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I Foretold the Former Things Long Ago, I Announced Them and Made Them Known
48: 1-11

I foretold the former things long ago, I announced them and made them known DIG: For what does the prophet rebuke the nation? How might this attitude account for the LORD's ridicule of idolatry in Chapters 40-48? Why has God gone to such lengths to announce this deliverance ahead of time? Why does ADONAI bother to save Isra'el (see 48:8; 45:14)? If He had cut her off, what would the nations assume about Ha'Shem compared to the gods of Babylon?

REFLECT: The Jews, both before and during the captivity, never gave up worship of YHVH, but many added idolatrous practices to their Judaism. Where do you feel caught between relying on biblical doctrines yet living by the values of modern idols? How might God be getting the message across to you that you can't have it both ways? Have you ever been influenced by the rebellious attitude of other believers? How has your rebellion at times affected others? What has it cost you in terms of ADONAI's peace and blessing in your life? Does it really matter whether we try to obey God? How so? What do these verses have to say about the grace of our LORD? If you had a choice, would you want God to be fair to you, or gracious? Why?

God's strongest case against idolatry in Chapters 40 through 47 has been the fulfillment of prophecy. In this section **God** is going to turn to **Isra'el**, about 200 years later and say, "Look at **My** prophecies concerning the coming of **Cyrus** and the deliverance from **Babylon**. Were they not fulfilled exactly the way **I** prophesied?"

The central question of **Chapters 7** to **39** was: **Will you trust God?** That question was asked in the context of the Assyrian threat. And here, although the threat is not the same, **Isaiah** shows that the issue has not changed. The same house of **Jacob** that doubted that **they** could trust **ADONAI** to deliver **them** from the Assyrians

would also doubt that **they** could trust **the LORD** to deliver **them** from **the Babylonians**.

To be sure, the appeal in **Chapters 40** to **47** has moved a step farther. In the earlier chapters concerning the Assyrians, the message was: **If you do not trust God, destruction will come on you.** Now, concerning **the Babylonians**, the message is: **Trust God because He has unconditionally pardoned you and will break the power of those who hold you**. In the same way the proofs of **God's** ability to help **Isra'el** (and us) have also advanced. With the Assyrians, it was the inability of any other nation to help **Isra'el**. Here with **the Babylonians**, it is **the LORD's** ability as **Creator** to master history, and the evidence of fulfilled prophecy. But the issue is the same with **Isaiah**. **Will we respond in trust? God's** trustworthiness has been demonstrated in **Chapters 7** to **39**, and **His** grace has been offered in **Chapters 40** to **48**, but it is all for nothing unless we humans act on it. Trust demands surrender to our proud independence and does not come naturally to us.[182]

Isaiah starts out this chapter with a rebuke and reminds **the Israelites** of **their** hypocrisy. **Listen to this, O house of Jacob, you who are called by the name of Israel and come from the line**, or waters, **of Judah, you who take oaths in the name of the LORD and invoke the God of Isra'el (48:1a).** What is the point of piling up all these names? It sets the stage for what follows. There is an appeal to the past: **Jacob,** meaning **Isra'el** and **Judah.** Who were **they**? **They** existed because of what **ADONAI** had done to and with **their** ancestors. But it was a proud claim without reality. **They swear by the name of Ha'Shem and claim to trust in Him, but in reality their claim is hypocritical.**

But not in truth of righteousness though you who call yourselves citizens of the holy city and rely on the God of Isra'el (481b-2) – the LORD of heaven's angelic **armies is His name (48:2). They** took **oaths**, invoking **God's name**, but **they** were **not** righteous. **They** thought that being **citizens of**

Jerusalem, though **they** were not living there, was enough. But **they** were actually **citizens of the holy city** in name only. In reality, **they** were strangers to **God**. **They** thought that claiming to **rely on ADONAI**, even though **they** were not, was enough. Because **many** had become comfortable over the course of the seventy years of captivity, **many** considered it unimportant to go back to live in **Judah**. In that regard **they** had failed, nevertheless, **God's** plans were not frustrated. How could **Isra'el** realize all the potential that **her** grand heritage and proud faith had to offer? By squarely facing the contradiction between **her** words and **her** actions. **She** needed to pay careful attention to what **God** had done for **her** in the past and learn from it.

