

ISAIAH

Chapter 46

Gods of Babylon

Bel bows down, Nebo stoops low; their idols are borne by beasts of burden. The images that are carried about are burdensome, a burden for the weary. ² They stoop and bow down together; unable to rescue the burden, they themselves go off into captivity. ³ “Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all you who remain of the house of Israel, you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth. ⁴ Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you. ⁵ “To whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared? ⁶ Some pour out gold from their bags and weigh out silver on the scales; they hire a goldsmith to make it into a god, and they bow down and worship it. ⁷ They lift it to their shoulders and carry it; they set it up in its place, and there it stands. From that spot it cannot move. Though one cries out to it, it does not answer; it cannot save him from his troubles. ⁸ “Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels. ⁹ Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. ¹⁰ I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. ¹¹ From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do. ¹² Listen to me, you stubborn-hearted, you who are far from righteousness. ¹³ I am bringing my righteousness near, it is not far away; and my salvation will not be delayed. I will grant salvation to Zion, my splendor to Israel.

46:1 *Bel*. Another name for Marduk, the chief deity of Babylon. The name “Bel” is equivalent to Canaanite “Baal” and means “lord.” (CSB)

Chief gods in Babylonian pantheon. Bel, equivalent of “Baal” in Hbr and a component in the name “Belshazzar,” is known also as Marduk (Merodach in Jer 50:2). Nebo, his son, appears in the name “Nebuchadnezzar.” (TLSB)

bows down ... stoops. In disgrace (see v. 2; 21:9 and note). (CSB)

Nebo. Nabu, the god of learning and writing who was the son of Marduk. (CSB)

Himself full of spiritual irony, the prophet rejoices and is glad over the destruction of the idols, as if to say, “Babel has two supreme gods, but these could not protect themselves. Along came Cyrus and lifted them from their beasts. These gods were

nothing but burdens and loads for the beasts. They are so heavy that the beasts lie down.” (Luther)

on beasts and livestock. Idols were carried in procession; however. (TLSB)

46:2 *go off into captivity.* The idols join their worshipers in exile (see Jer 48:7; 49:3; Hos 10:5; Am 1:15). (CSB)

Idols were loaded facedown on beasts of burden to be carted off as spoil by victorious invaders of the city. Each of them in effect bows down and stoops in abject submission to the conquerors of Babylon (vv 1–2). (TLSB)

46:3–13 In contrast to the idols of Babylon, the Lord carried His people; Israel did not carry Him. Three exodus images are used in these verses: a father carrying his son (Hos 11:1–4), a shepherd carrying his sheep (Ps 28:9), and an eagle carrying its young (Ex 19:4). (TLSB)

46:3 *who remain.* The remnant (see 1:9 and note). (CSB)

since ... conceived ... since ... birth. See 44:2 and note. (CSB)

As a mother cares for her children, so the Lord cares for Israel. Cf 49:15; 66:13. (TLSB)

Here you see the comparison. How could He speak more sweetly than in transferring a mother’s experiences to Himself, and the most concerned experience is carrying a child in the womb. The highest honor should be given to her who is pregnant. Here consider God’s zeal and care for us. Is not the maternal instinct constantly concerned about the infant? So God cares for us with an everlasting maternal heart and feeling. *Womb.* The fetus knows no concern. All the concern is in the mother, who looks after her tender belly. So God is likewise concerned for us. Therefore He wants to say: “Leave your cares, which look for ways of escape and other places of refuge. Come to Me, I will carry you in My womb.” The uterus and womb of God is the divine Word, by which we are fashioned and borne, as Paul says to the Galatians (4:19), “My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!” and to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:15), “I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.” It is an outstanding and very firm comfort for the godly that God cares for us. Therefore we must strive with a single heart that we abide in the Word. The Lord will reject no one, however weak, if only we cling to the Word, the womb of God. Thus, then, we must believe in our weakness that we are borne in the womb of God, who will care for us with supreme devotion and will never reject us. (Luther)

46:4 *old age and gray hairs.* Cf. Ps 37:25. (CSB)

sustain ... made ... rescue. Unlike the helpless idols of vv. 1–2. See 41:10, 13; 43:1–2 and notes. (CSB)

Emphasizes God’s action in love and redemption. Just as children simply receive life from parents, Israel simply receives salvation from her gracious Savior. (TLSB)

These are extremely sweet promises. “The first is that I desire to carry you. Beyond that, even after you are born, I will carry you into old age. During your entire life I will carry you. From the beginning, when you were shaped in My womb, and thereafter through all the following days I will carry you.” Even so a mother carries her boy first in her womb, then in her bosom, and finally in her arm. “Even so you are to be carried throughout your life. You will never grow too big for Me to carry you at every age of your life.” (Luther)

