

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH  
CONCERNING BABYLON:  
ISAIAH 46-48



T. M. Moore

*A Scriptorium Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*Concerning Babylon: Isaiah 46-48*

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## Introduction to *Isaiah 46-48*

Babylon was the ominous, dark cloud rising on the eastern horizon for the people of Isaiah's day. Having seen his prophecies concerning Israel and Assyria come to pass, they had every reason to believe that everything he'd preached about Babylon as the instrument of God's wrath would prove out as well.

But God wanted His people to understand that their captivity in Babylon was merely temporary, a preparation for the next stage of His saving work for them. God would deal with Babylon when the time was right, and Cyrus, God's anointed servant, would bring a restoration for the people of Judah and Jerusalem. But Cyrus, and the deliverance he would accomplish, were but tokens of a greater Anointed One and a greater salvation to come.

For now, the people of God needed to listen to His Word and trust in Him. They must not look to idols to deliver them from Babylon, but should accept their fate, repent of their sins, and set their hope on the precious and very great promises of their precious and very great God.

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T. M. Moore, Principal  
[tmmoore@ailbe.org](mailto:tmmoore@ailbe.org)

## 1 None like God

*Pray Psalm 71.1-3.*

In You, O LORD, I put my trust;  
Let me never be put to shame.  
Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape;  
Incline Your ear to me, and save me.  
Be my strong refuge,  
To which I may resort continually;  
You have given the commandment to save me,  
For You *are* my rock and my fortress.

*Read Isaiah 46.1-7.*

*Reflect.*

1. How does God use the idea of “carrying” or “bearing” with respect to idols and Himself?
2. Why is trusting in idols a stupid idea?

*Meditate.*

In this section (chapters 46-48) God wants to emphasize both the reliability of His Word and His sovereign power to save.

The people of Judah and Jerusalem had been trusting in idols, in particular, those of the nations around them, and the nations they were trying to placate. Bel and Nebo (v. 1) were Babylonian gods, and so the people of God were tempted to trust in these to deliver them. But, as would be clear in due course, these gods – which had to be carried around from place to place (vv. 1, 2, 7) – would be taken captive by a nation greater than Babylon (v. 2).

God doesn’t need to be carried around. Indeed, He has borne His people, upholding and carrying them from the very beginning; and He will carry them through to the very end (vv. 3, 4). Israel did not make God – like pagan nations make their gods. God made them (v. 4), and He will deliver them in His time. There is no God like the God of Israel (v. 5). All other gods are just shiny things and gewgaws crafted by expert smiths, but completely lacking in power to save (vv. 6, 7).

The message to the people of Judah and Jerusalem was simple, and has been repeated now many times: As you see the Babylonians coming – a powerful and pagan nation – do not be tempted to call on their gods to deliver you. God has brought the Babylonians against His people to judge them for their idolatry in the past. They must not make the same mistake again. God will bear them up through the trial of captivity, and He will raise up an *anointed* servant to return them to their land. And beyond that, another *Anointed One* – God’s Servant and Messenger, will bring “that day” of salvation and restoration which God has been promising from the beginning.

So trust the Lord. Look to Him. Hold fast to Him. Hear and obey Him, and you will be saved.

*Prepare.*

1. Believers are often tempted to put their trust and hope in things rather than in God. Why do we do this? What would God say to us?

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2. God promises to carry us through to the end (v. 4). How can we use this promise to encourage and comfort one another?

3. How would you counsel a new believer to avoid the temptation to trust in things – false gods – rather than in God?

*O Lord our God, under the shadow of your wings let us hope; defend us and support us. You will bear us up when we are little, and even down to our gray hairs you will carry us. For our stability, when it is in you, is stability indeed; but when it is in ourselves, then it is all unstable. Our good lives forever with you, and when we turn from you with aversion, we fall into our own perversion. Let us now, O Lord, return that we be not overturned, because with you our good lives without blemish—for our good is you yourself.* Augustine (354-430 AD), *Confessions* 4.51.31

*Bear me up, today, O Lord, lest I stumble and fall! Bear me up so that I may...*

*Pray Psalm 71.*

As you pray, recall the Lord's many blessings. Praise and thank Him for His goodness, and recommit yourself to serving Him this day.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 71** (*Solid Rock: My Hope is Built on Nothing Less*)

In You, O Lord, I refuge claim; O let me never be ashamed.