From the beginning of **Isaiah 1:2** to the end in **66:24**, **God**, through **His** prophet **Isaiah**, addresses rebellion. And when you think about it, the Bible says that we were created to live within certain limits and our refusal to "stay within the lines," sooner or later, results in disaster. Spiritual anarchy as a life plan never works.

Our refusal to follow **the LORD's** commands is not just an ignorant missing of the mark, it is an intentional and deliberate rebellion against what we know we should do. At its deepest level, it is a rejection of a relationship of dependence upon **God**, a refusal to acknowledge that **He** has the right to declare what is right and wrong for us. This is a part of the significance of the book of **Deuteronomy**, which places the entire element of obedience and dependence upon **God** in the midst of our relationship with **Him**. What **the Jews** did when **they** rebelled against **God** was not merely disobedience, but **treachery (48:8)**, or a breaking of faith. So in the end rebellion, stubbornness, and **treachery** are what sin is all about. It is entirely appropriate that **Messiah** should have been betrayed by one of **His** own disciples, because that is what **God's** family has been doing to **Him** since the dawn of time. We have not accidentally fallen into a ditch. Instead, like the two-year old who has been told not to ride his big-wheel down the driveway into the street, and who looks to make sure that he is not being watched before he starts, we have consciously and willfully chosen to fall into the ditch.[183]

The first part of the argument had to do with wha**t the LORD** had done for **the Israelites** in the past **(48:3-6a).** Throughout this section **God** made the case of **the former** prophets. **I foretold the former things long ago, My mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass (48:3).** It was **He** who inspired **them**, and now the prophecies had come to pass. **Suddenly** implies that the fulfillment of the prophecy was not always in the time or place expected (see **5:19, 46:10** and **48:14**), but according to **His**

sovereign will. **ADONAI** declared **Himself** to be both the declarer and the doer of prophecy. In other words, **YHVH** not only predicts, but being the sovereign **God**, **He** also brings about the fulfillment of **His** own prophecy. The fact that **He** can predict comes from **His** omniscience, and the fact that **He** can bring it to pass comes from **His** omnipotence. This is the sovereign **God** who was speaking to **the Israelites**.

Then **He** gives us **two reasons** why **ADONAI** fulfilled these prophecies quickly and **suddenly. The first reason was because they were stubborn. For I know how stubborn you were; the sinews of your neck were iron, your forehead was bronze (48:4).** The image **Isaiah** uses here is that of a **stubborn** animal that digs its heels, stiffens its **neck** and refuses to be led in the way it does not want to go. Over and over again Moses accused **Isra'el** of being **stubborn (Ex 32:9; 33:3** and **5; 34:9; Deut 9:6** and **13, 27; 10:16; 31:27)** because he experienced it over the forty years of wilderness wanderings. And in **Deuteronomy 31:27** he realized that even after his death, **Isra'el** will continue to be **stubborn**. In fact, according to **Dani'el 12:5-7,** one of the main purposes of the Great Tribulation is to break **the stubbornness** of **the Jewish nation** so that **they** will come to know **God**. But here, **He** fulfilled prophecies **suddenly** so that **Isra'el's stubborn** ways would be revealed and **she** might see that **her** precious **idols** had failed **her**. **God** alone made those prophecies come true.

