

ISAIAH

Chapter 46

The Idols of Babylon and the One True God

46 Bel bows down; Nebo stoops; their idols are on beasts and livestock; these things you carry are borne as burdens on weary beasts. 2 They stoop; they bow down together; they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity. 3 “Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; 4 even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save. 5 “To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike? 6 Those who lavish gold from the purse, and weigh out silver in the scales, hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! 7 They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble. 8 “Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, 9 remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, 10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ 11 calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it. 12 “Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness: 13 I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.”

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. (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 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 *from the womb*. 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)

carry... made ... save. Unlike the helpless idols of vv. 1–2. (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)

46:6 *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)

fall down and worship. 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)

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

46:8 *remember this and stand firm* – 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)

46:9 *former things.* 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. “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. Cf. Ps 33:11. (CSB)

46:10 *from the beginning.* Describes God’s predictive power, esp the foretelling of Cyrus. (TLSB)

Every determination has its own time. $\forall \square \square$, 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. (CSB)

46:12 *stubborn of heart.* 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. (CSB)

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

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)