed to a writer whose death cannot be placed much later than B.C. 700. The name which the Greeks expressed by Κύρος and the Romans by “Cyrus,” is in the original Persian *Kurush*, in the old Babylonian *Kuras*, and in the Hebrew *Koresh*.

9. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* comments on the use of “anointed” in relation to Cyrus: “A much discussed point is the mention of Cyrus, a non-Israelite, as the Lord’s anointed (*limshîhō*, Isa 45:1). If מְשִׁיחַ is envisioned as an ideal king, godly and upright, then the designation of “anointed” causes difficulty, for Cyrus was a worshiper of Marduk and other pagan deities. Yet Cyrus was the Lord’s appointee for a definite task. The Isaiah passage suggests that מְשִׁיחַ be understood as one singled out or “chosen” (בָּחַר q.v.) for a task, characteristically one of deliverance—a deliverance of Israel from their Babylonian captors returning them to their homeland.

As for the king, that task centered on a righteous rule in the context of grace included in which was deliverance from oppression. Saul, the first king, in his first major encounter exemplified the qualities of a מְשִׁיחַ (1 Sam 11).

through dreams. Nebuchadnezzar was even promised Divine aid (Ezek. 30:24, 25). But no heathen monarch had previously been personally addressed by God, much less called “his anointed,” and spoken to *by his name* (ver. 4). Three motives are mentioned for this special favor to him: (1) that he might acknowledge Jehovah to be the true God (2-3); (2) that Israel might be benefited and advantaged by him whom God had girded to provide strength for Cyrus’ task (4-5); (3) that the attention of the whole world might be attracted, and the unity of God made manifest far and wide (6). Jehovah can accomplish his will because of his power, which includes forming light and creating darkness, bringing prosperity and creating disaster. By that power Babylon will go from light to darkness and from prosperity to disaster while Medo-Persia does the opposite (7).

Vv. 8 – Heaven’s Cooperation Invoked

Heaven and earth are called upon to join the glory of Israel’s redemption and restoration. Righteousness is to rain down and salvation is to spring up. Righteousness will grow. It is the Lord’s creation or accomplishment. Once they returned, however, although idolatry in Israel was abolished to a great degree, the results were disappointing. Israel’s failure after the return is recorded in the prophetic books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi; the historical books of Ezra and Nehemiah; and Daniel’s prophecy of events to occur between the covenants (chs. 10-12). The commands in this verse were not fully carried out until the coming of the ideal Servant.

Vv.9-13 – Jehovah’s Response to Israel’s Complaint

There would be some who were defiant and these verses pronounce woe upon them. The clay does not question the work of the potter, and newborns do not talk back to their parents (9-10). In the same manner, God’s children do not question his work or give him orders about the work of his hands. After all, it was God who made the earth and created man, stretched out the heavens and filled it with stars. In the same manner he will raise up Cyrus who will accomplish God’s work and that without price or reward (11-13).

Vv. 14-17 – The Effect of Israel’s Redemption upon the Gentiles

As said before (43:3), Egypt, Cush, and the Sabeans would fall before them in defeat. Idol makers would experience shame, and Israel will be saved forever.

Vv. 18-25 – Jehovah’s Purpose in Creation

The Lord, the Creator has spoken openly, never in secret, and had accomplished everything that he said he would (18-19). This includes making the earth to be inhabited. While this is probably not what Isaiah had in mind since the science was unknown to him, the One who gave him the language by inspiration did know that even small changes in the position of earth in its galaxy would make it uninhabitable by mankind.

Idolaters are reminded that their gods cannot save them. Only he, the righteous Savior, who holds past, present, and future in his hands, can do so (20-21).

Using language that Isaiah’s audience must have found surprising, the prophet called upon the whole earth to turn to Jehovah and be saved (22). Every knee would bow before him, every tongue would swear allegiance, and only in him would they find righteousness and strength (23-24).

“All the descendants of Israel” may include all of those who cast their lot with the Lord (Gal. 3:29), but it may also simply highlight Israel’s special blessing among the redeemed.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

Jehovah and the Gods of Babylon

Vv. 1-2 – The Shame of Babylon’s Gods

Chapters 46 and 47 reveal the impending doom of Babylon. Cyrus’s call and mission have been set forth, and now Jehovah is ready to make known the fall of the great heathen city. Isaiah begins by describing the impotence of her gods.