In righteousness deliver me; incline Your ear and hear my plea.

*Refrain v. 3* A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;

My Rock and Fortress ever be!

From wicked hands redeem me, Lord, from all who wrest and break Your Word;  
My hope, my confidence from youth, my praise forever reaches You.

*Refrain*

While many see in me a sign, I shelter in Your strength will find.

Lord, fill my mouth with endless praise and with Your glory all my days.

*Refrain*

Lord, cast me not with age away; as strength decreases, with me stay.

My enemies against me speak; they lie in wait my soul to seek.

*Refrain*

O God be not too far from me; my ever-present Helper be!

Consume and shame my enemies; let them reproached and humbled be.

*Refrain*

But as for me my voice I raise to sing in hope and constant praise!

With saving grace my voice will swell Your never-ending grace to tell.

*Refrain*

O Lord, I praise Your righteousness Who me from youth have taught and blessed.

Forsake me not when I am old, 'til I Your mercies all have told!

*Refrain*

Your righteous deeds are great and true. O God, there is no one like You!

Though many troubles I have seen, You will revive my soul again!

*Refrain*

## 2 Former Things and Future

*Pray Psalm 105.1-4.*

Oh, give thanks to the LORD!  
Call upon His name;  
Make known His deeds among the peoples!  
Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him;  
Talk of all His wondrous works!  
Glory in His holy name;  
Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD!  
Seek the LORD and His strength;  
Seek His face evermore!

*Read Isaiah 46.8-13.*

*Reflect.*

1. Why does God call on His people to remember the things He has said in the past?
2. What seems to be the connection between righteousness, salvation, and God's glory?

*Meditate.*

The immediate prospects for the people of Judah and Jerusalem were not good. They had seen the nation of Israel overrun and carried away captive. And while God granted them a reprieve from the power of Assyria, the threat of Babylon loomed. The nation of Judah was diminished in numbers and strength. It could not hope to stand against Nebuchadnezzar.

And yet, God was making promises of a great salvation to be realized "in that day". Because His people can be so short-sighted, and forgetful of His blessings in the past, God called on them to "remember" and to "recall to mind" His former promises and faithfulness (vv. 8, 9). He is God. There is none like Him (v. 9). The promises He made in the past have not yet been entirely fulfilled, but He insists they shall not fail (v. 10).

When God calls Cyrus – "a bird of prey from the east" (v. 11) – to deliver them from Babylon, then they will know that His promised salvation "shall not be far off" (v. 13). Cyrus, God's *anointed* one, represents the faithfulness of God in two ways: God is faithful to return His people from their captivity in Babylon; and He is faithful to bring His righteousness and salvation to them, when He shall beautify them as His people (v. 13).

God continually calls His people to look back and see His faithfulness, look forward to His as-yet-unfulfilled promises, and look to Him as we look around at our present circumstances, trusting in His unfailing Word and love.

*Prepare.*

1. God's great promises to His people begin in Genesis 12.1-3. How do these promises apply to us today?
2. What are some ways that Christians can "remember" and "recall" all the ancient words and deeds of God? Why should we do so?
3. Meditate on Psalm 48.1-3. When God saves His people, His righteousness in them makes them a thing of beauty. How should we think about this with respect to our church?

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*See how he once again announces salvation to them and does not allow them to despair, lest they be overwhelmed by unrestrained sorrow and be moved too far away from the hope that they will be saved, if only they stop running. Cyril of Alexandria (375-444 AD), Commentary on Isaiah 4.3.46.12-13*

*Set Jesus before me today, O Lord, and all the great and precious promises that inhere in Him, so that I...*

*Pray Psalm 105.*

Thank God for His faithfulness. He has fulfilled all that He promised from long ago, and He has many exceeding great and precious promises yet in store for us (2 Pet. 1.4). How will you live toward those promises today?

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 105** (*Warrington: Give to Our God Immortal Praise*)

Give thanks unto the Lord Most High; call on His Name, before Him cry!

Make known His deeds in every land; sing praise for all the works of His hand.

Glory in God, rejoice in heart, all you who seek His holy part.

Him and His strength and presence seek; His works proclaim, His judgments speak.

You holy children of Abraham, You chosen ones of Jacob, stand!

