

# CHAPTER 46

## INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH 46

This chapter contains a prophecy of the taking of Babylon by Cyrus, and of the deliverance of the Jews; who are encouraged to expect the divine protection, and a continuance of it; are dehorted from idolatry, and directed to look to the Lord alone for righteousness and salvation. The taking of Babylon is signified by the demolition of its idols, which become the plunder of the enemy, and by the carrying of the inhabitants of it captive, (<sup>2341E</sup> Isaiah 46:1,2). Then follows a promise of grace and mercy to the remnant of Israel that should now be delivered; that the Lord, who had cared for them from the infancy of their state, would not leave them in their declining times, (<sup>2341B</sup> Isaiah 46:3,4), when they are dehorted from the worship of idols, from the consideration of the matter of which they were made, as silver and gold; from their being the works of men's hands; and from their inability to move themselves, or help others; and from the Lord being the true God, as appears by his omnipotence and omniscience, (<sup>2341F</sup> Isaiah 46:5-10). A description is given of Cyrus, who should be the instrument of the Jews' deliverance from Babylon, (<sup>2341I</sup> Isaiah 46:11). And the chapter is concluded with an address to the stout hearted and unrighteous Jews, to observe the righteousness and salvation which were brought near and set before them, (<sup>2341D</sup> Isaiah 46:12,13).

**Ver. 1** *Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, &c.*] These are names of the idols of Babylon. Bel is by some thought to be the contraction of Baal, the god of the Phoenicians, called by them Beel; so "Beelsamin"<sup>f906</sup>, in the Phoenician language, is Lord of heaven: but rather this is the Belus of the Babylonians, who was a renowned king of them, and after his death deified; whom Nebuchadnezzar, according to Megasthenes<sup>f907</sup>, calls Belus his progenitor, and by whom Babylon was walled about. This idol is, no doubt, the same with Jupiter Belus, who had a temple in Babylon with gates of brass, and which was in being in the times of Herodotus<sup>f908</sup>, as he reports. This name is sometimes taken into the names of their kings, as Belshazzar or Beltesbazaar. Nebo was another of their idols, an oracular one, from whom, by its priests, prophesies of things future were pretended

to be given out; for it may have its name from **abn**, “to prophesy”, and answers to the Apollo or Mercury of other nations. The Alexandrian copy of the Septuagint has very wrongly, instead of it, Dagon the god of the Philistines; and so the Arabic version “Dsgon”. This name Nebo was also taken into the names of the kings of Babylon, as Nabonassar, Nabopalassar, Nebuchadnezzar, and others. As Bel is the same with Belus, so Nebo is the same with Beltis, the queen Megasthenes or Abydenus speaks of in the same place; and Bel may design the sun, and Nebo the moon, which may have its name from **bwn**, “to bud forth”, or “make fruitful”, as the moon does; (see <sup>4334</sup>Deuteronomy 33:14). It is said of both these deities, that they “stooped” or “bowed down”; being taken down from the high places where they were set upright, and looked grand and majestic, and where they might be seen and worshipped by the people. Jarchi gives the words another sense, that it represents in a sarcastic way these idols, as through fear, in a like condition that men are in, in a fit of the colic, who not being able to get to the solid stool, are obliged to bend their knees, and ease themselves as they can<sup>1909</sup>. Aben Ezra seems to refer to the same signification of the word, when he says the sense was well known, but it was not fit to write it. The prophet goes on in the derision of these idols:

*their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle*; that is, being taken down, and broke to pieces for the sake of the silver, and gold, and brass that were about them, or they were made of, they were put into sacks by the Persians, and laid upon camels, and mules, and horses, and transported into Media and Persia. Jarchi interprets it, their idols are like to beasts, which defile themselves with their dung as they do; and so the Targum renders it,

“their images are “in” the likeness of serpents and beasts.”

These were the forms of them:

*your carriages were heavy laden, they are a burden to the weary beast*; this seems to be spoken to the Persians, who loaded their carriages, and their beasts, with this lumber, that their wagons were ready to break down, and their cattle groaned under the weight of it; a sarcastic jeer at the idols which were become the plunder and prey of the soldiers. It was usual at the taking of cities to demolish the idols of them; and this was typical of the demolition of Heathen idols, and the cessation of Heathen oracles in the

Gentile world, through the spread of the Gospel in it, in the first times of Christianity.

