

(Through the Bible) Isaiah 46-47

by Chuck Smith

The sermon highlights the contrast between the true and living God and false gods, and the consequences of worshiping false gods, emphasizing God's sovereignty and judgment.

Duration: 40:06

Scripture: Genesis 12:3, Isaiah 46:9-10, Isaiah 46:13, Isaiah 48:3, Matthew 25:31-32, Matthew 25:34-41

Topics: "Gods Sovereignty", "False Idolatry"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Nebuchadnezzar and his prideful behavior. Nebuchadnezzar initially repents and walks humbly before God, but eventually falls back into pride and is warned by the watchers that he will be driven forth with a wild beast for seven seasons. The preacher also mentions how astrology was popular during that time and how Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream about a great image and a rock that destroys it. The sermon emphasizes the power and sovereignty of God, who declares the end from the beginning and warns against worshiping false gods.

Transcript

Isaiah chapter 46. Now in Isaiah 46 we get a sharp contrast between God, the true and the living eternal God that created the heavens and the earth, and the false gods that these people were worshiping. And the tragic thing is these people were the Israelites, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

They had turned to idolatry. And as you read the prophecy of Isaiah and of Jeremiah, they are crying out against the idolatry of the people, warning them that their continued idolatry would bring upon them the judgment of God, using Babylon as his instrument of judgment, and that they would be going into captivity as the result of their idolatry. You remember Jeremiah cried out, for my people have committed two sins.

One, they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water. And they have hewn out for themselves cisterns, cisterns that can hold no water. Men will worship something.

Men will believe in something. They must. Every man has a God.

But there are some religious systems that hold no water at all. They just do nothing for the people who believe, but bring them into captivity. And so God's cry against the people.

Now it is interesting in some of the most recent archaeological excavations. There in Israel, above the springs of Gihon, on that section of the hill that comes down that was known as Ophel, which was the site

of the ancient city of Jerusalem in David's day, and on through to Hezekiah's time. There in the houses that have recently been excavated by the archaeologists.

Houses that were actually destroyed by the Babylonian army. Houses that have laid in ruins for 2,500 years as they uncovered the stones and the rubble of these houses. Within the houses they have found multitudes of little pagan gods.

The gods that the people had worshipped. The gods that the people had turned to. And thus we find actually by the archaeologists faith just tremendous confirmation to what Isaiah is saying.

As he is rebuking the people for their worship of the false gods. Now he speaks concerning two of their false gods and they had many. Bell boweth down, Nebo stoopeth.

Their idols were upon the beast and upon the cattle. Your carriages were heavy laden. They are a burden to the weary beast.

They stoop, they bow down together. They could not deliver the burden but themselves are gone into captivity. And so he speaks of their worship of these false gods.

But he points out a great truth here. And that is their false gods became a burden. Even the cattle strained under the load of them.

For as was the custom the false gods would be brought out of their temples or out of their centers of worship. Placed upon carts and driven through the streets on the various festivals and holy days in which they worshipped those particular gods. Sometimes they would be born by the men on a platform as they would walk with the poles on their shoulders.

Now these things are not totally uncommon today. There is a holiday in Mexico for the Virgin Guadalupe. And you can go down on that holiday and you can see them as they take the statues of the Virgin Guadalupe and put them in these glorious chariots or carts and all.

And they'll carry the Virgin Guadalupe through the streets as the people kneel and bow and genuflects and so forth and worship the Virgin Guadalupe. So these things are not totally unfamiliar even in our day. But they were very common in those days.

And here the people of God, who should surely know better, have turned to the worship of Bell and of Nebo. But in reality the worship of these false gods constituted an interesting study because these gods couldn't even carry themselves. They had to be carried by man.

And in man carrying them or in the beast pulling them, they became a burden and they bowed down and stooped those who tried to carry them or bear them along. Now in contrast to that, God declares, Harken unto me, O house of Jacob and all of the remnant of the house of Israel. Now here's an interesting verse because the house of, the remnant of the house of Israel, would have been those from the northern kingdom who, when the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom, fled down into Judah.

