

GOD'S CALL TO LISTEN TO HIM

Isaiah Chapters 47 and 48

Bernard Baruch once said, "Most of the successful people I've known are the ones who do more listening than talking." And someone else has said, "Be a good listener. Your ears will never get you in trouble."

As we go through today's message, we will find that if people had just listened to God, they could have stayed out of a lot of trouble and avoided a lot of heartache. We will be looking at Isaiah chapter 47, which is prefaced at the end of chapter 46 with a call to "listen" (46:12) and goes on in chapter 47 to say "sit silently" (47:5) and "hear" (47:8). Then chapter 48 begins with the word, "Hear." Yet the chapters outline pretty well how people did not really pay attention to God. So let us listen to God's Word with both ears this morning.

In chapter 47, Isaiah describes Babylon's fall to the Persians in 539 b.c., more than 150 years before the event took place. The Babylonians, Judah's captors, would themselves become captives.

Isaiah 47:1-3 NAS:

1 "Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; Sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans! For you shall no longer be called tender and delicate.

2 "Take the millstones and grind meal. Remove your veil, strip off the skirt, Uncover the leg, cross the rivers.

3 "Your nakedness will be uncovered, Your shame also will be exposed; I will take vengeance and will not spare a man."

When conquered by Cyrus, Babylon would become a humbled servant, sitting in the dust, a description depicting great humiliation. The words "*Virgin Daughter*" represent the people of a city as a young, innocent girl¹, probably meaning that the city had never before been captured. The people would no longer be delicate like a virgin because of the hardships they would face. As servants of the conquerors, the Persians, they would have to grind the flour, unable to worry about their clothing or their modesty. Some of them would have to flee across streams. Many of them would be raped and abused.

Isaiah 47:4 NAS:

4 Our Redeemer, the Lord of hosts is His name, The Holy One of Israel.

This verse records the response of Israel when they would sense the relief coming to them because of Babylon's defeat. Seeing God's vengeance on their captors, they would

¹ Isaiah 23 :12; 37:22.

praise God recognizing that release from exile would come from Him and not themselves. So they called God their **Redeemer**.

Isaiah 47:5-7 NAS:

5 *“Sit silently, and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans, For you will no longer be called The queen of kingdoms.*

6 *“I was angry with My people, I profaned My heritage² And gave them into your hand. You did not show mercy to them, On the aged you made your yoke very heavy.*

7 *“Yet you said, ‘I will be a queen forever.’ These things you did not consider Nor remember the outcome of them.*

This passage presents a song of triumph over vanquished Babylon. She would be removed from her position as the world’s major power. The silence and darkness of [verse 5](#) refer to the fact that Babylon would never again attain independence or imperial power, and after 539 **B.C.** she never did. God then explains in verses 6 and 7 that He allowed the Babylonians to conquer and take Judah captive only for the punishment of Israel. But the Babylonians would go far beyond the bounds of humane decency in their savage maltreatment of the Jews. This was the reason God destroyed them.

Isaiah 47:8-11 NAS:

8 *“Now, then, hear this, you sensual one, Who dwells securely, Who says in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one besides me. I will not sit as a widow, Nor know loss of children.’*

9 *“But these two things will come on you suddenly in one day: Loss of children and widowhood. They will come on you in full measure In spite of your many sorceries, In spite of the great power of your spells.*

10 *“You felt secure in your wickedness and said, ‘No one sees me,’ Your wisdom and your knowledge, they have deluded you; For you have said in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one besides me.’*

11 *“But evil will come on you Which you will not know how to charm away; And disaster will fall on you For which you cannot atone; And destruction about which you do not know Will come on you suddenly.*

In verses 8-11 God pronounces doom for the atheistic humanism of Babylonian culture. Babylon represents the human-centered culture of the unbelieving world, living for pleasures and lusts, ignoring responsibility towards a God of justice, and with the self-confidence of denying God’s existence altogether. Chaldean Babylon combined the practical atheism of the freethinker with astrology, necromancy³, and superstition. **Many sinners are like Babylon. They think they are safe and that no one will judge them,**

Babylon thought that she could never be defeated. But God said that she would lose her children and become a widow . . . on a single day, speaking figuratively of her destruction and defeat. She would lose her leadership, her soldiers, and many of her

² Judah.

