

The Prophets

Lesson #18

Isaiah 40:1-48:22

Outline

I. **Consolation (40:1-66:24)**

- A. The greatness of God (40:1-48:22).
 1. In releasing Judah from captivity (40:1-11).
 2. In relation to the creation (40:12-31).
 3. In comparison to idols (41:1-29).
 4. In providing His Servant (42:1-25).
 5. In restoring Israel (43:1-44:28).
 6. In using Cyrus (45:1-25).
 7. In judging Babylon (46:1-47:15).
 8. In releasing Judah from Babylon (48:1-22).

Notes

The Goodness Of God In Releasing Judah From Captivity (40:1-11)

- Pardon through grace (40:1-2).
 - In former times the prophetic voice had been primarily one of doom, but now it is one of comfort.
 - Jerusalem stands for the surviving remnant, for at the time in view the physical city will lie in ruins and the people will be in captivity.
- Make preparation (40:3-5).
 - The voice does not speak literally of road building, but figuratively of the hearts of the people.
 - They are to remove every barrier and fill every hindering depression, so that they will be prepared for a new relationship with God.
 - All peoples will marvel when God raises up Cyrus to deliver His people out of Babylon.
- The enduring word (40:6-8).
 - What is going to be done will not be accomplished by human achievement or by fleshly power.
 - Whether Judah in her vaunting pride and independence from God, or heathen Babylon, or a present day nation, every people will wither, die and fade away when the breath of God blows upon them.
- Declare the tidings (40:9-11).
 - Fulfillment of this promise is so certain that the prophet speaks as if it were already accomplished.
 - With His arm, that is, His strength and power, He both gathers and then protects and provides for them.

The Goodness Of God In Relation To The Creation (40:12-31

- God and creation (40:12-14).
 - The prophet begins by speaking of God and His creation, not to emphasize the magnitude and greatness of the universe, but to show by comparison how exceedingly much greater is its Creator.
 - The creation is the product of God's own purpose, plan and execution. He had no counsellor.
- God and the nations (40:15-17).
 - The nations are utterly insignificant and powerless in comparison to God. This, however, does not mean that He had no concern for them.
 - Nations have risen, exulted in their glory and vanished; but God and His power remain infinite and eternal.
- God and the idols (40:18-21).
 - With keen irony the prophet describes the idol as a workman's casting overlaid with gold by the goldsmith and decorated by the silver-smith.
 - The absurdity of the whole comparison is evident in the fact the gold, silver and wood fashioned into the idol have been created by the infinite God.
- God and the princes of earth (40:22-25).
 - God sets above the circle or dome of the earth and is described as stretching out the heavens as one would spread out a tent.
 - There is no being or creature in the universe with whom God can be compared; He is in a class all His own.
- God and the glorious assurance (40:26-31).
 - At times we may feel that God has forgotten and that He does not care. When this feeling comes, the discouraged one can lift up their eyes and see a God of infinite power and a Father equally infinite in love.
 - At the news of the decree of Cyrus, those who have waited for God will soar to heights of joy as they anticipate returning to their homeland.

Isaiah 41:1-29

- God addresses the nations (41:1-7).
 - In accordance with His righteous standard, God will raise up a deliverer; He will stir up Cyrus to serve His righteous cause.
 - In his uninterrupted conquest Cyrus pursues a course which he has never before taken. He will act with such speed and completeness that there will be no need to return.
- God addresses Israel (41:8-20).
 - In this word of encouragement God reminds the people of the great honor which had been bestowed upon the nation.

- Like chaff winnowed and carried away by a strong wind, the heathen nations will be scattered throughout the earth regardless of their previous position.
- God challenges the idols (41:21-29).
 - In the second stage of the court trial, God now challenges the idols themselves.
 - At the end of the trial, there was no one to accept the challenge, no man to answer and no prophet of the idols to offer counsel. They answer not a word.