He is our Lord, of wondrous worth; His judgments are in all the earth.

He will His covenant faithfully guard – His oath, the promise of His Word.

That which He to our fathers swore, He will perform forevermore!

He brought His people from Egypt alive, and made their joy and song revive.

He made the nations' land their own, and all the wealth that they had known.

To them He granted the promised land, the portion of His gracious hand.

Though they were few, and wandered far, He kept them close within His heart.

So let us all in our Savior confide, and in His holy Law abide.

Let us observe His glorious Word, and praise our sovereign, faithful Lord!

### 3 Babylon's Pride and Desolation

*Pray Psalm 79.8, 9.*

Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us!  
Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us,  
For we have been brought very low.  
Help us, O God of our salvation,  
For the glory of Your name;  
And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins,  
For Your name's sake!

*Read Isaiah 47.1-15.*

*Reflect.*

1. Why did God raise up the nation of Babylon? Why was He now promising to set them down?
2. How can you see that Babylon had set itself up as God?

*Meditate.*

This brief message to Babylon is really a word of comfort and hope to Israel. It comes to the Babylonians from God, the Lord of hosts, Who is the Redeemer and Holy One of His people (v. 4). This announcement to the Babylonians serves as a reminder to the people of Israel, who will shortly be carried away captive to Babylon for 70 years.

But Babylon will be judged. They were a proud and idolatrous nation, devoted to the pleasures gained from conquering other nations. They foolishly believed they could invade, subject, plunder, and destroy peoples – such as the people of Judah and Jerusalem – without any accountability, as though they were a law unto themselves (v. 10). They regarded themselves as the ultimate authority and power, but they would learn the hard way that God can quickly make “the Lady of Kingdoms” into a grieving widow and shamed servant (vv. 5, 7, 9, 2, 3).

The Babylonians trusted in their wise men, astrologers, and mediums. God will bring all those vain counselors to naught; none will be able to save Babylon from God's *anointed* one, Cyrus (vv. 12-15).

The people of Judah and Jerusalem should therefore take hope. Many of them will live to see the fall of Babylon, and to be returned to Jerusalem at the decree of Cyrus. All should trust in the Lord, hope in Him, continue in their calling as His people, and not lose hope.

*Prepare.*

1. Are we ever tempted to think we can get away with sin, and no one will know? Whenever we find ourselves thinking that way, what should we do?
2. If we are not to live as though we are a law unto ourselves, by what law should we live? The Law of God cannot save us, but can we be saved without it? Explain.
3. Imagine how shocking it must have been to the world of that day to see the “Lady of Kingdoms” reduced to rubble and shame. Is God still able to do such things with the nations of the world? Explain.

*In the other nations likewise, there are people who choose an iniquitous law, he says, but not all embrace this mode of conduct. For your part, you studied iniquity and you practiced the extreme of impiety as if it were the height of piety; therefore you will not*

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*enjoy salvation. As for us, instructed by their punishment, let us procure salvation, and may their destruction turn to our advantage!* Theodoret of Cyr (393-466 AD), *Commentary on Isaiah 14.47.15*

*Lord, keep me from thinking that I can do what I want, and that no one will know; instead, help me always to...*

*Pray Psalm 79.*

God can bring judgment on the nations of the world. He can bring judgment on His people as well. Pray that God will cleanse us of all worldly ways and desires, and set our hearts on Him in fear, love, and hope.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 79** (*Passion Chorale: O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*)

O God the nations all Your inheritance have spoiled!  
Your City have they ruined, Your temple they have soiled!  
Your servants' bodies all to the birds of heav'n are thrown;  
The flesh of all Your faithful the jaws of beasts now own.

The blood of faithful servants like water flows around;  
And none are there Your saints to commit into the ground.  
Our neighbors mock and scorn us: How long, O Lord, how long?  
How long will You be angry and scorn our mournful song?

Pour out, O Lord, Your wrath on all who deny Your Name;  
Who trust You not nor seek You, bring down to deepest shame!  
For they have with great rancor Your precious saints devoured;  
Lay waste their habitation at this late dreadful hour.

Why should the nations mock and say, "Where now is their God?"  
Let there be known among them harsh vengeance for our blood!  
Hear, Lord, our groans and sighing; preserve us by Your pow'r.  
For we are fairly dying each day and hour by hour.