So there was a remnant. When the northern kingdom fell, there was a remnant from each of the tribes that escaped and came down to Judah and became a part of the southern kingdom at that time. The rest of them were dispersed by the Assyrians into the various parts of the world, but many of them from the various tribes came and settled in Judah after the Assyrian invasion.

So the remnant of the house of Israel, which are born by me, in contrast to these people bearing their gods or carrying their gods, God declares, I am carrying you and I've carried you from the womb and I will carry you till you come to the grave, until your gray hairs, your old age. I am he that carries you, for I have made you and I will bear you and I will carry you and I will deliver you. And so the true and the living God, rather than having to be carried, will carry you.

Rather than having to be supported, will support you. So it all depends on what kind of a God you want. You want a God that you have to support or do you want a God that will support you? You want a God that you have to carry or do you want a God that can carry you? You want a God that will bring you into captivity or do you want a God who is able to deliver you? And this is the contrast that has been made between the false idols that the people had turned to when they had turned away from God and the true and the living God.

Now God said to whom will you liken me? Now they had made their images of their gods. They had carved or they had made their molds and poured in the hot metals and had their molten images or they had carved the likenesses of their God. Now God said if you were going to carve a likeness of me what would you make me like? What kind of a figure would you make? What would be the likeness? What would you liken me to? Or to what would you try to make me equal? Or to compare me that we may be like? What kind of a comparison can you make with God that is anything that we know on the human level? What are you going to make him like? If you're going to start to carve him out, how and in what way are you going to carve him out like a man? When God is a spirit where do you start in carving the likeness of a spirit? Now he again speaks of how they had made their own gods in various and have you seen some of the the idols of these gods? These carvings that they made and said that is God.

These carvings that they bowed down to and worshipped. These carvings that they had built great temples for. Have you ever seen idols of Diana? She is supposed to be God.

Many people worshipped her. The multi-breasted Diana. Breasts all down the front of her and she is God.

The nourisher of life in a symbolic form and so they say that's God and and and so they worship this image or idol of Diana or Ashtar. So God said what are you going to make me like? Now he is talking about their making gods for they lavish gold out of their bag and they waste silver in the balances and then they hire a goldsmith and he makes a god and they fall down and worship it. Now he was made by a man and yet the people are so foolish as to fall down and worship it.

Imagine he makes a God. Men make their own gods. Somehow within the consciousness of consciousness of man innate within there is the consciousness of God and it is just a part of man's nature to worship.

So that you'll find in every culture even the most primitive cultures there are forms of worship of God or of gods and in most cases men have made gods after the projections of themselves. If I were God this is what I would do. This is how I would do it and so they make up their legends of their gods and they have superpower in hunting and great cunning abilities and they worship that.

Down in the jungles of South America where the primitive people do not wear clothing and when the storms come their bodies are cold and shivering. Some of them do not make permanent dwelling places but are nomadic. Now these people in their minds think if I were God I would live in that tree because it's so big and strong and when the wind comes and the rain descends it doesn't seem to be affected.

It doesn't shiver with the wind like I am shivering. So if I were God I would be in that tree and I would live in that tree and so you find them worshiping a tree and they have trees that they have set out for special worship. That's God.

Or the full moon that gives light in the jungles at night and so you'll find them out in the full moon arms around each other in a circle as they do their little dance and then their little chants as they are worshiping their God. For if I were God I would ride there in the moon and I would give beautiful light at night the silvery light through the jungles and so forth and so they worship the moon. Now the Greeks had interesting concepts of God and they're expressed in if I were God I would live on Mount Olympus and I would look down and I would see these men down below and those earthlings, those mortals would not have a chance with the beautiful maidens that are there for I would use my supernatural powers to charm them and to bewitch them and and I would take advantage over those mortals and so you have your various concepts of God that men have created in their own minds.

So here's here's the interesting thing. He makes a God and then the people bow down and worship it and then they bear him on their shoulders. This is our God.

They carry him on their shoulders and they set him in his place and he stands in his place and he doesn't move from it. Yes they will cry unto him yet he cannot answer them nor save them out of their trouble and yet people worship these things. They cannot move, cannot respond, cannot talk to them and they worship them in lieu of worshiping the true and the living God.