**Ver. 2.** *They stoop, they bow together, &c.*] Either the beasts under their burdens, or other idols besides those mentioned; or rather the Babylonians themselves, who were obliged to submit to the conquerors:

*they could not deliver the burdens*; the idols could not save themselves from being laid as burdens upon the beasts, any more than they could save their worshippers: so the Targum understands this and the preceding clause of them;

“they are cut off, and cut to pieces together, they could not deliver those that carried them;”

or else the Babylonians are designed, who could not save their gods from being used in this shameful manner:

*but themselves are gone into captivity*, or “their souls”<sup>f910</sup>; what were as dear to them as their own souls, their idols; to whom also souls may be ascribed by way of derision, being inanimate as well as irrational; and it is not unusual for idols to be said to be carried captive; hence those words of Tertullian, “manent et simulachra captiva”: or rather the Babylonians, who went into captivity themselves, and so could not save their idols: thus they who had led captive the Jews are led captive themselves; and thus it will be with mystical Babylon, (<sup>f930</sup>Revelation 13:10).

**Ver. 3.** *Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, &c.*] The Jews, the descendants of Jacob:

*and all the remnant of the house of Israel*; those that remained of the ten tribes that had been carried captive long ago. These may, in a spiritual sense, design those who are Israelites indeed; the household of the God of Jacob; the chosen of God, and called; the remnant according to the election of grace:

*which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb*: here the Lord distinguishes himself from the idols of the Babylonians; they were laid as burdens upon beasts, and bore and carried by them; but the Lord is born and carried by none, but bears and carries his people. The allusion is to tender parents that have compassion on their children as soon as born, and take care of them, and bear them in their bosoms, and carry

them in their arms; and may have respect, in the literal sense, to the infant state of the Jews, both as a church and commonwealth, when the Lord took pity on them, and care of them, and bore them as a father bears his son; and bore with their manners too, and carried them all the days of old through the wilderness to Canaan's land; (see <sup><04112></sup>Numbers 11:12 <sup><0103></sup>Deuteronomy 1:31 <sup><4138></sup>Acts 13:18 <sup><2359></sup>Isaiah 63:9). It may be applied to the care of God in the preservation of men by his providence, especially his own people, whose God he is from their mother's belly; who takes them under his protection as soon as born, and carries them through every state of infancy, youth, manhood, and old age, and never leaves nor forsakes them; (see <sup><1220></sup>Psalms 22:10 71:5,6,17,18 48:14), and with great propriety may be applied to regenerate persons, who, as soon as born again, are regarded by the Lord in a very visible, tender, and compassionate manner; he "bears" them in his bosom, and on his heart; he bears them in his arms; he puts his everlasting arms underneath them; he bears with them, with all their weakness and infirmities, their peevishness and frowardness; he bears them up under all their afflictions, and sustains all their burdens; he bears them through and out of all their troubles and difficulties: he "carries" them, in like manner, in his bosom, and in his arms; he "carries" them into his house, the church, which is the nursery for them, where they are nursed and fed, and have the breasts of consolation drawn out to them; he carries on the good work of grace in them; he carries them through all their trials and exercises safe to heaven and eternal happiness; for they are poor, weak, helpless creatures, like newly born babes, cannot go alone, but must be bore up and carried.

**Ver. 4.** *And even to your old age I am he*, &c.] The same he ever was, the eternal and unchangeable Jehovah; the same in his love and affections; in his sympathy and care; in his power and protection; in his promises, truth, and faithfulness to his people, in their last days, as at the first moment of their conversion; and therefore they are safe; (see <sup><3927></sup>Psalms 102:27 <sup><3906></sup>Malachi 3:6):

*and even to hoar hairs will I carry you*<sup>f911</sup>; which is doing more than the most tender parent does, or can, or need to do! God will not leave his people in the decline of life, when pressing infirmities are upon them, and they stand in as much need as ever of being bore up, supported, and carried: wherefore it follows,

*I have made*; these persons, not merely as creatures, but as new creatures; they are formed for myself; they are my sons and daughters, the works of my hands: I have an interest in them,

*therefore I will bear, even I will carry*: from the first of their regeneration, to their entrance into glory; (See Gill on “<sup>234B</sup>Isaiah 46:3”);

*And will deliver you*; out of all affliction; out of all temptations; out of the hand of every enemy; from a final and total falling away; from a body of sin and death; from death eternal, and wrath to come; and even at last from the grave and all corruption.