Reproach those who reproach us with judgment sevenfold!  
Let thanks and praise to You by Your precious flock be told.  
We are Your sheep, O Savior, we thank You all our days.  
Look on us with Your favor as we declare Your praise.

## 4 For God's Name and Praise

*Pray Psalm 33:1-5.*

Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous!  
For praise from the upright is beautiful.  
Praise the LORD with the harp;  
Make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings.  
Sing to Him a new song;  
Play skillfully with a shout of joy.  
For the word of the LORD *is* right,  
And all His work *is done* in truth.  
He loves righteousness and justice;  
The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.

*Read Isaiah 48:1-11.*

*Reflect.*

1. God charges His people with having profaned His Name. How did they do that?
2. Why does God defer His anger and restrain Himself from destroying His people?

*Meditate.*

In essence, God's charge against His people was that they didn't take His Word as seriously as He did. They claimed to know Him; they even swore by His Name (v. 1), but not according to truth, and not in the righteousness He required. They leaned on God – that is, they looked to Him for help and for their daily provision – but they were merely using Him, and not honoring Him for His greatness and love (v. 2).

God had spoken to them clearly about what He would do, so that, when it came to pass, they would have confidence in Him and all His Word (v. 3). But they were stiff-necked, and they credited their idols with the blessings God provided (vv. 4, 5). They knew what God had spoken, and they knew what they were doing as they continued in their idolatry. God had spoken many mysteries to them, promises and truths reserved for later days, but they would not listen. They closed their ears to His promises and clung to their idols (vv. 6-8).

Is it any wonder God was angry with them? But He would not let His anger go full circle. For the praise of His Name and the glory of His Word, God would restrain His anger, limiting His judgment against Judah and Jerusalem to 70 years' captivity in Babylon. He would not cut them off, but would use this time to refine His people, and prepare them for the greater mysteries of salvation yet to come (vv. 9-11).

*Prepare.*

1. Throughout the Scriptures, we see God's Word declared to His people, then fulfilled. Can you give some examples?
2. Much of what God has declared in His Word has not yet been fulfilled. Can you give some examples of that?
3. God expects us to trust His Word, to "lean" on Him and wait for Him to fulfill all that He has spoken. What does this require of us as His people today?

*"I have restrained my wrath for the sake of my name," and I will establish my glorious deeds over you lest you be destroyed....*

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*We see in this the greatness of God's love; he mixes in with unhappy events glorious things lest they be totally destroyed. Cyril of Alexandria (375-444 AD), Commentary on Isaiah 4.3.48.5-11*

*Lead me by Your promises today, O Lord, especially that I might...*

*Pray Psalm 33.*

Praise God for what He has done in the past, just as He said in His Word. And seek His mercy and grace for whatever your needs may be today.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 33** (*Truro: Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*)

Sing with rejoicing in the Lord, for praise becomes His righteous ones!

With harps and songs raise grateful words, and let new songs of praise be sung!

Joyfully shout! His Word is true; He does His work in faithfulness.

His love prevails the whole world through; the Lord loves truth and righteousness.

God spoke and heaven came to be, and all its hosts His Spirit wrought.

He heaps the waters of the sea; the deeps their dwelling place are taught.

Let all below now fear the Lord; let all in awe of Him abide!

The worlds exist by Jesus' Word; let all on earth in Him confide.

He nullifies the nations' plans; forever stands His sov'reign Word.

All they are blessed who with Him stand – the chosen people of the Lord.

God from His throne looks down on men; He knows our works and made our hearts.

Let not Your Church, let none depend on strength or skill or human arts.

God watches those who fear His Name, who hope upon His grace and love;

He keeps their souls from death and shame who trust in Him Who reigns above.

God is our Helper and our Shield; upon us let Your grace descend!

We hope in You; to You we yield; we trust in Jesus to the end.

## 5 From Ancient Times

*Pray Psalm 147.1.*

Praise the LORD!

For *it is* good to sing praises to our God;

For *it is* pleasant, *and* praise is beautiful.