Isaiah begins abruptly. His opening descriptions may have been an allusion to the Babylonian New Year Festival. It normally lasted eleven days and all major deities of the Babylonian pantheon were brought to Babylon to participate in a grand parade. However, the event that Isaiah described sounded far from grand. His mocking language described the idols as stooping and bowing and utterly humiliated. Even the animals that pulled the wagons seemed to feel the burden of their worthless load (1-2). The gods did not look like rulers; they looked more like the defeated spoils of war.

Vv. 3-11 – The Glory of Israel’s God

Isaiah now turns to addressing the remnant of God’s people. He reminds them of their relationship with God from birth to old age, and repeats God’s promise to carry and deliver them (3-4). Instead of carrying their gods like the Babylonians did their idols, their God has carried them.

This led to two rhetorical questions designed to emphasize the glory of God. There was no way in which God was comparable to the Babylonian gods bowing and stooping down, having been hoisted onto wagons on which they were lugged about. They couldn’t move on their own; they couldn’t speak; when their subjects cry out for help, there is none (7).

God is unique. All Israel needed to do realize God’s nature was to be men and remember their past. Not only had he created, delivered, and carried them, he had declared the end from the beginning, even from ancient times. His counsel, will, and pleasure had been and would be done (8-10).

Knowing that God's counsel, will, and pleasure had always been accomplished, they could be assured that what he was now promising, the coming of a bird of prey, one named Cyrus, would in fact happen and Babylon would be no more (11).

Vv. 12-13 – Salvation Is Drawing Near

Many of his people stubbornly refused to believe the God would bring them home. Their evil lives were far from the righteousness to which God called them (12). Nevertheless, he would bring his righteousness to the very people who had walked away from it. This does not say that God will overlook their unrighteousness. Rather it is God's righteousness that governs his every act. Salvation will follow, a salvation from captivity (13). Salvation from sin will flow from Zion to which those saved from captivity will return. There they will receive it based upon repentance and turning to the Lord (Luke 24:47).

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

Jehovah's Judgment Pronounced on Babylon

Vv. 1-7 – The Humiliation of Babylon

Having described the humiliation of Babylon's deities, Isaiah turns his attention to Babylon's downfall. Babylon was ancient. The tower erected at Babel, forerunner of Babylon (Gen. 11:1-9), was an expression of man's desire to have his own god and a religion molded after the imagination of his own heart. The Babylon of Chaldea was of the same mold, symbolized by haughtiness and cruelty of man without God. John could find no greater illustration of Rome than ancient Babylon. John's Babylon became a permanent symbol of all that is lustful, seductive, and enticing—all that

appeals to the flesh. Each of the Babylons has been brought to an end by divine judgment. God rules in history.

Feminine imagery describes the city. Two imperatives are used to taunt it. “Sit in the dust” and “sit on the ground without a throne.” It is described as a virgin, an unlikely name for such an evil city. However, the term may indicate the fact that it had not been violated by an alien army at this point in its history. Her days of being “tender and delicate” (see Deut. 28:56) were over, the consequence of profligate living (1).

Isaiah uses the language of captivity to describe that which Babylon would experience. It would be inflicted with the treatment that it had inflicted on others. Their nakedness would be exposed. They would be stripped of their power, wealth, and glory. Jehovah would accomplish this and bring to a close “the mistress of the kingdoms” (2-5).

God gave Israel into Babylon’s hand (“profaned mine inheritance”) because of his anger with his sinful and rebellious people. Babylon was God’s instrument of judgment, but it overstepped its prerogatives by its arrogance and pride (vv. 6-7).

