

ISAIAH 46: THE SOVEREIGN GOD WILL SAVE

OUTLINE OF ISAIAH 46

- I. Babylon's idols cannot save but must be saved (46:1-2)
- II. God can save and promises to save his people (46:3-4)
- III. God cannot be compared with the idols of the nations (46:5-7)
- IV. God is utterly sovereign (46:8-11)
- V. God will bring salvation to Israel (46:12-13)

Truths about God from Isaiah 46

- God has protected his people since the beginning.
- God will always protect his people.
- God answers his people.
- God saves his people from troubles.
- God is patient with rebels.
- God is the only God.
- God is unique.
- God knows the future.
- God declares the future.
- God will accomplish all that he has planned.
- God will transform and deliver his people.

“But does this passage speak to us at all? It certainly does, because many contemporary persons are carrying a whole host of gods, and the burden is killing them.

I am referring to all the things that have come to replace God in our lives—perhaps a job, a house, a car, a love relationship, or even one's self-image. The pagans personalized all these, but they were seeking in the gods what we seek in these. These are the things that give us our sense of identity and meaning in life. Yet many of us are suffering from burnout or breakdown because we have all these things to carry and they have become too much for us. We need them for what they do for us, but the burdens they impose are devastatingly heavy. Instead of our using them, they use us, and the results are all around us. To escape them, we must have increasingly stimulating and exciting diversions, but then the diversions themselves become a burden” (Oswalt 2003: 524-25).

“We truly begin to experience God's carrying of us when we take our hands off these things and relinquish them into God's hands. And why should we not? The reason is that we are afraid—afraid that God will do a worse job of directing our lives than we are able to do” (Oswalt 2003: 524-25).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

What is the foundation of God's promises to care for his people?

Paul said, “The God who made the world...is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything?” (Acts 17:24-25). How do attempts to serve God dishonor him?

What limits God's sovereignty? Does human choice?

SOURCES CITED

- John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, NICOT, 1998.
John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, NIVAC, 2003.
Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, New American Commentary, 2009.
Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, The Bible Speaks Today, 1996.

NOTES

“Overall, the unit functions to sum up the arguments that God is superior to the pagan gods in every way, but especially in his ability to deliver from the tragedies of life” (Oswalt 1998: 227).

“The development of this part of the book can be perplexing at times. There is a good deal of repetition. It seems as though the text keeps doubling back on itself. But each time a particular theme is returned to, something new is added to the treatment of it, and often there is a link word or phrase to indicate what exactly it is that is now to be picked up and taken further. Like a good pastor, Isaiah returns to basic issues again and again because he knows that it is around these issues that the fundamental, daily struggles of the believer’s life are lost or won. This whole chapter is in effect an elaboration of the last two lines of 45:20, ‘Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save.’ The key link word is *carry*” (Webb 1996: 187).

vv1-2 “The worshipers, instead of being saved by their gods, have to save the gods!” (Oswalt 2003: 522).

vv1-2 “The commentators then proclaim that this was definitely one prediction that was made before the fact, since it turned out to be incorrect. The reasoning here is astonishing: all predictions that the Bible says came true exactly as predicted are false, because they were obviously written after the fact, while all predictions that did not occur as predicted are true, because they were written before the fact! Yet this whole part of the book specifically hangs the Lord’s unique godhood on his inimitable ability to tell the future through his prophets. If this book had actually been produced by the kind of process that many commentators envision, then the presence of these materials in the book is inexplicable. The editors, who supposedly altered so much other material to make it appear that God could predict the future, would certainly have altered this section if they had sensed any problem” (Oswalt 1998: 228-29).

vv3-4 “When in all that time had they ever carried their God? Never! From the very beginning of their existence as a nation, from the hour of their birth as a nation, God had been carrying them!” (Oswalt 1998: 230).

vv3-4 “Normally, we expect that as children reach maturity, they do not need to be carried any longer. Furthermore, there usually comes a time when the child must begin to carry the aged parent. This is where God transcends the imagery. There will never come a time when we outgrow our dependence on God. We are as dependent on God in old age as we were when we were infants (Ps. 71:9, 18). Nor will there ever be a time when a doddering old grandfather-God will somehow need to lean on us, and we will need to find a young, virile god for a new age. He is not subject to history; in every age he is the unchanging *I am he*” (Oswalt 1998: 230).

vv3-7 “There it is in a nutshell; false religion is based on works, true religion on grace. So it has always been and so it always will be” (Webb 1996: 188).

vv5-7 “Obviously to [Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel], the thought of worshiping something you had provided the metal for and a craftsman had produced was so wildly contradictory that it merited the broadest, not to say most ribald, humor” (Oswalt 1998: 232).

v8 “The recurrence of the unusual phrase *bring it again to mind* here (see 44:19) suggests the dulling effect that idol worship has on human thought” (Oswalt 1998: 235).

v8 “What is the antidote to unbelief? Memory. God is not to be known in the endlessly recurring cycles of nature, mind numbing in their glorious repetitions, but in his stark, unrepeatable intrusions into history. Remember those moments, say Moses and all the prophets, for as you do, you will see reality. You will see God as he really is and know that you can entrust yourself to him” (Oswalt 1998: 235).