³ Calling up spirits of the dead for purposes of magically revealing the future or influencing the course of events

common people. Though Babylon thought she was unique, she was wrong; God is the One who is unique, as Isaiah stated repeatedly. Babylon prided herself in her sorcerers who supposedly could predict the future and cast spells to influence others. *Sorceries* suggests seeking information about the future by means of demonic forces. Such supposed knowledge, however, was unreliable, for the sorcerers could not foresee Babylon's forthcoming calamity and would not be able to conjure it away.

Isaiah 47:12-15 NAS:

12 "Stand fast now in your spells And in your many sorceries With which you have labored from your youth; Perhaps you will be able to profit, Perhaps you may cause trembling.

13 "You are wearied with your many counsels; Let now the astrologers, Those who prophesy by the stars, Those who predict by the new moons, Stand up and save you from what will come upon you.

14 "Behold, they have become like stubble, Fire burns them; They cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame; There will be no coal to warm by Nor a fire to sit before!

15 "So have those become to you with whom you have labored, Who have trafficked with you from your youth; Each has wandered in his own way; There is none to save you.

God issues a challenge to this proud world power. God mockingly urged the Babylonians to keep on in their spells and sorceries which the city had been involved in since childhood, that is, since the nation was founded. God suggested the astrologers and stargazers save them. Astrology was common in Babylon as Daniel spoke of in Daniel 2:2, 4-5. But their work was worthless, like mere stubble, the dried stalks of grain that burn quickly. Those religious leaders could not save even themselves, let alone Babylon. Yet they continued misleading the people that they could. Ancient Babylon prided herself on the accumulated wisdom of her sages and educators, especially those who had perfected the science of astrology and claimed the ability to tell fortunes and predict favorable and unfavorable days for every occasion. But the fire of God's judgment was to consume these so-called wise men and their lies and leave only ashes behind. The nations that had admired the brilliance of Babylonian culture would return disillusioned to their own lands leaving Babylon to face the Persians alone.⁴

If you were listening you may have noticed that there are some eerie parallels between ancient Babylon as described in this chapter and the United States today. Babylon is described in verse 5 as a world leader and the US is unquestionably a world leader. We heard in this chapter a lot of description of Babylon's dependence on astrology and sorcery. While the United States is still nominally a Christian nation, there is a growing interest in the occult and less reverence for the true God. We find an increasing number of TV programs and movies with titles or themes dealing with the demonic, such as "Medium" or the Harry Potter series. There is ongoing interest in games such as Ouija Boards or Dungeons and Dragons. We see psychics gaining in respectability and instead of being relegated to booths at a carnival or small shops in the not-so-good part of town,

⁴ Pfeiffer, Charles F.: The Wycliffe Bible Commentary : Old Testament. Chicago : Moody Press, 1962, S. Is 47:1

we find law enforcement agencies calling them in for assistance. And unfortunately even some Christians consult their Daily Horoscope in the newspaper, or talk about what “sign” they were born under. This is a dangerous trend. That, coupled with the additional trend of people thinking all gods are the same and all faiths will lead to heaven and the tendency for people to shape their god however they want him or her to be, is leading our country down the path of becoming more and more humanistic and farther away from faith in the Lord God Jehovah and His Son Jesus Christ. Mighty world powers should take heed and learn the lesson of Babylon.

So Babylon, the proud queen, is now a humbled slave. She had long boasted that she would be the eternal queen, but in a moment, the judgment for her sins caught up with her and she became a widow. Neither her idols nor her occult practices were able to warn her or prepare her for her destruction. But God knew that Babylon would fall because He planned it ages ago. He called on Cyrus who swooped down on Babylon like a bird of prey.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 48

Now let’s move on into chapter 48, which begins with a call to hear what God has to say.