*Read Isaiah 48.12-16.*

*Reflect.*

1. What seems to be God's purpose in these verses?
2. What does He want His people to do?

*Meditate.*

God continues through Isaiah to urge His people to trust in Him. He calls them to listen to His words (v. 12), and to remember that He is before all things and all things consist in Him (vv. 12, 13). As He has "called" Israel to be His people, and so they were, so He "calls" the whole creation and it will "stand up together". All creation obeys God's Word, even the king of Babylon.

There is power in God's Word, and God's Word is coming through Isaiah to comfort and encourage His people in the face of their captivity. After He has satisfied His wrath against His rebellious people, God assures them that the man He loves (Cyrus) will come and do God's pleasure against Babylon. This will include releasing the captives to return to Jerusalem, and to wait for the coming day of salvation (vv. 14, 15).

Again at the end of this passage, Isaiah calls the people to hear God, Who has spoken to His people from the beginning (cf. Ps. 147.19, 20). This *inclusio* returns us to the thought of verse 11, and marks this section off as a self-contained unit. God has been with His people from the beginning, and they know that His Word is reliable and sure (v. 16a).

The second part of verse 16 is, I believe, deliberately enigmatic. The NKJV has "And now the Lord GOD and His Spirit have sent Me." However, in the Hebrew *His Spirit* is the last word (one word in Hebrew) of the sentence, and it follows the verb *sent*, which is singular, not plural, as NKJV suggests. Moreover, the form of the verb is *past tense* – usage sometimes referred to as "prophetic perfect", in which a future event is pictured as being so certain that it is treated as if already accomplished. And, while we might expect the Hebrew to add the sign of the direct object ( **אֶת** ) if *His Spirit* were indeed to be understood as an object of the verb *sent*, still, a literal reading, following the Hebrew word order, would be more like, "and now the Lord Yahweh has sent Me, and His Spirit."

Is Isaiah looking forward to the day when the Lord sends His greater Anointed One, and His Spirit, to accomplish all that He has promised His people? This would be in line with what God has been doing throughout this section (chs. 40ff), and would keep the hope of His people focused beyond Babylon and Cyrus to "that Day" yet to come.

*Prepare.*

1. In what sense are God's people *called* by Him? From what? To what? With what in mind?
2. God is sovereign over all of creation and all of history. Why should we find this to be a comforting notion?
3. What does it mean to *listen* to God and to *hear* Him? How can you know when you have actually heard

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God speaking to you?

*When all things were made by the Father, he [the Son] was there with him, in whom the Son rejoiced when he said, I am he who always was with the Father and in the Father and never was without the Father, and who now speaks, and due to the weakness of the flesh I assumed, I say that "the Lord has sent me and his Spirit." In this short verse we are shown the mystery of the Trinity. Jerome (347-420 AD), Commentary on Isaiah 13.16*

*Teach me Your will, O God, and help me to accept and submit to it, so that I...*

*Pray Psalm 147.*

Give thanks to God for all the ways He is sovereign, and for His giving His Word to you.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 147** (*St. Ann: Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*)

Praise God, for it is good to sing loud praises to the Lord!

With joy our songs of praise we bring to God and to His Word.

The Lord builds up His Church and He His people gathers in.

The broken hearts He tenderly repairs and heals their sin.

The stars He counts, He knows the name of every chosen soul;

His pow'r is great, and great His fame Who understands us whole.

The humble God exalts above; the wicked He casts down.

Sing thanks to this great God of love; let songs of praise abound.

He brings refreshing rain to earth and feeds the beasts so dear.

He puts in man's strength naught of worth, but loves those who God fear.

O praise your God, Jerusalem, O Zion, praise the Lord!

He strengthens those who trust in Him with blessings from His Word.

Around us He has spread His peace; our borders are secure.

His bounty daily shall increase; His grace to us is sure!

His Word to earth runs to and fro to carry out His will;

He brings the rain, He sends the snow, and none can keep Him still.

His Word He to His Church bestows – His promises and Law.

No other nation God thus knows: praise Him with songs of awe!

## 6 Peace, No Peace

*Pray Psalm 46.1.*

God is our refuge and strength,  
A very present help in trouble.

*Read Isaiah 48.17-22.*

*Reflect.*

1. These are some of the most passionate verses we have encountered thus far in the book of Isaiah. How do you see that?
2. This passage breaks down into two parts, which we might label “If Only” and “Now Therefore.” Where is the dividing point?

