

Review

Last time, we talked about the prophecies regarding the judgments on Babylon. One has happened already, in Isaiah's future, but our past. The other is still in our future.

The first was Babylon falling to the Medes and the Persians, under the leadership of King Cyrus, who God called by name 200 years earlier.

The future one will be a complete destruction during the Great Tribulation.

Now, God turns His attention to His people, the Jews, to both rebuke and exhort them.

48:1-2 Invoking, But Not In Truth

One of the interesting things about the Jews' history is regarding the name change of their forefather Jacob. He was called Jacob ("heel-snatcher") because of his sneaky nature. But then, God changed his name to Israel, meaning "God prevails" or "Governed by God."

So now, God points out that the people are called Israelites, of the land of Israel, supposedly governed by God. "But really," He says, "You are of the house of Jacob, the sneaky guy who always broke the rules to get what he wanted."

He also tells them that they came "from the loins of Judah." Judah was a man who sold his own brother into slavery (Gen. 37:26-27) and slept with a prostitute after his wife died (Gen. 38:18). This was a pretty accurate description of the Jews in their national behavior as well.

The Lord said that they would invoke His name frequently, but it was not in truth or righteousness. They just used God's name as the label of validation. It's like when businesses put the Christian fish on their sign and then proceed to rip you off. Or people who say, "Praise God, brother," while telling you lies.

48:3-6a My Idol Has Done Them

God knew that the people of Israel were stubborn. In the Bible, stubbornness is often referred to as being "stiff-necked." This is in reference to horses that won't be turned by their riders, refusing to yield

to their direction. God says, "You people are worse than a stiff-necked horse. Your neck is made of iron! And hard-headed? You guys have a bronze forehead!"

But knowing this, He made sure that they couldn't steal His glory away by attributing their eventual deliverance from Babylon to their false gods. The Lord actually prophesied this would happen in advance so that the credit wouldn't go to their idols.

He dares them.... "Okay, you guys. You heard me foretell this, and it's all happened just as I said. Will you give me the credit now?"

48:6b-8 New Things

Not everything had been prophesied by the days of Isaiah. There were new, amazing visions coming from God for the first time through the prophet.

And this was for the sole purpose of the Jews not being able to say, "Oh, I already knew that." This is a behavior which seems to be picked up by know-it-all children: "I knew that, I knew that." But God says, "No, this stuff nobody has known until just now, when I revealed it. I didn't tell it to you before because you would have used the information in deceitful ways. Because ever since you were born, you've been rebellious children."

48:9 I Delay My Wrath

God would have been justified in smiting the Israelites to non-existence many times. But He never did, because He'd made promises to them. And this is God's nature: to preserve His reputation as a promise-keeper, even if it means delaying a punishment that is clearly deserved.

You may recall that when the twelve spies came back from checking out the Promised Land, all of them except Joshua and Caleb incited the Israelites to be afraid and rebel against God's leading. The result was that...

Num. 14:11-19 The LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in

their midst? I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they.” But Moses said to the LORD, “Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for by Your strength You brought up this people from their midst, and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people, for You, O LORD, are seen eye to eye, while Your cloud stands over them; and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if You slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of Your fame will say, ‘Because the LORD could not bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, therefore He slaughtered them in the wilderness.’ But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared, ‘The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.’ Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.”

Ever since the nation of Israel's beginning, they had deserved judgment for their rebellion against the Lord. But God had restrained Himself over and over and over again. Because He is a God who always keeps His promises, and is worthy to be praised.

48:10 The Refiner's Fire

Way back in chapter one, we read,

Is. 1:25 “I will also turn My hand against you, and will smelt away your dross as with lye and will remove all your alloy.”

God's figure of speech was that of smelting precious metals - refining them by heating them up and removing the impurities. God tells

them now, "I'm refining you, but the furnace isn't the one that you would refine silver in. This furnace is the furnace of affliction."

The heating up to remove impurities would happen in the form of affliction. All through the Jews' history, God has used affliction to purify them. The 70 years in Babylon would do that. Ultimately, the seven years of the Tribulation will finish that work.

48:11-15 For My Own Sake I Will Act

As we've read, God would ultimately deliver the Jews from Babylon for His own sake, to preserve His reputation as a God who can accomplish His promises. As a God who can save.

He won't allow idols to get the credit, because He is the only true God - the First and the Last, the Creator of the heavens and earth.

And once again, he points to Cyrus: "I've spoken it, and I'm going to accomplish it. I'll carry out the conquering of Babylon by using this man Cyrus. I've called him by name, and I've called him to do it. Therefore, he will be successful."

48:16 God Has Sent Me And His Spirit

There seems to be a difference of opinion among commentators as to who is speaking in this verse.

At first reading, it would seem clear that Isaiah himself is saying, "Hey everybody, listen to me. I'm not speaking in secret - God has sent me."

But others say that that this is Jesus speaking, that the Father had sent Him and the Holy Spirit.

At this point, I can't really say one way or another.

48:17-19 Who Teaches You To Profit

A lot of people read verse 17 and come to one of two conclusions: "the Jews are all rich because God made it that way," or "since this applies to us, God's going to make me rich."

The word "profit" in verse 17 is "**Yaw-AL**." Now, that's not just the most commonly-used pronoun spoken in the south... it's also a Hebrew

word that means "to gain, profit, benefit, avail."

God isn't saying that He teaches anybody to get rich. The context explains what He means:

Is. 48:17 ...“I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, Who leads you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to My commandments! Then your well-being would have been like a river...

That's the gain, that's the benefit, the profit: our well-being, going down God's path, His way. Paul the apostle wrote to Timothy,

1Tim. 6:6-11 ...godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

The Lord had instructed the Jews in the way of godliness, but they hadn't paid attention. It would have been to their benefit to follow His teaching, but their behavior was self-destructive.

48:20-22 Go Forth From Babylon

In spite of the Jews' disobedience, God had made promises to them that He intended to keep. Through Cyrus, the Lord would deliver them after 70 years in Babylon. But... it would be their choice. Only those who wanted to be delivered would be delivered. They would have to decide that leaving Babylon was what they wanted to do.

And unfortunately, when the 70 years was over, not a lot of them wanted to leave Babylon. We read in the book of Ezra that when King

Cyrus made the decree, he said,

Ezra 1:2 ..."The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem."

But there were Jews who had been born in Babylon. They didn't want to go back. There were Jews who'd found that they could be quite comfortable living in Babylon. And so they didn't return.

God tells them all to flee. But only the remnant would return. And those who chose to go back to Jerusalem to rebuilt God's temple would be provided for on the long journey back home.

But as for those who chose to stay in Babylon, God promised that they would never find peace.

Saints, the principle applies to us today as well. Those who desire to take the straight and narrow path towards the kingdom of God will be blessed and provided for. But those who choose the world with its comforts and pleasures will find no peace in that place.