That's the tragedy. People say well I don't believe in God. Well they don't believe what they mean is in a God who created the heavens and the earth and everything that is in them and sent his son to die for man's sins.

They don't believe in the true and the living God but they believe in God and they have a God but they refuse to worship the true and the living God who is able to help them and respond to their needs and instead they are worshiping gods that cannot be of any help to them whatsoever but will only bring them into captivity. They worship really the gods of pleasure so many times but you give your life over to pleasure and you're going to end up with lust. So many people worshiping the God of the intellect.

You give yourself over to the God of intellect and you're going to end up with pride. So many people are worshiping the God of power and their whole life is dedicated to the power principle and they end up with greed. So God speaks out about these false gods.

They cannot answer you. They cannot move. They cannot even carry themselves.

Now remember this God said and show yourselves men. Just bring it into mind again you transgressors. Remember the former things of old.

For I am God and there is none other. I am God and there is none like me. For I have declared the end from the beginning.

There is no God that is able to declare the end from the beginning. There is no religious system outside. Well there just is no religious system really that has been predicated upon the ability of God to declare from the beginning what the end of the matter or a situation is going to be.

And from ancient times the things that are not yet done. At that time of Isaiah's writing there were prophecies that still had not been fulfilled. Saying my counsel shall stand and I will do my pleasure.

So God has already established what shall be. That cannot change. God said I will do my pleasure.

Calling and now he refers back to chapter 45 where he said that Cyrus the king of the Medo-Persians would be his instrument in releasing the children of Israel from their Babylonian captivity. Now that's a hundred and fifty years before Cyrus was born. That's why God is declaring this.

Hey I there's no God like me. I'm declaring you before it happens what's going to happen. I'm naming the fellow before he is ever born.

He doesn't know me but I'm calling him by his name. And his name is Cyrus. And he's going to allow you to be released from your captivity.

And so referring back to that prophecy of Cyrus he said calling a ravenous bird from the east. The man that executes my counsel from a far country I have spoken it and I will also bring it to pass. I purposed it and also I will do it.

Now you go ahead and read the history and you'll find that God did do it. He purposed it. He did do it.

And Cyrus was the name of the Medo-Persian king that gave the decree that the children of Israel might return from their captivity in Babylon. Giving unto the children of Israel that permission to go back and to rebuild the temple. Hearken unto me ye stout hearted that are far from righteousness.

I bring near my righteousness it shall not be far off and my salvation shall not tarry. I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory. And so God promises that their salvation their righteousness will be placed in Zion.

Now in chapter 47 God speaks of the judgment that is going to come against Babylon. Now this is before Babylon ever conquered them. But God has declared that Babylon shall conquer them.

But because of the treatment that Babylon gives to the people of God. She herself though used as an instrument of God in judgment against his people will also be brought into judgment by God. Come down and sit in the dust oh virgin daughter of Babylon.

Sit on the ground. There is no throne oh daughter of the Chaldeans for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate. Take the millstones and grind meal.

Uncover thy locks and make bare the leg. Uncover the thigh. Pass over the rivers.

For thy nakedness shall be uncovered. Yea thy shame shall be seen. And I will take vengeance and I will not meet thee as a man.

He's going to meet them as a God in judgment. As for our Redeemer the Lord of hosts is his name. The holy one of Israel.

Sit thou silent and get thee into darkness oh daughter of the Chaldeans. For thou shalt no more be called the lady of kingdoms. For I was wroth with my people and I have polluted mine inheritance and given them into your hand.

But you did not show them mercy upon the ancient that is the very old men. You have laid a very heavy yoke. So the Babylonians were not really kind to their captives.

They were very hard on the people of Israel when they took them captives. And even upon the old men. They laid very heavy burdens made them bond slaves and made them work hard.

And so because of their treatment. He said you have said I will be a lady forever. So that you did not lay these things to your heart.

Neither did you remember the latter end of it. Therefore hear now this. Now that are given to pleasures.

That dwell carelessly. That say in your heart I am and none else beside me. I shall not sit as a widow.

Neither shall I know the loss of children. These two things will come upon thee in a moment in one day. The loss of children and widowhood.

They shall come upon thee in their perfection. For the multitude of your sorceries and for the great abundance of your enchantments. For you have trusted in your wickedness and you have said none seeth me.