Isaiah 48:1-5 NAS:

- 1 *“Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are named Israel And who came forth from the loins of Judah, Who swear by the name of the Lord And invoke the God of Israel, **But not in truth nor in righteousness.***
- 2 *“For they call themselves after the holy city And lean on the God of Israel; The Lord of hosts is His name.*
- 3 *“I declared the former things long ago And they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaimed them. Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.*
- 4 *“Because I know that you are obstinate, And your neck is an iron sinew And your forehead bronze,*
- 5 *Therefore I declared them to you long ago, Before they took place I proclaimed them to you, So that you would not say, ‘My idol has done them, And my graven image and my molten image have commanded them.’*

God here challenges the faithless hypocrites among his chosen people. These seemingly pious Israelites practiced idol-worship on the side (verse 5) and yet had the nerve to invoke the name of Jehovah as their God also, pretending that they were true citizens of his holy city, much like Christians today who go to church regularly but also consult their daily horoscope. In order to expose the falseness and emptiness of those other gods to whom they divided their loyalty, God presented them with proof of his existence as the only true God by reminding them that His predictions always come to pass. The former things God refers to here is the prophecy of Jerusalem’s fall to the Chaldeans and deportation to Babylon. The point here is that this prediction was made a hundred years before its fulfillment. No human being, including a Satan inspired sorcerer, can

accurately and specifically foretell events that far ahead. Again, one reason God made those predictions was to point up His superiority to idols. The same applies today. If you believe in astrology, fortune telling, and other such nonsense, you're not only going to be disappointed but you'll be extending an open door for Satan to come in and control your life. I warn you most emphatically to stay away from all such things. They are Satan's playground.

Isaiah 48:6-8 NAS:

6 *"You have heard; look at all this. And you, will you not declare it? I proclaim to you new things from this time, Even hidden things which you have not known.*

7 *"They are created now and not long ago; And before today you have not heard them, So that you will not say, 'Behold, I knew them.'*

8 *"You have not heard, you have not known. Even from long ago your ear has not been open, Because I knew that you would deal very treacherously; And you have been called a rebel from birth.*

God is reprimanding them in verse 6 for not listening: "You have not heard" and He calls the people to "look at this"—the new things. The "new things" **refer to the specific prophecies of deliverance from bondage in Babylon**. They also refer to a return to the land of Israel during the *end times*. Such specific prophecies were not foretold before Isaiah's generation so that the Jews could not boast that they knew all about these coming events all along (verse 8). These new promises that God gave Israel through Isaiah stated that God's wrath would be delayed and that Israel would be freed from captivity. Israel knew in general terms that she would one day be brought back from captivity if she repented and turned again to God because that's what God promised in Deuteronomy 30:1-5 NLT:

1 *"In the future, when you experience all these blessings and curses I have listed for you, and when you are living among the nations to which the Lord your God has exiled you, take to heart all these instructions.*

2 *If at that time you and your children return to the Lord your God, and if you obey with all your heart and all your soul all the commands I have given you today,*

3 *then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes. He will have mercy on you and gather you back from all the nations where he has scattered you.*

4 *Even though you are banished to the ends of the earth, the Lord your God will gather you from there and bring you back again.*

5 *The Lord your God will return you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will possess that land again. Then he will make you even more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors!*

In addition, Israel's dwelling in the land was assured by the **Abrahamic Covenant** in Genesis 15:18 NLT:

18 So the Lord made a covenant with Abram that day and said, “I have given this land to your descendants, all the way from the border of Egypt to the great Euphrates River.”

But until Isaiah’s prophecies were given the Israelites did not know any specifics about how God would deliver her. One of the reasons God gave them this information was so the people would not feel smug, thinking their own cunning had set them free. Because they were so treacherous and rebellious they liked to believe good things were the result of their own planning and abilities. God wanted it to be crystal clear that their physical and spiritual deliverance would come, not from their goodness or their own plans, but from God’s grace.

Isaiah 48:9-11 NAS:

9 “For the sake of My name I delay My wrath, And for My praise I restrain it for you, In order not to cut you off.”

10 “Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.”

11 “For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.”

