

THE COUNSEL OF GOD
Isaiah 46

Intro: This chapter contains one of Isaiah's messages. We can see its divisions very easily.

The message begins with a prophetic introduction in verses 1 and 2.

Then there follows three exhortations, the first beginning with the word, "Hearken"; the second beginning with the word, "Remember"; and the last beginning with the word, "Hearken," also.

The three divisions are:

- 1) Vv. 3-7.
- 2) Vv. 8-11.
- 3) Vv. 12, 13.

So let us follow those four divisions as we consider this message of the prophet.

I. THE PROPHETIC INTRODUCTION (Isa. 46:1, 2).

We must keep in mind that the prophets of the OT were preachers, but preachers of a special kind. They were able to speak by divine revelation. Those who were writing prophets, as Isaiah was, were being used to give the Scriptures to Israel and to the world. Consequently they spoke of things which had not taken place before, but things which were certain to happen. Thus, we have already seen how Isaiah spoke of Cyrus who did not appear on the human scene until more than 200 years after Isaiah lived. But Isaiah, speaking by divine revelation, could speak of Cyrus with the same certainty that an historian would speak of past events.

And so here, before Babylon had reached its zenith as a world power, is portrayed as being defeated. And the defeat is revealed by what happened to their gods.

These ancient powers were very religious, and placed great faith in their gods. The power of the Gentile nations left a great impression on the Israelites, so much so that the Israelites were inclined to worship the gods of the heathen also.

But notice how their defeat is pictured in vv. 1, 2. Not only were they unable to help the Babylonians, but they themselves were taken into captivity.

Application: The child of God is always being tempted to trust in some one, or some thing, rather than to trust in the Lord. With us, it may not be idols as such, but we have our idols, even though they may be of a different kind.

We may trust in ourselves. We may trust in our resources. We may trust in other people. Anything that takes the place of the Lord is an idol. Many of the Lord's people today are trusting in somebody's methods or programs for their help, instead of trusting in the Lord.

After Isaiah had stated the problem, not historically, but prophetically, letting the people of Israel see what was going to happen to the gods of the Babylonians, Bel and Nebo, then he pointed to the remedy.

II. THE FIRST EXHORTATION (Isa. 46:3-7).

Here and in v. 12 Isaiah, not speaking for himself, but speaking for God, asked the people to listen to Him. (Note that when a man speaks the Word of God, it is actually God Who is speaking to the hearers.)

The Lord is identified in two ways:

- 1) In v. 3, as to what He had already done for Israel.
- 2) In v. 4, as to what He was committed to do for Israel in the future—to the end of their history as a nation.
(But note how this would apply to every individual child of God.)

The thing which the Lord wanted the people of Israel to listen to is that which has been stated over and over again in Isaiah's ministry: the uniqueness of God. See v. 5.

By way of contrast with God, we see how the idols were made, and then how helpless they were, in vv. 6, 7.

Application: The only reason a child of God would place his trust in something other than God is because he is not listening to the Word of God, and because he has lost sight of the uniqueness of God.

How important it is to be listening to God through His Word!

III. THE SECOND EXHORTATION (Isa. 46:8-11).

The call here is to "remember"—stated twice!

The first "remember" seems to look back to what was said in the preceding section, especially vv. 6, 7. It is not enough to hear, but we need to remember what we have heard. This is why we need to read the Word daily, and go over it again and again.

But then, beginning with v. 9, the Lord through Isaiah called upon the people to remember three other things.

First, they were to remember what God had done for them in

the past. See v. 9. And then in referring again to God's uniqueness, the implication is twofold:

- 1) Have any other gods done what God for you?
- 2) Has God done for any other nation what He had done for Israel?

Second, in v. 10, we see that many of the things which God had done for them in the past were things that He had announced ahead of time. And He had assured them as that time that He would stand by His Word. And He did!

What god among the heathen could point to such a record?

Third, in v. 11, God was doing through Isaiah what He had done before, speaking of things that were yet to come to pass with the certainty that they would take place. The "raven-ous bird" probably is a reference to Cyrus and the predictions which were made of him in chapters 44 and 45.

It is just as important for us to dwell upon God's promises for the future as to remember what He did in the past. Both will feed and strengthen our faith because "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

IV. THE THIRD EXHORTATION (Isa. 46:12, 13).

This exhortation also has to do with hearing.

Here we see the faithfulness of God.

Israel, by her unfaithfulness to God, had given the Lord the right to have no more to do with her. Or, He could pass judgment on the nation again as He did at Kadesh-Barnea. Cf. Num. 14:26-39, esp. vv. 34-37. Another generation of evildoers could have died.

David wrote,

He hath not dealt with us after our sins;
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.
For as the heaven is high above the earth,
so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.
(Psa. 103:10, 11.)

Paul wrote,

If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful:
he cannot deny himself (2 Tim. 2:13).

What did Isaiah have to say to the people in v. 13?

He would stand by His counsel. He would keep His promises. His purposes regarding His people would not change.

Concl: What lessons do we have here?

Let me mention three:

- 1) The proneness of the people of God to put their trust in anything except the Lord.

How easily we are deceived! How quickly we respond to any unusual thing, forgetting all that the Lord has done for us, and forgetting all that He has promised to do.

- 2) The persistence of God with His people.

He sent His prophets. He gave His word. He repeated His messages over and over. He refused to be unfaithful to them even though they had been grossly unfaithful to Him.

- 3) The need we have to hear and to remember.

How important it is for us to have our time each day in the Word—an unhurried time!

Busy-ness can become a real threat to our fellowship with the Lord. The Lord never gives us so much to do that we do not have time for Him. If that has happened in our lives, then we are too busy, and something needs to change. Either we need to cut back, or we need to be more determined about our time in the Word.

Dr. Alan Redpath, who formerly was the pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago, had this motto on the wall of his study:
BEWARE OF THE BARRENNESS OF A BUSY LIFE.

Conclude with Psalm 1. Note what it has to say about meditation—which cannot be hurried if it is to profit us.