

# ISAIAH

## Chapter 48

*Israel Refined for God's Glory*

**Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and who came from the waters of Judah, who swear by the name of the LORD and confess the God of Israel, but not in truth or right. 2 For they call themselves after the holy city, and stay themselves on the God of Israel; the LORD of hosts is his name. 3 “The former things I declared of old; they went out from my mouth, and I announced them; then suddenly I did them, and they came to pass. 4 Because I know that you are obstinate, and your neck is an iron sinew and your forehead brass, 5 I declared them to you from of old, before they came to pass I announced them to you, lest you should say, ‘My idol did them, my carved image and my metal image commanded them.’ 6 “You have heard; now see all this; and will you not declare it? From this time forth I announce to you new things, hidden things that you have not known. 7 They are created now, not long ago; before today you have never heard of them, lest you should say, ‘Behold, I knew them.’ 8 You have never heard, you have never known, from of old your ear has not been opened. For I knew that you would surely deal treacherously, and that from before birth you were called a rebel. 9 “For my name's sake I defer my anger; for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. 10 Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried[a] you in the furnace of affliction. 11 For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.**

**48:1** *house of Jacob.* Israel, named for their forefather. (TLSB)

*called by the name.* They belong to Israel. (CSB)

*Israel.* This was a name that reminded them of God's choice and His faithfulness to them over the centuries. (PBC)

*waters of Judah.* Compares Judah to a source or spring of the people. Isaiah's audience was chiefly from Judah. (TLSB)

*Judah.* The main tribe of the southern kingdom. (CSB)

*swear.* Oaths identify them as former citizens of the Holy City, Jerusalem. (TLSB)

*not in truth.* Contrast the oaths of 65:16. (CSB)

The great fault of their religion and their concepts of God was that it did not have the Messiah at its center. (PBC)

**48:2** *holy city.* Jerusalem, where the temple was located. (CSB)

*stay themselves.* † Contrast 31:1; 36:6, 9; Eze 29:6–7. (CSB)

They defiantly claimed the assistance of the almighty God for themselves, merely on account of their outward relation to the Lord's people, forgetting that God is also the Holy One and a devouring fire upon all hypocrites. (Kretzmann)

**48:3** *former things*. The Lord of hosts is indeed the Lord of history. The former things happened exactly as He declared. Doubters should believe that new things, still hidden, will come. (TLSB)

The Lord asserts His ability to foretell the future. The history of God's OT people is a history of prophecy. God foretold the coming of the Messiah to Adam and Eve. He told Noah to prepare for the coming flood. He called Abraham and told him that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in heaven and sand on the seashore. He sent Moses to deliver His people from Egypt. These and other things God foretold long before they occurred. (PBC)

*I did them*. No idol or "carved image" had anything to do with planning and guiding the course of events (vv 3–5). (TLSB)

**48:4** *obsinate... brass*. See Jer 6:28; cf. Eze 3:7. (CSB)

Like animals who refused to be led in the direction their master desired. (TLSB)

**48:5** *My idol did them*. See Isaiah's harsh words about idolatry in 44:17–20. (CSB)

*carved image and my metal image*. And my graven image and my molten image hath commanded them, ascribing to these false gods an interference with the affairs of the world which was excluded by the Lord's proof of prophecy and fulfillment. (Kretzmann)

**48:6** *You have heard*. Israel knew from experience that "former things" (v 3), pronounced by God's prophets long in advance, materialized as foretold. (TLSB)

*new things*.† Israel's restoration and the implementation of God's announced plan to redeem all nations from the bondage of sin. (CSB)

The Israelites should not hesitate to believe. However, they "never heard" the prophets' teachings with penitent hearts but scoffed at them instead (v 8; 5:19). (TLSB)

*hidden things*. Cf. Ro 16:25–26. (CSB)

The events like the overthrow of Babylon might be thought of. Though Isaiah had prophesied this (13:19) the fact as such was good as unknown, for Israel had as yet not taken it to heart. (Leupold)

**48:7** *created now*. Now given substance in the prophetic announcement of their coming. (CSB)

**48:8** *never have heard*. He charges the nation in its spiritual intractability, practically with never having learned her lessons in the past. (Leupold)

*ear ... not ... opened*. She had degenerated in the course of time to the point where her ear has long been completely closed. (Leupold)

*rebel*. Jacob, renamed Israel in Gn 32:28. His life was typified by deceit, treachery, and dishonesty (cf Gn 27:1–29; 30:34–43). (TLSB)