**Ver. 5.** *To whom will ye liken me?* &c.] Was it lawful that any likeness might be made, which yet is forbidden, (<sup>220B</sup>Exodus 20:4) what likeness could be thought of? is there any creature in heaven or earth, among all the angels or sons of men, to whom God can be likened, who has done such works of power, and acts of grace, as to care and provide not only for the house of Israel, from the beginning of their state to the close of it, but for all his creatures from the beginning of life to the end thereof, yea, from the beginning of the world to the end of it, and has shown such special grace and goodness to his chosen people, in such a kind and tender manner?

*And make me equal*; or any equal to him in power and goodness, since all are but worms, dust, and ashes, as the small dust of the balance, yea, as nothing in comparison of him.

*And compare me, that we may be like?* which is impossible to be done; for what comparison or likeness can there be between the Creator and a creature, between an infinite, immense, and eternal Being, possessed of all perfections, and a finite, frail, imperfect one? (see <sup>230B</sup>Isaiah 40:18). To pretend to frame a likeness of such a Being, is to act the absurd and stupid part the Heathens do, described in the following verses.

**Ver. 6.** *They lavish gold out of the bag,* &c.] As if it was of no value and account; that is, the Heathen idolaters, some of them, who are excessively devoted to idolatry; these, being rich, take out their bags of gold, and give it in a very profuse manner to a workman to make a golden image for them, not caring what it cost them; such an one was that which Nebuchadnezzar made, sixty cubits high, and six broad, (<sup>270B</sup>Daniel 3:1) see an instance of profuseness this way in the Israelites themselves, (<sup>232B</sup>Exodus 32:2-4).

*And weigh silver in the balance*; or “with a reed”<sup>f912</sup>. Others, though idolaters, yet less devoted to idolatry, and more tenacious of their money, make silver do for a god, and weigh it out to the workman, that it be made of such a weight, and no more, and that they might not be cheated of their silver; or they weighed it to pay the workman for his workmanship. Money formerly was not coined and stamped, so not numbered by pieces, but weighed.

*And hire a goldsmith, and he maketh it a god*; a “finer” or “founder”, with whom they agree for such a sum of money, and he, of the gold or silver that is put into his hands, makes a god: he casts and moulds it into such a form or shape that is agreed upon, and this is called a god; though nothing but a piece of gold or silver fashioned by art and man’s device, and the work of his hands:

*they fall down, yea, they worship*; the god they made; both the artificer, and he that employed him, fall down upon their knees, or their faces, and pay divine worship add adoration to the idol; though the one knew it was made of his own gold or silver, and the other knew it to be the workmanship of his hands. Worshipping is more than falling down, as Ben Melech observes, and therefore it is said, yea, they worship.

**Ver. 7.** *They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, &c.*] That is, the idol; men carry him upon their shoulders in procession, and expose him to the view and veneration of the people, just as the host is carried in procession by the Papists; or the idol being made, the workman or his men lift it up, for it cannot lift up itself, and take it upon their shoulders, and carry it home to the proprietor:

*and set him in his place*; in his house, if an household god: or in the temple, church, or place of public worship, if designed for that:

*or cause him to rest under him*<sup>f913</sup>, or “in his place”; under the roof of his house or temple; a jeer upon him, as if he was weary of his long journey, though carried. Here again the idols are distinguished from the true God, and he from them; they are on men’s shoulders, and set in a certain place, but he carries all his people, and is not limited to, or included in any place:

*and he standeth, and from his place he shall not remove*; the idol being set in his place stands fast, being nailed; he stands upright as a palm tree, and can never stir from the place where he is, to help any of his worshippers, in whatsoever distress they may be; nor can he get out of the way of any

danger to which he may be exposed; if the temple or house, in which he is, is on fire, or overflowed with water, or broke into by thieves, he cannot move out of his place, and escape the danger; a fine deity to be worshipped indeed! (see <sup><3413></sup>Isaiah 44:13 <sup><3401></sup>Jeremiah 10:4,5).

*Yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer*; as Baal's priests and worshippers cried to him, but no voice was heard, nor answer returned, (<sup><1185></sup>1 Kings 18:26,29) for though they have ears, they hear not, and mouths, yet they speak not, (<sup><4875></sup>Psalm 115:5,6)

*nor save him out of his trouble*; that is, the idol cannot save the idolatrous worshipper out of his distress, which has caused him to cry unto him; (see <sup><351></sup>Isaiah 45:20).

**Ver. 8.** *Remember this*, &c.] Or "these things", as the Syriac version, concerning the matter of which, and the manner in which idols are made; their impotency to move themselves, and their inability to help their votaries, and the difference between them and the true God:

*and show yourselves men*; and not brutes, as the makers and worshippers of images are, or show themselves as if they were; who unmanly themselves, and act contrary to the natural reason of mankind: or "be ye strong"<sup>f914</sup>; so the Targum and Jarchi; fortify yourselves against all temptations to idolatry, and against all the arguments and persuasions of idolaters; or "burn ye"<sup>f915</sup> or "be ye inflamed", so Rabenu Hal and Joseph Kimchi; that is, blush and be ashamed at such sottishness and stupidity, as men when they are ashamed look as if their faces were inflamed; so the Vulgate Latin version renders it, "be ye confounded"<sup>f916</sup>; or the sense is, be fervent in spirit, be fired<sup>f917</sup> with zeal for God and his glory, and with indignation against such gross idolatry:

*bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors*; of the law of God, in this instance of idolatry; meaning either the Babylonians, or rather the Jews, who had been drawn in by them to idolatrous practices; calling upon them to return to their senses; to use and exercise their reason; to recollect and reconsider things, and observe and repent of the folly and wickedness they had been guilty of.

**Ver. 9.** *Remember the former things of old*, &c.] The things that were from the beginning, or the ancient things done by the Lord, whether as the effects of power, wisdom, and goodness, or in wrath, or in mercy; such as the creation of the heavens, and the earth, and all things in them; the

destruction of the old world, and of Sodom and Gomorrah; the bringing of Israel out of Egypt through the Red sea and wilderness, to Canaan's land, and all the wondrous things then done for them; which are so many proofs of the true deity of the God of Israel, in opposition to the idols of the Gentiles:

*for I am God, and there is none else*; as he must needs be what did the above things:

*I am God, and there is none like me*; for greatness or goodness, or that has done the like things; not one of the gods of the Gentiles.

**Ver. 10.** *Declaring the end from the beginning*, &c.] The end of the Jewish state, both as a church, and a commonwealth, from the first settlement of it in the times of Moses, and by him, (<sup><4529></sup>Deuteronomy 32:29). The end of the world, and all things in it, as early as the times of Enoch, the seventh from Adam, (<sup><4614></sup>Jude 1:14,15). The end and issue of every event, at least of many very remarkable and momentous ones, before they came to pass; and particularly things relating to Christ, the beginning and end; the fulfilling end of the moral law for righteousness; the scope and design of the ceremonial law, to which that tended, and in which it issued; as well as the end of the whole Scripture, of the prophecies and promises of it: and this end was declared very early, and spoken of by all the prophets that were from the beginning of the world; and which is a full proof of the omniscience of God, and so of his true deity, (<sup><4070></sup>Luke 1:70 <sup><0035></sup>Genesis 3:15).

