

HOLY, OR HARDENED
Isaiah 48

Intro: This chapter concludes the first section of Isaiah 40-66.

It contains a series of messages in which the Lord was appealing to His people. In some ways it seems that they were already in captivity, but that is the nature of OT prophecy—to speak of a future event as though it were present, or even past. This is done to show the certainty that it would eventually come to pass.

The chapter really pictures the experience of so many of the Lord's people, and is especially important as we come to the Lord's table. In approaching the Lord's table we need to search our hearts to make sure that what we say with our mouths is a true expression of our devotion to the Lord.

As in previous chapters, the Lord was calling upon His people to listen to Him. You see this in vv. 1, 12, 16 — and this gives us the divisions of the chapter.

The first section, vv. 1-11, calls upon Israel to realize three things which God has known.

The second section, vv. 12-15, speaks again of who the Lord is, and how His grace will be exercised in dealing with Babylon and in making His people "prosperous."

The final section, vv. 16-22, is a divine lamentation in which we see how different things could have been with Israel, concluding in vv. 20-22 with a message both of hope and a warning.

I. HEARKEN TO WHAT GOD KNOWS (Isa. 48:1-11).

A. The Lord knew their hypocrisy (Isa. 48:1, 2).

They maintained their claim to be the people of God, but their lives were a contradiction of what they were saying.

B. The Lord knew when He chose them that they were going to be obstinate (hard-hearted) (Isa. 48:3-6a).

And he revealed this to them ahead of time in the writings of Moses so they would not be able to blame it on their idolatry. In other words, the problem was not their idols; the problem was in their hearts. So the Lord made this known ahead of time.

C. The Lord knew, but did not reveal, what He would do in the case of Babylon (Isa. 48:6b-11).

Vv. 9-11 give the "new things":

- 1) He will not give them the full punishment that they deserve (v. 9). "I will not cut thee off." This would not be the end of them.
- 2) He would refine them through the captivity (v. 10). And then He would bring them out of their captivity as though He were making a fresh choice of them as a nation.
- 3) He would do all of this for His own name's sake, and for His glory (v. 11).

You can see the effect that this should have had upon the people.

II. HEARKEN TO A RENEWED REVELATION OF WHO THE LORD IS, AND OF HIS UNCHANGING PURPOSE FOR HIS PEOPLE (Isa. 48:12-15).

He is the eternal, unchanging God.

He is the mighty Creator.

He had set His love upon Israel, and called him, and brought him.

Therefore, He would not give up on him. "He shall make his way prosperous."

III. HEARKEN TO HOW THINGS COULD HAVE BEEN, AND HOW THEY YET MAY BE (Isa. 48:16-22).

When we come to the Lord's table, we come not only to remember the Lord in His death, to reflect upon all of the wonders of our salvation, but it is also to be a time of heart-searching, a time in which we get things straightened out in our lives which may have become defiled.

Thus far we have seen:

- 1) The possibility of hypocrisy--that our lives do not measure up to the claim we make to be the Lord's. This was in the first section.
- 2) The tendency to blame our circumstances instead of tracing the trouble to our own hearts. This also was in the first section.
- 3) Our proneness to forget the Lord, who He is, and how it was that we became His people.

Here is a strong argument for the sovereignty of God in salvation. This is in the second part of the chapter. The person who feels that it was his own doing can just as easily feel that he can give it all up when he wants to. If we have been chosen by God, called to Christ, and brought to Him, then God is not going to give up on us.

Let us make sure that there are no troubles in these areas.

But now let us look at this third section.

Here we come back to things that the Lord had made known. What were they?

- A. The Lord had provided for the teaching of His people; He had shown them through His Word how they were to live. It was revealed in the commandments of the Word.

But they had been disobedient. See vv. 16-18.

- B. Consequently they had forfeited three things:

1. Peace.
2. Righteousness.
3. Fruitfulness.

These are in vv. 18b, 19.

- C. A fresh opportunity was offered to the people, not by staying in Babylon, but by separating themselves from the Babylonians, and returning to the Lord. The Lord would provide for them as He had done when they came out of Egypt.

- D. A final warning (v. 22).

To be "wicked" means to be loose—to be loose and careless with the Word of God, and consequently to be loose and careless with sin. There is no peace in such a life, even though a person may be a child of God.

Concl: Thus again we see that the great need of the children of Israel was to be obedient to the Word of God. With obedience comes peace, righteousness, and fruitfulness. How thankful we need to be for God's grace and His persistence in dealing with us, and what better place to turn to Him afresh than when we are preparing to remember His death for us as we take the Lord's Supper. May the Lord search our hearts and renew our love for Him!

As the Lord's people, we are to be holy, not hardened.