



Preaching Through The Bible, Michael Eaton

Isaiah

Part 65

Who Carries Whom? (46:1-13)

• No point arguing with God

1. All of our pagan gods prove to be useless

• Modern gods will be just the same

• The people run to escape Babylon with their idols

2. False gods have to be carried; the true God carries us when it is necessary

• No other god can carry us in this way

• False gods do not hear our prayers for salvation

3. Isaiah appeals for faith in the people of Judah

There is no point in arguing with God about his rule of the world. God is God! He will achieve his will regardless of what we think! Isaiah pictures the day when Cyrus is threatening Babylon.

1. All of our pagan gods prove to be useless. There are of course pagan gods that 'modern people' trust in! The gods of Babylon proved to be useless, and the modern gods will be the same.

¹Bel [the God of Babylon, also known as Marduk] has collapsed; Nebo [who was thought to be Bel's son!] is crumbling.

The peoples' idols belong to animals, to beasts of burden. The images that are carried along are loaded, a burden for the weary animals.

²They have collapsed; they are suddenly crumbling, unable to rescue the burden, they themselves go off into captivity.

The people are running to escape Babylon, carrying their idols.

2. False gods have to be carried; the true God carries us when it is necessary. Isaiah says:

³Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all you who remain of the house of Israel, you who have been carried as a load since you were conceived, you who have been carried since your birth.

⁴Even to your old age, I am the same; even to the time of grey hairs I myself will sustain you.

I have made you and I myself will carry you; I will sustain you and rescue you.'

No other god can carry us in this way.

⁵'To whom will you compare me or put on level terms with me? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared?

⁶Some 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 even worship it.

⁷They 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.'

The false gods do not hear us when we pray for salvation.

3. Isaiah appeals for faith in the people of Judah. We must remember that in the eighth century BC (Isaiah's time) the people were steeped in idolatry. That was why they were about to go to Babylon. Did they want lots of idols? Then Babylon was just the place for them! But Isaiah makes a last appeal. They ought to remember the way God had been faithful to them for centuries of their history.

⁸Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels

*⁹Remember the former things, those of long ago;
For I am God, and there is no other;
For I am God, and there is none like me.'*

- Pharaoh
- Joshua and Gideon
- Assyrians

What are 'the former things'? They are surely the countless episodes in their story when God has shown himself faithful. Can they not remember the deliverances from Pharaoh, the defeat of their enemies under Joshua and Gideon and others, the taking of Jerusalem by David? Can they not remember the time, not so long back, when the Assyrians were even at the gates of Jerusalem but God intervened? Has God ever been unfaithful to them? Can they not see their own history?

- They will see the predictions come true – Cyrus will come

And soon, as the story of Judah goes forward, they will see again and again that the predictions of Isaiah are true. They will see it happening. Cyrus will come.

*¹⁰'I make known the outcome from the beginning,
I make known from beforehand things which
have not yet been done.
I say: My plan will stand,
and I will do all that I please.'*

*¹¹From the east I summon a bird of prey [Cyrus!];
from a far-off land, a man to fulfil my purpose.
What I have said, that I will certainly bring about;
what I have planned, for sure I will do it.'*

- Cyrus is just a stage in the arrival of God's salvation

They ought to see also that the predicted coming of Cyrus is but one stage along the way to God's sending salvation to the world not through Cyrus but through Israel!

*¹²'Listen to me, you stubborn-hearted,
you who are far from righteousness.'*

*¹³I am bringing my righteousness
near, it is not far away;
and my salvation will not be delayed.
I will grant salvation to Zion,
my beauty to Israel.'*

- Salvation will come to Israel, despite themselves

- All who believe will experience salvation

They are extraordinarily blind at the moment, but they will see it all in due course. The very people who are being exiled, the very people who do not like the idea of a rescue by Cyrus: it is for those very people that God is at work. Soon there will be exile. Then there will be Cyrus. Before that there will be salvation. It will come to Israel, despite themselves. Salvation is coming. They can know it now if they will but believe. And all who do believe will experience salvation. Even gentiles will – when they believe in Jesus – become part of God's Israel.

- Much of God's word to Isaiah has been abundantly confirmed

Much of God's word to Isaiah has been abundantly confirmed. **Babylon's gods proved to be useless.** Israel was compelled eventually to turn away from idolatry. There were many problems in Israel when Jesus came to them, but blatant worship of foreign gods was not one of them. Years in exile had cured them of that! They discovered that all the Babylonian gods were simply bits of wood that have to be carried. God's word proved true. Cyrus did come – more than a century after Isaiah had spoken of him. The promise is still there: 'Listen . . . I will grant salvation . . .' is still God's word to us. But now the Saviour has come. He was born in Israel. He is risen from the dead. Jesus is his name.

- Now the Saviour has come - Jesus