*And from the ancient times the things that are not yet done*; that were not at this time done, though they are since: such as the captivity of the Jews, and their return from it; also the incarnation of Christ, his obedience and sufferings, and the glory that should follow; his resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of God; the work of redemption by him; the effusion of the Spirit; the spread of the Gospel among the Gentiles, and their conversion; and others which are now not yet done; as the conversion of the Jews in the latter day, and the bringing in the fulness of the Gentiles; the glory of the church in those times as to knowledge, peace, purity, power, and authority; the destruction of antichrist; and the second coming of the Messiah; all which have been declared from ancient times; and as the former have been accomplished, there is reason to believe the latter will:



*saying, my counsel shall stand*; the purposes and decrees of God, which are within himself, wisely formed by him, eternal and not frustrable; and which shall stand, or be accomplished, being the counsels of him who is all wise, all knowing, all powerful, unchangeable, true, and faithful; whether they respect the providence of God in relation to the world in general, and the government of it, or to particular persons, and their affairs, from the time of their birth to their death; or whether they respect his grace and goodness in the salvation of men; such as his purpose according to election, the covenant of his grace, redemption by Christ, the effectual calling, and eternal glorification; all which, as they are according to the will and counsel of God; stand firm and sure, and shall have their full accomplishment; (see <sup><1931B></sup> Psalm 33:11 <sup><2092I></sup> Proverbs 19:21).

*And I will do all my pleasure*; as he has done in creation, and does in providence, so he has done, can do, and does in grace, in predestination and redemption, and in the effectual calling. And particularly this may refer to the deliverance of the Jews by Cyrus, a type of Christ, and deliverance by him, as follows:

**Ver. 11.** *Calling a ravenous bird from the east, &c.*] Or “a flying fowl”, or “swift winged bird”<sup>f918</sup>; for the word used does not so much denote rapaciousness as swiftness; which well agrees with Cyrus, who is here meant, and not Abraham, as Jarchi, nor Nebuchadnezzar, as others; and who was always swift in all his expeditions, and always recommended celerity and dispatch of business to his soldiers and others, as Xenophon<sup>f919</sup> often observes; and very remarkable is that speech of Tigranes to him, in which he tells him<sup>f920</sup>, that he so far exceeded the king of Armenia in swiftness, that he came upon him with a great army, from a far country, before he could get his army together, which was just by him. And very observable are the words of Cyrus himself, who was desirous of being a thorough horseman, that he might seem to be *αυψρωπος πτηνος*, “a winged” or “flying man”<sup>f921</sup>. So the Targum here renders it, a swift bird. Aben Ezra, who interprets it of Cyrus, says he is so called, as if he flew to do the will of God; and Kimchi observes of Cyrus, that he has this name because he came swiftly, and in haste, as a bird that flies: and it is no unusual thing for a mighty monarch, or a general, marching with his army, to be compared to a flying bird, particularly an eagle, (<sup><248D></sup> Jeremiah 48:40 <sup><247B></sup> Ezekiel 17:3,7 <sup><200B></sup> Hosea 8:1) and may be the bird intended here, which well suits with Cyrus, who had, as Plutarch<sup>f922</sup> reports, an aquiline nose; hence men that have such noses, among the Persians, are highly

esteemed: and Xenophon<sup>f923</sup> says, that the standard of Cyrus was a golden eagle upon the top of a high spear, and which is retained by the kings of Persia. Cyrus is said to be called from the east, because, as Kimchi observes, his country lay to the east of Babylon:

*the man that executeth my counsel from afar country*; as Persia was from Babylon, Assyria and other provinces lying between; but though he lived in a far country, and knew nothing of the affairs of the people of God in Babylon, or what work he was to do, yet God called him, and brought him to do his will, which he was ignorant of: so God sometimes puts into the hearts of men to fulfil his will, which they are strangers to, (<sup><6677></sup>Revelation 17:17). It is in the Hebrew text, “the man of my counsel”<sup>f924</sup>; not with whom the Lord consulted, for none are of his counsel in this sense; but whom in his counsels, decrees, and purposes, he appointed to such service, and whom he made use of as an instrument to do his pleasure; (see <sup><348></sup>Isaiah 44:8)

*yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass: I have purposed, I will also do it*; the counsel of the Lord, concerning the deliverance of his people from Babylon, by the hand of Cyrus; this he had purposed in his own breast, had spoken of in prophecy, and would certainly perform. R. Joseph Kimchi interprets this verse of the Messiah, and so does Jerom, of whom, no doubt, Cyrus was a type; and what is here said agrees with him: he may be compared to a flying bird for his swiftness in coming at the appointed time; he came from the east, as the rising sun of righteousness; he was the man of God’s counsel in the highest sense, and came, being called, to execute it; the work of redemption was according to the eternal purpose of God, and spoke of by all the holy prophets, and now accomplished; and his righteousness and salvation are made mention of in the following verses.