God would **delay** His **wrath**, that is, withhold it so His people could return to Judah. This would be for His **sake** primarily. The Exile in Babylon was intended to refine them so they would return to Jerusalem believing in the one God, Jehovah. That refining, however, was “*not as silver.*” Unlike silver that is purged to purity in a furnace, the purging of Israel is not complete. It was not complete during the Babylonian captivity nor has it been complete since that time. But one day in the future their punishment will be over.

God well knew that from Israel’s very beginning as a nation in the time of Moses that the Jews’ piety was largely an outward act only and that their ears were closed to His call to a life of genuine devotion. But because He had chosen them and put his name upon them, He would refrain, for the sake of His glory, from cutting them off as they deserved. Rather, He would purge them of their idolatry by putting them through great suffering and thereby lead them to repentance. From that time until this very day, Israel never again worshipped idols of wood, metal, or stone.

God would save His people, in spite of their wickedness, and no false god could be credited with the achievement.

How often we also have to go through the furnace of affliction in order to learn to put God first and to worship only Him. Note verse 11 where we see that phrase again which we saw in Isaiah 42:8:

Isaiah 42:8, NAS

“I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images.”

The theme that has recurred over and over in these chapters is that there is Only One God, the Lord God Jehovah, and He is holy and sovereign and powerful. He alone is the God of the universe. He alone is worthy of our worship and He will not tolerate for long His creatures giving credit, praise, or worship to anyone but Him. The first of the Ten Commandments says it all:

Exodus 20:2-3, NAS

2 *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*

3 *"You shall have no other gods before Me.*

Why is it so hard for people to understand and obey that commandment?

Isaiah 48:12-15 NAS:

12 *"Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last.*

13 *"Surely My hand founded the earth, And My right hand spread out the heavens; When I call to them, they stand together.*

14 *"Assemble, all of you, and listen! Who among them has declared these things? The Lord loves him; he will carry out His good pleasure on Babylon, And His arm will be against the Chaldeans.*

15 *"I, even I, have spoken; indeed I have called him, I have brought him, and He will make his ways successful.*

Urging the nation to **listen to Him**, God once again spoke of His unique position as the only God. Isaiah repeatedly wrote about two proofs of God's uniqueness: (a) His creative power⁵ and (b) His ability to foretell the future, in this case, the fall of **Babylon** by means of Cyrus, the king of Persia, God's **chosen ally** ([Isaiah 44:28](#); [45:1](#)). God **called him** and would help him **succeed**. **No other god could have predicted this.** In fact, God would defeat Babylon and He was telling Israel ahead of time so that they would know it was He who was doing this for them.

God invites Israel to recognize His sovereign wisdom in using a heathen king to deliver them. As eternal Creator, God is the Lord of human history and brings to pass amazing divine acts beyond all human ability to predict. It was indeed a unique approach that God should call Israel's deliverer, Cyrus, by name 150 years before he was born, and love him as His chosen instrument to defeat Babylon and destroy her power. But an even greater wonder is the fact that from the beginning of the human race, God has revealed His divine will and plan for the future through His prophets and pre-incarnation appearances of Jesus. By "pre-incarnation" we are referring to times in the Old Testament before He was born to the Virgin Mary, when Jesus Himself appeared to individuals.

Isaiah 48:16 NAS:

16 *"Come near to Me, listen to this: From the first I have not spoken in*

⁵ [Isaiah 42:5](#); [44:24](#); [45:12, 18](#); [51:13, 16](#).

secret, From the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord God has sent Me, and His Spirit.”

God tells them ahead of time that He'll save them. God had always known that His people would repeatedly refuse to obey Him (48:1–2). Therefore he had always told them ahead of time what He was going to do, so that they could not credit those events to their idols (Isaiah 48:5) or to some natural cause (48:7). God says He's not been secretive about Cyrus' defeat of Babylon. Various commentators suggest that the person speaking in the second part of verse 16, beginning with the words “*And now,*” could be Cyrus, Israel, Isaiah, or the Messiah. But the speaker is probably the Messiah, God's Servant, because of His association with the Holy Spirit, as in Isaiah 42:1. Just as Cyrus would not fail in his mission according to verse 15, so the Messiah-Servant, sent by God with the Holy Spirit on Him, will not fail in His mission. The pre-incarnate Christ identifies Himself as the One sent by the Father and the Spirit to convey God's prophetic message to the inspired prophet. This is a remarkable look at the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 48:17-19 NAS:

17 Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, “I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, Who leads you in the way you should go.