*Meditate.*

Many pastors today seem to think that teaching God’s people to keep His commandments is not something they should do. The Law of God in general is not held in high regard by Christians. We seem to fear that if we insist on the Law, we’re recommending a salvation by works. Did Jesus (Matt. 5.17-19)? Or Paul (Rom. 3.31)? Or John (1 Jn. 5.1-3)?

The commandments of God were given to a *saved* people, so that they might fully enjoy the benefits of their saved condition, as God intended. If only Israel had obeyed the Law, and kept it as God commanded, how many blessings would He have poured out on them! The Law was given *to profit* God’s people, not to oppress them (v. 17). It shows them the way they *should go*, not the way to be saved (v. 17). Keeping the commandments yields peace *like a river* and *righteousness like the waves of the sea* (v. 18). By obeying the commandments of God, His people would have ensured offspring *like the sand, like the grains of sand* (v. 19), and their name *would not have been cut off* from the Presence of God (v. 19).

If only God’s people, who had come to know His saving mercy and grace, had kept His commandments! If only we who are His saved people today would do so.

Verses 20-22 become especially urgent, as the Lord commands His people to go from Babylon as His redeemed people, His chosen servant (v. 20). They have not yet been carried away there, where they will experience 70 years of captivity. But already God wants them to be thinking about the day of His deliverance at the hands of His anointed one, Cyrus. God will meet their needs, as He did in the wilderness (v. 21). But all those who reject His counsel and fail to obey Him will die in their sins without peace (v. 22). God has spoken; now therefore, people of God, be about His work!

God has spoken to us; now therefore, let us be diligent to obey.

*Prepare.*

1. Why should we expect keeping the commandments of God to lead to abundant blessing?
2. We’re not saved by keeping the Law (Eph. 2.8, 9); but we’re not saved without keeping it (Rom. 8.5-9). Explain.
3. Do you think God is as urgent about our keeping His commandments today as He was in Isaiah’s day? Explain.

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*The Spirit is called a river, too, just as the Father said, "Behold, I come down on you like a river of peace, and like a stream overflowing the glory of the Gentiles." And who can doubt that the Son of God is the river of life from whom the streams of eternal life flowed forth? Ambrose of Milan (333-397 AD), On the Holy Spirit 1.16.180-81*

*Let Your Spirit fill me and overflow from me today, O Lord, so that I...*

*Pray Psalm 46.*

Use this psalm to lead you into the Lord as your place of shelter and refreshment. Seek the filling of His Spirit (Jn. 7.37-39) so that you might be able to refresh the people you will meet today. Ask the Lord to give you many opportunities to exalt Him today.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 46** (*St. Chrysostom: We Have Not Known Thee As We Ought*)

God is our refuge and our strength; He is our help in times of need.  
Thus though the earth beneath us should change, the sea consume the mountain range;  
Waters may roar with raging speed; yet God will rescue us at length.

God's everlasting, joyous grace gladdens the city where He dwells.  
Safely in Him, we will not be moved; when morning dawns, His love will be proved.  
Fears and distresses Jesus dispels for His beloved, chosen race.

Kingdoms arise and rage and roar, threat'ning the earth with sore distress;  
Nations may fall, earth melt away, His Word is yet our hope and stay.  
God is among us, ever to bless; He is our stronghold evermore.

Come see the works of God's Right Hand! He breaks the nations of the earth,  
Shatters their foolish weapons and pride, sets all their sinful strength aside;  
Them He will show His infinite worth as they before His judgment stand.

Rest in the Lord and be at peace, all who are mired in sore travail:  
Lift up our God, praise Jesus our Lord; proclaim to all the earth His Word!  
God is our stronghold, never to fail: thus may our hope and joy increase!

## 7 Babylon in God's Plan

*Pray Psalm 118.1.*

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!  
For His mercy endures forever.

*Review Isaiah chapters 46-48.*

*Reflect.*

1. How did Babylon fit into God's plan for His people?
2. Why did God humble Babylon? What did He want His people to learn from this?

*Meditate.*

The people of Judah and Jerusalem knew that Babylon was growing in power. They also knew that Isaiah had prophesied that Babylon was coming to destroy Jerusalem and to take the people captive in a foreign land. They had witnessed his prophecies come to pass against the northern kingdom of Israel and the Assyrians, and so they had every reason to believe that what he proclaimed concerning them would be equally certain. The prospect of this must have been frightening. Can you imagine trying to work or sleep or carry on normal activities, all the while wondering when this calamity would come to pass?