Isaiah 42:1-25

- God's ideal Servant (42:1-9).
 - The Servant has been chosen by God for a redemptive work, and God's soul will delight in Him as He carries out His work.
 - God is Himself the guarantee that what He has foretold will be accomplished; His name is His bond.
- A new song of praise to God (42:10-17).
 - The new relationship to God through the new covenant, which includes Gentiles as well as Jews, calls for a new or fresh song (cf. Revelation 5:9-10).
 - Because of their failure and complete defeat at Jehovah's hand, both the idols and their worshipers will fall into disgrace; ultimately to pass away.
- Israel will be punished (42:18-25).
 - As God's servant, Israel had been given a divine responsibility to represent Him to the world, as God's messenger he had been sent to deliver words from God to the inhabitants of earth.
 - But Israel had been both blind and deaf. They were without excuse, for while his ears were open, his heart was not; he did not hear, grasp and understand.

Isaiah 43:1-44:28

- A renewed promise to Israel of deliverance and protection (43:1-7).
 - There will be many trials before the people; but though they should pass through affliction and adversity, God will be with them.
 - Because Israel is honorable and precious to Him, God, in His love for them, places them above all nations, giving up others in exchange for them.
- A fresh challenge to Israel and the nations (43:8-13).
 - The Lord seeks to open Israel's eyes and ears by pointing out the wondrous works He has performed in and through them.
 - When the people find themselves in exile in Babylon, they will realize that there is salvation in none other.

- God's power to remove obstacles in redeeming His people (43:14-21).
 - The ships of which the Babylonians are so very proud will become the means of their humiliating flight before their enemies.
 - By His providence and power He will provide a path for the exiles' return journey and will supply water for their thirst.
 - The people formed by God for Himself will be brought forth that they might praise Him; this should ever be the aim of His people.
- Israel's indifference and God's grace (43:22-28).
 - God has power to deliver and provide for their needs, but they had not called upon Him. Instead they have become weary of His ways and the exertion necessary to serve Him.
 - God could do good for Israel only if the people turned from their sins. Forgiveness comes through faith in Him and not through ceremonial sacrifices performed as mere formalities.
- Israel's blessings in spite of the curse (44:1-5).
 - In sharp contrast to the ban and curse in the previous chapter, He now pronounces a blessing upon them, one so rich that it will attract the heathen.
 - As water poured out upon a dry and arid land brings life to its dormant seed, so the pouring out of God's Spirit will bring spiritual life and blessings.
- Israel's King -- the only God (44:6-8).
 - God is eternal, omnipotent and the complete Master of His universe. His claim is uncontested; besides Him there is no other.
 - There is no stronghold, fortress or place of refuge other than God; only He is permanent.
- The shame and folly of idolatry (44:9-20).
 - The idols are as empty as their makers. In their blindness and ignorance they will be put to shame.
 - All that God created on the earth was intended for man's good. But when man made it an object of worship, he made it an abomination, misusing that which had been entrusted to him.
- Pardon and praise (44:21-23).
 - God will not forget the one He formed to be His servant and to carry out His purpose.
 - There is little doubt that vs. 22 looks beyond the redemption of the nation to the ransom price that God would pay for the complete blotting out of sins.
- Cyrus the deliverer (44:24-28).
 - Before naming the coming deliverer, God again declares His own greatness. In His greatness He had formed Israel; in His love He had redeemed him.

- Cyrus will act as God's shepherd, seeing that Jerusalem and the temple are rebuilt and His flock restored to their proper homeland.