18 “If only you had paid attention to My commandments! Then your well-being would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.

19 “Your descendants would have been like the sand, And your offspring like its grains; Their name would never be cut off or destroyed from My presence.”

God, Israel's “**Redeemer**” (Isaiah 41:14) and **Holy One**, had constantly been teaching and guiding **Israel** through the Law. But they **had not paid attention to His commands**. Had they done so, they would have experienced not the Exile but **peace** and **righteousness**, and none of their **children** would have been killed.

I believe verse 18 is a spiritual principle that applies to today and all time. The principle is stated in several other places in Scripture (Deuteronomy 4:40; Proverbs 16:7; Luke 11:28 to mention only a few). If we obey God and put Him first in our lives, He works out the other details of our lives so they are blessings. This does not mean freedom from problems, but blessing and righteousness to us as God makes ultimate good to come out of the problems (Romans 8:28).

Isaiah 48:20, 21 NAS:

*20 Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! Declare with the sound of joyful shouting, proclaim this, Send it out to the end of the earth; Say, “**The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob.**”*

21 They did not thirst when He led them through the deserts. He made the water flow out of the rock for them; He split the rock and the water gushed

forth.

With Cyrus' edict⁶ allowing the Jews to return home, God urged His people to **leave Babylon** quickly. Because this return was like being **redeemed** (Isaiah 43:1), this time from Babylon not Egypt, the people could rejoice. After the Egyptian Exodus God provided water in **the deserts** and **from the rock** (Exodus 17:1-7). Here too, it is implied, God would provide for them in their second "*Exodus*." God would go before them and prepare the way, and they had nothing to fear. *Liberation Day!* Having expressed his love for them, God prophetically signaled the day of his people's liberation from Babylon. He pictured their salvation as an escape from a desert to a land of abundant water.⁷

God is reminding them of specific ways He took care of His people during their Exodus from Egypt. It is good to remember what God has done in the past so as to strengthen your faith in whatever the current trial.

Isaiah 48:22 NAS:

22 "*There is no peace for the wicked,*" says the Lord.

In contrast with joy (verse 20) for those who obey the Lord, "*there is no peace for the wicked,*" either in the nation of Israel or among Gentile nations.

What a contrast also to verse 18. Obedience brings blessing and righteousness. But wickedness brings turmoil and enmity with God.

The Jews had become comfortable and complacent in their captivity and did not want to leave. They had followed the counsel of Jeremiah (Jer. 29:4-7) and had houses, gardens, and families; and it would not be easy for them to pack up and go back to the holy land. But that was where they belonged and where God had work for them to do. God told them that they were hypocritical in using His name and identifying with His city but not obeying His will. They were stubborn (verse 4) and were not excited about the new things God was doing for them.

Had they obeyed the Lord in the first place, Judah would have experienced peace and not war (Isaiah 48:19, 19), but it was not too late. God had put them into the furnace to refine them and prepare them for their future work (verse 10). "*Go forth from Babylon; flee from the Chaldeans,*" was God's command (Isaiah 48:20; see Jeremiah 50:8; 51:6, 45; Revelation 18:4)

One would think that the Jews would have been eager to leave their "*prison*" and return to their land to see God do new and great things for them. They had grown accustomed to the security of bondage and had forgotten the challenges of freedom. The church today can easily grow complacent with its comfort and affluence. God may have to put us into the furnace to remind us that we're here to be servants and not consumers or spectators.⁸

⁶ 2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4.

⁷ Willmington, H. L.: Willmington's Bible Handbook. Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House Publishers, 1997, S. 370

⁸ Wiersbe, Warren W.: Be Comforted. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1992 (An Old Testament Study), S. Is