Now God speaks of the judgment that is going to come against Babylon because of their treatment of his people. You remember Jesus spoke when he returns to the earth. He said then will I gather together the nations for judgment.

And I will separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And to those on the right hand I will say come you blessed with the father inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you from the foundations of the earth. For I was hungry you fed me thirsty and you gave me to drink and so forth.

Lord when do we see you hungry when do we see you thirsty in as much as you did it unto my brethren. The least of my brethren you did it to me. And so the nations will be judged for their treatment of God's people the Jew.

Be careful about speaking against the Jew. For God has chosen them. And God has said I will bless those that bless thee and curse those that curse thee.

To those on his left he said depart from me ye workers of iniquity into everlasting judgment that was prepared for Satan and his angels. For I was hungry and you did not feed me thirsty and you did not give me to drink. Naked and you did not clothe me.

In prison you did not visit me. Lord when do we see you and not help you out in as much as you did it not to the least of these my brethren you did it not to me. Now here because of the ill treatment of his people though God was angry with the Jews and had a cause against them.

Because they had polluted the name of God by their false worship. Yet though he gave them over into the hand of the Babylonians they did not show them mercy. And thus God's judgment and heavy hand.

Now one of the things the Babylonians were saying notice here is that our kingdom is going to last. I will be a lady forever. The Babylonian kingdom will endure forever.

We will never be widows. We will never lose our children. Our husbands will never be slain in battle.

And we'll never have to face widowhood. And God said you've said these things and you've lived in pleasure and you've lived carelessly. But in a moment in one night you're going to be both the loss of children and become widows.

Now you remember when Nebuchadnezzar had this dream that troubled him. He could not remember the dream. He felt it had significance and so they called in all the wise men astrologers soothsayers and so forth to interpret for him the dream.

These astrologers were very active in Babylon at that time. In fact we get a little kick against them down in verse 13. Astrology was a very popular thing.

They had those that could tell your horoscope and tell you when to do what according to the influence of the stars upon your lives. And finally Daniel was brought in. And Daniel said to him now the other night before you went to sleep.

In your mind you were wondering what is going to happen to my great kingdom and what is going to happen to the world. And so the God who dwells in heaven has shown unto thee what is going to happen to your kingdom and what is going to happen to the world. For in your dream you saw this great image.

It had a head of gold, chest of silver, stomach of brass, legs of iron, feet of iron and clay with ten toes. And as you watch this great image there came a rock not cut with hands. It hit the image in its feet and the whole image fell.

It crumbled and there grew from the rock. The rock grew into a mountain that covered the whole earth. He said God has shown to you the kingdoms that are going to rule over the earth and you Nebuchadnezzar are the head of gold.

But your kingdom is going to be replaced by an inferior kingdom as silver is inferior to gold. That kingdom will be replaced by a yet inferior kingdom, the stomach of brass, as brass is inferior to silver. And that will be replaced by iron which is hard and stamps everything to pieces.

And the final kingdom will be of ten kings as iron and clay are mixed together. It will not have the power of the iron but they will be mixed together and it is during the time of these ten kings that the Lord of heaven shall come and set up a kingdom that shall never end. Nebuchadnezzar said I proclaim that there is no God in all the earth like the God of Daniel that is able to reveal dreams and secrets and tell things that are going to be.

Acknowledge God but turn right around and he commanded that they build a huge idol 90 feet tall of all gold. Now that huge idol of all gold was a direct defiance to what God had just declared. Now there are a lot of people who proclaim well there's no God like the God of heaven and then they go do their own thing or they defy him.

And he was defying God with this huge idol. And as Isaiah declared here their attitude is Babylon will live forever. Babylon will never be destroyed.

Babylon will never be conquered. It's the eternal kingdom. It'll rule forever.

But the prophecy is here is in a moment, in a day the kingdom will fall and Babylon fell in one night as Daniel came in before Belshazzar and interpreted to him the writing that was on the wall. For your

kingdom has been weighed in the balances you're found wanting and this night thy soul shall be taken from thee and your kingdom will be divided among the Medes and the Persians. This night and that night Cyrus the king of Persia came under the walls of Babylon where they had diverted the river Euphrates up into the city and that night Belshazzar and all of his lords were slain.