Vv. 8-11 – Babylon’s Blasphemous Claims and Their Consequences

Years of supremacy led to a false sense of security by Babylon (cf. Dan. 4:29-30). When Persia defeated Babylon in 539 BC it may have been taken totally by surprise (see Dan. 5). The NIV’s “lounging in your security” conveys the complacency and false confidence apparent. Babylon’s arrogance culminated in its boast, “I am, and there is none else besides me” (v. 8)—almost exactly what the Lord said of himself (45:22). Babylon was confident that widowhood would never come upon it, but the Lord declared that desolation would come upon them “suddenly” and “in a moment in one day” (8-11). This is a lesson for all time (1 Thess. 5:3).

Vv. 12-15 – The Failure of Babylon’s Occult Arts

Finally, Isaiah warned Babylon to brace itself for the inevitable. He mockingly invited the people to persist with their spells and sorceries, as if these would save them.

Those who consulted the heavens would find nothing there that would save them, let alone the people of the kingdom..

Isaiah's message to Babylon brought home what every nation on earth needed to understand. Nations ruled only by God's grace, and when they had served his purpose, he would bring them down. He would judge their sin and those who mistakenly thought their own wisdom or strength had attained their lofty positions would receive the due penalty of their arrogance.

The universe would have only One who would remain to say, "I am, and there is no one besides me" (8). The Lord of Hosts is his name.

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

Assurance of Deliverance

Vv. 1-11 – Rebuke of Israel's Hypocrisy and Stubbornness

This chapter concludes this section, which has dealt primarily with Jehovah's controversy with the heathen idols, his plan involving Cyrus, and the destruction of Babylon. His purpose has been twofold: to strengthen Israel's faith in him and to show the folly of worshiping or fearing idols, for they are impotent and the gods they represent are nonentities.

Isaiah focused on three aspects of Israel's stubbornness. He reminded the people of 1) their election, 2) detailed their sin, and 3) God's faithfulness.

The people are addressed as the "house of Jacob who are called by the name of Israel," indicating that they were characterized more by the deceit of Jacob than by God. They came forth out of the waters of Jacob, a reference to their origin. They called on God, but they did not call in truth and righteousness (see Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8-9). They

took oaths in God's name and prided themselves on their being citizens of Jerusalem, but their actions betrayed their sinful hearts (1-2).

Israel had no excuse because God had declared long before of impending judgment. He gave them space to repent, called them through the prophets, all to no avail. They could not say that their idols were responsible because it was God who had told them what would happen if they continued in their sinful ways. But their hearts were stubborn. God did withhold judgment for his name's sake and for his praise, but eventually judgment came. (3-9).

The exile became a time of refinement. God used his people's affliction to test and strengthen them. Paul and James recognized the potentially good side of afflictions and trials (Rom. 5:2-4; Jas. 1:2-4). God was protecting his glory and he would not share his glory with another (10-11).

Vv. 12-16 – Jehovah's Faithfulness

God again proclaimed and called upon his people to hear that he was the first and the last. He was the source of everything that existed; he was the end toward which history moved. He created the universe and it responded to his direction (12-13). Once more he challenges false gods. Who among all of them had foretold everything that he done? No one? God has declared that his chosen servant whom he loved, Cyrus, would bring Babylon to an end. Moreover, that which God had declared was not spoken in secret (14-16).

Vv. 17-22 – What Might Have Been and What Will Be

The exhortation is now continued. Israel is to learn the incomparable nature of Jehovah from the work of redemption thus prepared in word and deed. The whole future depends upon the attitude that Judah henceforth has toward His commandments.

Isaiah stressed the Lord's authority. He is their Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. He is Jehovah their God who teaches them and leads them in the right way. (17) If they had listened to his commandments things would have been different. Instead of

affliction they would have had peace like a river and righteousness as the waves of the sea. Their descendants would have been innumerable; their name would not have been cut off and destroyed from before God (17-19).

Once more Isaiah goes from judgment to promise. His joyful announcement of God's redemption recalled the days of deliverance from Egypt and the care that God provided so that they thirsted not in the desert. He would do so again for those traveling homeward from Babylon (20-21).

With abrupt change Isaiah gives a final warning – there is no peace for the wicked. During the days of the wilderness wanderings, God displayed his power and care for his people in many ways, but many nonetheless refused to place their faith in him. Those who persisted in their rebellion ultimately perished. Isaiah's warning to the wicked reminded his hearers that God's blessing was linked to his people's faithfulness.