More than a measure of dullness or weakness is attributed to Israel. She has long been very treacherous, a charge that God makes in a tone marked by some impatience. (Leupold)

This is what Moses called you, and this is what I call you too. (Luther)

**48:9** *for name's sake* – This underscores the grace of God and His faithfulness to all His promises. (PBC)

*defer my anger.* Cf. Ps 78:38. (CSB)

That is, “for the purpose of your salvation.” (Luther)

*my praise.* The praise God is worthy of. (CSB)

**48:10** *refined ... tried.* Images of judgment (see Jer 9:7; Eze 22:18–22). Purifying fire is also mentioned in 1:25; 4:4. (CSB)

The Lord foretells the Babylonian captivity and return so that Israel will not attribute those events to their idols (v 5). By this, the Lord refines His people for service to His glory.

*furnace of affliction.* For Israel, Egypt had been an “iron-smelting furnace” (Dt 4:20; 1Ki 8:51; Jer 11:4). The fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile were a similar furnace. (CSB)

The exodus and now the Babylonian captivity. (TLSB)

**48:11** *For ... profaned.* Jerusalem's fall and God's scattered people had brought dishonor to God's name (see Eze 36:20–23). (CSB)

We measure the greatness of God in the astounding fact that He carried out His plan through these rebellious and treacherous people. (PBC)

*my glory.* God would not share His honor with idols. (TLSB)

Here you see that a self-righteous person is a thief of the divine glory and also an idolater, because he lays claim to God's glory for himself. He does not pray, “Hallowed be Thy name.” Aspiring to the glory of divinity is a most grievous monstrosity. Here you see the battle between God and the self-righteous concerning glory. (Luther)

**48:1–11** The Lord chastens Israel for stubbornness, indifference, and idolatry, noting that they were corrupt from the beginning. You, too, started life in the corruption of sin, which continues to manifest itself in sins like those of Israel. The Lord's refinement can purge away your sins. As you reflect on your persistent weaknesses, recall also the Lord's patience (vv 9–11) and the mercy announced for you in Christ. • Lord, forgive my obstinacy, and refine my attitude. Amen. (TLSB)

*The LORD's Call to Israel*

**12** “Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am he; I am the first, and I am the last.  
**13** My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand forth together. **14** “Assemble, all of you, and listen! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him; he shall perform his purpose on Babylon, and his arm shall be against the Chaldeans. **15** I, even I, have spoken and called him; I have brought him, and he will prosper in his way. **16** Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in

secret, from the time it came to be I have been there.” And now the Lord GOD has sent me, and his Spirit. 17 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go. 18 Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea; 19 your offspring would have been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me.” 20 Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it out to the end of the earth; say, “The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!” 21 They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and the water gushed out. 22 “There is no peace,” says the LORD, “for the wicked.”

**48:12–16** Three servants are mentioned. The Lord called Israel (v 12); Cyrus, who defeated Babylon (v 14); and the sent One (v 16b). (TLSB)

**48:12***listen* – The Lord pleads with His people to listen to Him because all His words are words of grace and mercy, life and deliverance. (PBC)

*called.*† To be God’s chosen people. (CSB)

*first and ... last.* Sets the Lord apart from any god, man, or event that would seek to compete with Him. (TLSB)

“I have been there in the past and will be there hereafter.” This you heard above. “I was the God who made promises in the past, and I will be the One who acts; because I have freely promised, I will freely give. (Luther)

**48:13** *laid the foundations ... spread out the heavens.* Isaiah often refers to God as Creator (see 40:21–22; 42:5; 51:13 and notes). Cf. Ps 102:25. (CSB)

That is, “I have heaven in My hand and enclosed in My hand. I have closed My fingers around it. Why do you not believe Me? Do you think that My hand has been shortened? Do you think I am so weak that I could not set you free? Just wait a little while, I still have enough strength to do justice to My promises. I am strong enough because I lay the foundation of the earth and hold the heavens in My hand.” (Luther)

Astrologers foolishly ask the stars what will happen next, while God holds the stars in His hand. (TLSB)

*when I call to them... stand forth together.* All creation does God’s bidding. (CSB)

The Lord arranges and orders the stars and knows all of them by name (Jb 38:31–32; Ps 147:4). (TLSB)