But it was not God's purpose to torment His people. Yes, He would bring His wrath and judgment against them because they had preferred the idols of surrounding nations to trusting in Him. But this would be a temporary season of discipline. Isaiah spoke words of comfort to the people, assuring them that Babylon was merely serving God's purposes; and when He had finished with them, they would be humbled for their prideful ways by God's anointed servant, Cyrus, king of Persia.

The thrust of these chapters is to encourage the people of God to trust in His Word, turn from their idolatrous ways, and cling to Him and His promises. From ancient days God had spoken to His people, and His Word had never failed. Israel must believe the same in their day, even as they prepared for their great trial in Babylon.

God promised to return His people to Jerusalem. Beyond that, He promised a salvation that would come from His Anointed One, by the work of His Spirit, in which deliverance and restoration would come to His people as never before. When they saw the work of Cyrus in delivering them from Babylon, then they would remember that a greater day of salvation was yet to come. Just how that day would work out, and what lay beyond even that, Isaiah will unfold in the remaining chapters of his book.

*Prepare.*

1. God called His people to repent of their sins. What is repentance, and is it still necessary today?
2. Babylon's great sin was its pride, believing itself to be God. Read Daniel 4. Nebuchadnezzar embodied the pride of Babylon. But God dealt with him differently than he did the nation as a whole. Why?
3. What's your primary takeaway from Isaiah 46-48?

*Justly, therefore, does Isaiah reproach the Jews that, if they had not defrauded themselves of the benefit of teaching, nothing that was profitable for their salvation would have been hidden from them. And if these things were said of the Law, that the Lord, by*

*Concerning Babylon: Isaiah 46-48*

*means of it, "taught his people profitably," what shall we say of the Gospel, in which everything that is profitable for us is very fully explained? John Calvin (1509-1564 AD), Commentary on Isaiah 48:17*

*Help me to hear You speaking to me in Your Word, O Lord, that I might know You truly and ...*

*Pray Psalm 118.*

Let this psalm lead you to count the Lord's blessings to you, and to renew you in your trust and confidence in His Word.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 118** (*St. George's Windsor: Come, Ye Thankful People, Come*)

Thank the Lord, His love endures! All to whom His love is sure,  
all who fear Him day by day, let them thanks and praise now say!  
Out of my distress I cry; He will hear me from on high.  
He will free me from all fear. What can man do to me here?

For the Lord stands next to me; He will give me victory!  
Over all who hate my life I will triumph through the strife!  
In His grace I refuge find; in His steadfast love so kind.  
Trust not princes, trust not men – Christ shall be our haven then!

Praise the Lord, in whose great Name all His foes are brought to shame!  
Though they swarmed on every side, in God's Name He dashed their pride!  
Like a fire His judgment goes to consume His ardent foes;  
Though they pushed against Him hard, He was rescued by the Lord.

In the Savior we are strong! He is all our strength and song!  
To His grace now raise your voice; in His righteousness rejoice!  
For the Lord does valiantly; we shall live eternally.  
Praise His works with all your breath, you whom He redeems from death.

All who know Christ's righteousness His great Name now thank and bless!  
Though His gate full righteous is, He our saving mercy is.  
Cast aside and left alone, Christ is now our Cornerstone!  
God has made His Son and Word our salvation: Praise the Lord!

Blessed are they who in His Name come and Jesus' grace proclaim.  
God His light upon us shines in the Savior's sacrifice.  
Praise and thanks to You, O Lord; we extol Your holy Word!  
Thanks to You for You are good! Thanks to our great loving God!

*Concerning Babylon: Isaiah 46-48*

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. God's people had abundant evidence of the faithfulness of His Word. Yet they had a hard time listening to Him. Why? What interferes with our hearing and obeying the Word of God today?
2. Babylon was humbled because of pride. Why does God treat pride so harshly? What are the prideful saying by boasting in their own strength or accomplishments? How does pride diminish the glory of God?
3. God comforts His people even when He has to discipline them. Explain.
4. The deliverance God's people would experience at the hand of Cyrus is a type of a greater deliverance to come. In what ways?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from Isaiah 46-48? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.