Now Isaiah here is talking 150 years before the king Cyrus was born. He's talking really well in advance of the attitude that would prevail in Babylon. Declaring that they would not have mercy on the people of God thus Babylon was to be judged and in a moment in one day they would experience the loss of their children and widowhood.

For they shall come upon thee the Lord said verse 9 and their perfection for the multitude of your sorceries and for the great abundance of your enchantments for you have trusted in your wickedness and none and they you have said no one sees me.

So many times we think that our sin is done in secret we say nobody sees me but when Nebuchadnezzar was walking through the gardens he heard a voice and it said the watchers have been watching you and you've not been behaving yourself and you're going to get cut off and he came to Daniel he said oh what's this all about and he says walk carefully oh king you're in a bad way because of the pride of your heart you've exalted yourself against God you see he made this golden idol he was defying God he was lifted up with pride and so he said walk softly before the Lord that you might continue your days upon the earth and for a year he behaved himself and he walked softly but at the end of the year as he was walking through the hanging gardens one of the seven wonders of the ancient world he

said is this not the great Babylon that I have built and he heard that voice for the watchers were still watching and they declared because you have been lifted up in pride you are going to be driven forth with the wild beast for seven seasons until you know that the God in heaven rules over the earth and he sets into the kingdoms those whom he will and Nebuchadnezzar went insane and lived with the animals out in the field like a wild beast until his hair grew like feathers and his nails grew like claws until seven seasons had passed over him until he knew that the Lord of heaven reigned over the earth and set up the kingdoms and set on the kingdoms those whom he would you say none sees but there are watchers and God sees thy wisdom and thy knowledge it hath perverted thee you said in

your heart I am and there is no one besides me beside me therefore shall evil come upon thee thou shalt not know from whence it rises and mischief shall fall on thee and thou shall not be able to put it off and desolation should come upon you suddenly which you will not know stand now with your enchantments and with a multitude of your sorceries wherein you have labored from your youth if so be that thou shall be able to profit if so be that you may prevail for thou art wearied in the multitude of their of thy counsels now you remember oh nebuchadnezzar calling the counselors the wise men soothsayers astrologers and so forth and here again let now the astrologers and the stargazers the monthly prognosticators stand up and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee I am really

amazed in a world of science in which we live where we have made such positive scientific advancement and we've come to know so much about the universe in which we live I am amazed that in this world of modern technology that most of the newspapers publish a daily horoscope which is superstition and comes from the ancient religions in Babylon the charting of a person's life the monthly prognosticating of a person's highs and lows and and positive signs and so forth all has superstitious origin as though the stars and the position of the stars have some kind of a mystic influence over our lives and people seek to

govern their activities by the position of the stars in heaven how ridiculous can you be and yet people have to believe in something and it is amazing the foolish things that

people believe in when they've rejected the truth of God you see the bible declares that professing themselves to be wise they've become fools the minute you rule God out of your life you are open and susceptible to every foolish thing and men can believe the most stupid things when they once reject God for the bible speaks that God will give them over to a delusion that they may believe a lie rather than the truth you don't want to believe in God all right Mr.

Wise guy we'll show you how wise you are and God lets people believe in such stupid foolish ridiculous things once they've rejected him and I look at these what can you say that won't get into trouble these professed wise people and I read of some of their actions and activities and all and I think and they are supposed to be so smart but it's because once you have put God out of your life you are open and susceptible to every kind of gimmick religious or otherwise and so people are looking into psychic phenomena and into the occult and so forth having rejected God they're open they're susceptible to anything and they're gullible ready to believe anything and professing themselves to be wise God has allowed them to become fools for their foolish minds are darkened and because they do not want to retain God in their minds God gives them over to minds that are reprobate and void of God so that men end up in the pit behold they shall be as stubble the fire shall burn them they will not deliver themselves from the power of the flame there shall not be a coal to warm at nor fire to sit before it thus shall they be unto thee with whom you have labored even your merchants from your youth they shall wander everyone to his quarter none shall save thee all of these wise men and astrologers they won't be able to save themselves much less you

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