“I say to the sun and the moon, ‘Shine,’ and they stand forth. I say to the earth, ‘Germinate,’ and it stands forth. I say to the earth, ‘Bring forth and produce,’ and it stands forth.” (Luther)

**48:14** *these things.* None of the idols has the ability to foretell the future. None of them actually exists except in the imagination of misguided human minds. (PBC)

*he.* Cyrus the Great. (CSB)

As the Lord “set His love on ... and chose” (Dt 7:7) the children of Israel to be “His servant” (Is 48:20), though they did not deserve this distinction (cf Dt 4:37; 7:6–8), so He let Cyrus experience His favor for the purpose of liberating the chosen people (Is 45:1–6). (TLSB)

*his purpose.* “This is My purpose; it is not your merit.” Therefore these words are placed in antithesis: “With My arm, not with your power.” (Luther)

**48:15** *called him.* Cyrus. (CSB)

*will prosper.* From God’s perspective, and from the perspective of His prophet, the deliverance promised has already become a reality. (PBC)

**48:16** *from the beginning.* The prediction about Cyrus and his mission. (CSB)

*not spoken in secret.* That is, “I do not speak uselessly, and in secret. My words are not empty, as are the words of those who speak into the trees. I did not speak in vain from of old. Long ago I uttered threats regarding the Babylonian captivity. I told you well in advance. (Luther)

*And now.* Cyrus is referred to in vv 14–15. In v 16, a new Servant who was sent “to seek and to save the lost” (Lk 19:10) suddenly speaks. Made flesh in the fullness of time (Gal 4:4), the eternal Word (Jn 1:1) has more to say in the opening verses of ch 49 and in 50:4–6. and in 50:4–6. (TLSB)

*has sent me, with his Spirit.*† A reference to the servant of the Lord, who speaks this verse. The Spirit of the Lord comes upon the servant in 42:1. In 42:1, here, and in 61:1 all three persons of the Trinity are referred to. (CSB)

The Servant will be sent, and He, with the Father, will send the Spirit (Jn 14:16–17, 26; 15:26; 16:7). (TLSB)

**48:17** *teaches you ... the way you should go.* Through the prophets. (CSB)

“Things of advantage to you for eternal life and everything good.” (Luther)

**48:18** *peace ... like a river, righteousness like the waves.* Abundant and overflowing peace and righteousness. Peace and righteousness are also linked in 9:7; 32:17; 54:13–14; 60:17; Ps 85:10; Heb 7:2. (CSB)

Unlike occasional flow of a seasonal stream. Amos employs this same metaphor when he calls Israel to let justice and righteousness flow like a perennial spring (Amos 5:24) (TLSB)

**48:19** *descendants ... like the sand.*† Abraham, Israel’s ancestor and the father of all believers, was promised countless offspring (Gn 13:16; 15:5; 17:5–6; Rm 4:16; 9:6–8; Gal 3:29).

*name ... never be cut off.*† Israel’s name would not be completely obliterated. (CSB)

**48:20** *go out from Babylon, flee.* Although the Jews did not have to flee (see 52:12), they were encouraged to depart quickly because of the judgment coming on Babylon (cf. Rev 18:4). This is the last mention of Babylon by name in Isaiah. (CSB)

Complete and permanent severance from “the way of sinners” and “the seat of scoffers” is required (Ps 1:1; cf Rv 18:4–5). (TLSB)

*shout of joy.* That is, “when you will have been set free, then offer to God a song and a sacrifice of praise.” (Luther)

*end of the earth.* So vociferously are they to make their proclamation that it will resound to the end of the earth. (Leupold)

**48:21** *did not thirst ... water ... from the rock.*† A reference to God's provision after the exodus. (CSB)

Thus the prophets habitually combined their songs and thanksgiving with the miracles of the past. (Luther)

**48:22** Repeated almost verbatim in 57:21. (CSB)

*wicked.* Those who rebel against the Lord. (CSB)

If you will believe, you will have peace. If you will not believe, you will be without peace. This passage is properly applied to the captive Jews, who in their unbelief refused to believe. Consequently they shall have no good fortune or prosperity. With the Hebrews *peace* means prosperity and joy, good fortune and well-being. (Luther)

**48:12–22** The Lord distinguishes His people from the nations and promises enduring peace through His Servant and His Spirit. This promise was fulfilled for your sake by Jesus of Nazareth (Mt 11:27–30). • Lord Jesus, grant me Your Spirit to sustain me in God's peace. Amen. (TLSB)