**Ver. 12.** *Hearken unto me, ye stout hearted,* &c.] This is not an address to the Chaldeans, as Kimchi and others think, who were merciless and cruel to the Jews, and far from doing that which was right unto them, but oppressed them, and would not let them go; but to the Jews themselves, at least to the wicked and profligate among them, who were always a stouthearted, stiffnecked, and a rebellious people; and even those who made more presences to religion were only self-righteous, and were far from true righteousness. The whole may be applied to all persons destitute of the grace of God, professors or profane, who are stout or stubborn

hearted; have hard and impenitent hearts; proud and haughty in their hearts; proud of their wisdom, power, and strength; stout in their hearts against God, as appears by their words and actions; oppose themselves to the people of God, his word and ordinances; and some so daring as to make a mock at sin, at religion, and a future state, and outbrave death itself; though when God calls them to an account, as he sometimes does by his judgments here, and will at the last judgment hereafter; or by the workings of his Spirit upon them, convincing them of sin, righteousness, and judgment; their hearts fail, and they cannot be strong and endure; when his word comes with power, and they hear it, and feel the energy of it, they are cut to the heart, and their stout and proud spirits are brought down, and made to submit: even such

*that are far from righteousness*; as all men are in a state of nature, none are righteous, no, not one, but are full of all unrighteousness; even those that are the most righteous and religious, externally, are without a righteousness; they do not attain to one by the law of works; they go about to establish their own, and do not submit to the righteousness of God, and so are far from it: and indeed all God's elect, in a state of unregeneracy, are far from any knowledge of the righteousness of Christ, they not being yet convinced of the need of it, and it having not yet been revealed and applied unto them, and received by faith; now these are called upon to hear the word externally, which coming with power, causes them to hear spiritually what follows:

**Ver. 13.** *I bring near my righteousness, it shall not be far off, &c.]*

Meaning either the faithfulness of God, in fulfilling his promises; or the justice of God displayed, in redemption by Christ; or Christ himself, God's righteous One, and the Lord our righteousness; or rather the righteousness of Christ itself, which Jehovah the Father may call his, because he sent his Son to work it out, approved of it, accepted it, and imputes it to his people, and justifies them by it; and which was near to be wrought out by Christ, and revealed in the Gospel; and which is brought near and applied by the Spirit of God to a sensible sinner, to a sinner convinced of the insufficiency of his own righteousness, and of the suitableness and excellency of Christ's, and of his need of it; and which is near in Christ, and in the Gospel, for faith to come at, at any time; nor is it ever far off from the believer, to whom it is imputed, and on whom it is put:

*and my salvation shall not tarry*; either Christ, who is God's salvation, provided and appointed by him, who was to come as a Saviour, and should not tarry; nor did he tarry beyond the appointed time, (<sup>311B</sup>Habakkuk 2:3) or the salvation itself wrought out by him; this work is done by Christ, and is published in the Gospel, and is brought nigh and applied by the Spirit of God in conversion, in due and proper time, and shortly will be fully enjoyed in heaven:

*and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory*: the Saviour himself was to come to Zion; near to Zion was salvation wrought out; here the Gospel of salvation was first published, and out of it the word of it was sent into all the world; and in Zion, the church of God, Christ the Saviour is to be met with; and his salvation is the safety of it, it is placed about it instead of walls and bulwarks; and all this is for the Israel of God, the spiritual Israel, chosen, redeemed, and called, and who shall be saved with an everlasting salvation; and who are the glory of God, have the glory of God, the grace of God in them, and the righteousness of God upon them, by which they are glorious; who enjoy the presence of the glorious God, and who is glorified in them, and by them; whose glory, even the glory of all his perfections, wisdom, grace, mercy, justice, holiness, truth, and faithfulness, is great in their salvation. So Kimchi gives the sense of the words,

“the salvation I will give to them shall be glory to me,”

Or Israel may be called his glory, because he gives glory to them; not only grace here, but glory hereafter, when their salvation wilt be complete, that is, completely enjoyed.