Isaiah 45:1-25

- God addresses Cyrus as to his mission (45:1-8).
 - When Isaiah uses the term "righteousness" in connection with Cyrus, it is the righteousness of God and His purpose which is in view. Cyrus is simply an instrument in God's service; the emphasis is on God's carrying out His plan through him.
 - God will provide Cyrus with the essentials necessary to conquer nations and to allow Israel to return.
- God's response to Israel's complaint (45:9-13).
 - The complaint is about God's raising Cyrus, a heathen, to deliver Israel or about handling Israel as He has.
 - As Creator, God directs their actions and gives the orders; He is neither directed in His actions, nor does He take orders.
- The effect of Israel's redemption upon the Gentiles (45:14-17).
 - The Gentiles will offer themselves and what they have, they will go after and bow down to Israel, because of the God who is in the midst of Israel.
 - The everlasting salvation which emanates from God will bear His likeness; it too will be endless. Israel will not be put to shame nor confounded.
 - With their return under the command of Cyrus the way was being opened for the full realization of the promises in this passage.
- God's purpose in creation (45:18-25).
 - In vss 18-19, God appeals to His two great witnesses: creation and revelation. His power in these two realms proves His claim to sole deity.
 - The Lord challenges the heathen to declare something and then bring forth its fulfillment (cf. 41:22-23; 43:9).
 - The return under Cyrus pointed to a greater and more glorious deliverance and redemption under the Messiah.

Isaiah 46:1-47:15

- The shame of Babylon's gods (46:1-2).
 - The name "Bel," which is cognate with the Canaanite term "Baal" and means "lord" or "possessor," was given an as honorific title to the Babylonian god Marduk. It gradually became the common name for Marduk.
 - Being unable to deliver the people, the idols must go into captivity. The Cyrus Cylinder depicts the conqueror accepting Babylon's gods and paying homage to them.

- The glory of Israel's God (46:3-11).
 - The heathen idols must be borne upon beasts, whereas God has borne Israel from their birth.
 - And even now, He is not ready to give them up, but will carry them to a venerable old age.
 - Wavering Israel, or those among Israel who waver in choosing between God and the idols, are charged with rebellion against their sovereign King.
- Salvation is drawing near (46:12-13).
 - In their state of transgression and stubbornness of heart, they will suffer God's righteous judgment -- the destruction of their city and temple, and captivity in Babylon.
 - Accompanying His righteousness is His salvation, which shall not tarry. Both righteousness and salvation are the provision of God, not idols.
- The humiliation of Babylon (47:1-7).
 - The undressing of Babylon and the exposing of the proud woman's body will be most humiliating.
 - The Lord explains the reason for the severity of His judgment against Babylon. He was indignant against Israel because of their disregard for Him and for the dignity of their calling.
- Babylon's blasphemous claims and their consequences (47:8-11).
 - Widowhood and the loss of children are great calamities in the life of any woman. The expression is used metaphorically of one who is left helpless and lonely, reduced to the status of a slave.
 - What Babylon deems wisdom and knowledge has actually caused her heart to turn aside from true wisdom and knowledge.
- The failure of Babylon's magical arts (47:12-15).
 - Her wise men had not attended to these subjects as amusing pastimes, but had labored as seriously to learn their secrets as do devoted students of a science.
 - Throughout history man has desired to look into and know the future. All occult systems are efforts toward this end, but this prerogative belongs to God.
 - Unable to save others, the occultists are also powerless to save themselves from the flame, and they shall all perish like dry grass or chaff in a blaze.

Isaiah 48:1-22

- A rebuke of Israel's hypocrisy and stubbornness (48:1-11).
 - The exiles claim citizenship and residence in the holy city, Jerusalem, where God dwells, giving it the quality of holiness.

- As God's people who had heard the words of His prophets and had seen them brought to pass, Israel should have been anxious to confess God and teach this truth to the heathen.
- God defers His anger for His own sake; to make sure that His name will not be defiled, dishonored or desecrated by the heathen. He will not destroy Israel as they deserve.
- God's faithfulness (48:12-16).
 - When time began, He was there; and He will be there when time fades away into eternity; in between He has never ceased to be and to be in control.
 - The reference to loving Cyrus does not signify the love which brings salvation, but it means that God saw fit to choose Cyrus to faithfully work His will and pleasure upon Babylon.
- What might have been and what will be (48:17-22).
 - From the heart of God there now bursts forth a cry expressing His holy desire for His people -- not captivity and affliction, but blessings.
 - Leaving the land of their captivity with singing, Israel will enjoy God's protective care and provision for their needs throughout the journey home (cf. 43:19; Ezra 8:21-23).