46:5–7 See 40:18–20 and note. (CSB)

46:6 WEIGH OUT SILVER – It was customary in those days to measure things by weight where we now count them out. They measure the value on scales. Superstition is the mistress of all moneys. Here you see how generous the hands are when it comes to superstition. It opens up all purses. (Luther)

The Lord mocks the absurdity of worshiping a created idol rather than the true God by laying out the idol’s origins (cf 40:18; 44:10–19; 45:20). (TLSB)

HIRE A GOLDSMITH – He is ridiculing their folly. They themselves hire a man who makes a god for them. The god is himself carried, and he cannot move from the spot. (Luther)

bow down and worship. See 44:15, 17, 19. (CSB)

They adore and implore the work of their hands, of which they rest assured, they may expect nothing by way of help. (Leupold)

46:7 *carry.* See v. 1. (CSB)

The whole approach centers around the fact that the idols can become so heavy a burden for a man. (Leupold)

cannot save. See 44:17 and note. (CSB)

Idolatry is the height of futility. The idol will not deliver man from his distress. (Leupold)

46:8 REMEMBER THIS, FIX IT IN MIND – After a notion has been fixed in an ungodly man’s mind, a great deal of admonition is required, because he sees nothing but his own idea and regards nothing but his own works while fasting, dressing, praying, etc. He believes that in this way he is pleasing God. He does not think otherwise: “God truly has regard for these things.” While that idol stands in his mind, it is impossible for him to think about the promises of God. For that reason the prophet says *Recall it to mind.* (Luther)

rebels. Israel. See 1:2 and note; cf. 1:20, 23, 28; 30:1; 57:4. (CSB)

46:9 *former things*. See 41:22 and note. (CSB)

Here he sets forth what should be remembered, the promises made concerning the Babylonians. There he commands that they should not look to the promises which deal with the Babylonian captivity. "Deliverance is promised you through the king of the Persians. Remember him." *Former things*, that is, promises. (Luther)

there is no other. See 43:11 and note. (CSB)

"Do not make for yourselves other gods, but stay with Me, for I am the One who has made promises. Your gods do nothing, in fact, they cannot achieve their own plans and endeavors. I alone am He, and I act." (Luther)

46:10–11 *My purpose*.† God's purposes and plans regarding Babylon and Israel (see 8:9–10; 14:24; 48:14 and notes). Cf. Ps 33:11. (CSB)

46:10 *from the beginning*. See 41:26 and note. (CSB)

Describes God's predictive power, esp the foretelling of Cyrus. (TLSB)

Every determination has its own time. $\Upsilon\vartheta\Omega$, whatever a person undertakes. The counsel of God alone will stand. All human counsels, however, will fade away and be confounded. Everyone must, therefore, see to it that he establishes his situation in the Word. Whatever you do, whether it is sleeping, eating, obeying, etc., know this for sure: These things must be regulated by the Word. (Luther)

46:11 *east ... bird of prey*. Cyrus king of Persia (see 41:2 and note). The swiftness and power of a bird of prey are in view (see 8:8 and note; Jer 49:22; cf. Da 8:4). (CSB)

46:12 *stubborn-hearted*. See v. 8; 48:4; Eze 2:4. (CSB)

In 45:9–10, a woe is pronounced on those who think they can dictate to God how He is to let righteousness prevail. (TLSB)

The Lord addresses the same people He addressed earlier when He called them rebels. Here He calls them stubborn-hearted. They are the unbelievers who do not accept the Lord's ability to predict the future. But God's prediction becomes more than the revelation of future events. It foretells more than the rise of Cyrus. The magnificent future God predicts includes all He will do to redeem the world from sin, death and hell. (PBC)

46:13 *righteousness*. Here equivalent to salvation. See 41:2 and note; 45:8 and note. (CSB)

salvation. See note on 43:3. (CSB)

Fulfilled in the return from exile, but ultimately by the birth of Jesus, God with us. (TLSB)

splendor. See 35:2 and note; 40:5 and note; see also 44:23; 49:3. (CSB)

salvation in Zion. Where the Lord's righteousness and salvation will be displayed (cf Heb 12:22–24). (TLSB)

My glory. Israel was God's chosen nation. He speaks as a proud father over his son.

Ch 46 The Lord will humble mighty Babylon when He raises up Cyrus the Persian. The power and future of all nations are in God's hands. Pray for your leaders, that they may know the Lord and His ways. However, pray most of all for the return of our Savior-King. • O Father, I am Your child, over whom You glory. Draw near to me this day in Your mercy. Amen. (TLSB)