God *did not choose* ***Jacob*** *and* ***his sons*** *because* ***they*** *were superior, nor did* ***He*** *choose us because we are superior.* ***The LORD*** *chose* ***Jacob*** *and us because of* ***His*** *grace and because* ***He*** *saw our great need. Also,* ***God*** *must deliver* ***His people*** *so the world may know* ***the Truth****.* ***Jesus*** *said:* ***You are right in saying I am a King. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me (John 18:37).***

The second reason was to make sure that the idols do not get the credit, because **Isra'el** was prone to give it to them. **Therefore, I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, "My idols did them, my wooden image and metal god ordained them" (48:5).** It was not Bel or Nebo **(46:1)** who caused the fall of Jerusalem and the exile to **Babylon**, it was **ADONAI**. Neither would they free the exiles to go home. Nor was it some creation of human intellect or cunning that **announced** those events to happen; it was the living **God**.

Before proceeding to the next stage of **his** argument, **Isaiah** sums up what **he** had

just said: **You have heard these things; look at them all. Will you not admit them (48:6a)? Isra'el** did not hear the prophecy before, but now they are hearing it. And now they are obligated to proclaim that **the idols** failed where **God** succeeded. **She** could no longer refuse to allow the facts to persuade **her**. For far too long, it was as if **Isra'el** had said, "My mind is already made up, don't confuse me with the facts!" That would have to end.

Next, we see the case for **new** prophecies **(48:6b-8)**. **From now on I will tell you of new things, of hidden things unknown you (48:6b). Isra'el** had ignored the previous prophecies, so **God** now announces the coming of **new** prophecies. **Having heard the predictions and witnessed their fulfillment, the people can no longer doubt that the LORD alone plans and rules the destinations of nations. They must, therefore, also believe in the new prophecies now made by His prophet.** Once again, the test of a prophet was this, after successfully prophesying near events, the prophet could be trusted with success in prophesying far events. The easiest thing to do is to predict the events of a thousand years in advance because they would not be around to suffer the consequences if their prophecies were not fulfilled. It is quite another thing for a prophet to prophesy something six months to a year in advance because if the prophecy did not come true he would be stoned to death. But **God** here subjects **Himself** to the test of a prophet. **He** reminds them of the former prophecies that had come to pass. So now **He** says that since these earlier prophecies had come to pass, they could trust **Him** for the far prophecies. Therefore, there is an announcement of new prophecies to come.

God gives two reasons why **He** will predict new prophecies. **They are created now, and not long ago; you have not heard of them before today. Therefore, you cannot say, "Yes, I knew of them" (48:7).** The refusal to believe in revealed truth was the cardinal sin of **God's** people **(Amos 2:4)**. **The LORD's** prophecies were **created now**, not that **God** had never thought of them before, but that they would be put into effect **now**. From **Deuteronomy 30:1-5**, **Isra'el** knew **she** would be brought back to the Land after captivity. After all, **her** living in the Land was guaranteed by the Abrahamic Covenant (see the commentary on **Genesis, to see link click Eg – I Am the LORD, Who Brought You Out of Ur of the Chaldeans to Give You This Land**). But until **Isaiah's** prophecies were given, **she** did not know *how* **God** would deliver **her**. This was so **the Israelites** would not feel smug, thinking **their** own cunning had liberated **them**. **They** were actually spiritually insensitive.

The second reason was because of **Israel's treachery** in giving credit to **idols**. **You have neither heard nor understood; from of old your ear has not been open (48:8a).** Again, the point is made that these prophecies had never been made before. Why not? Would it have been just another opportunity for unfaithfulness? But if that were true, why give them any more prophecies at all? The reason is simple: so that it will be obvious that it was **the LORD** at work and not **the idols**.

From the very beginning **Isra'el** was prone to **idolatry**. We saw this right after the exodus when **she** made a golden calf while Moses was up on Mount Sinai. And throughout **Isra'el's** history up to **Isaiah's** day, **Isra'el** was prone to **idolatry** and to spiritual adultery. **Well do I know how treacherous you are; you were called a rebel from birth (48:8b).** This was **her treachery**. **God** performed miracles for **Isra'el**, and whom did **she** thank? **She** thanked **idols** for performing the blessings that **God** alone had given **her**. **ADONAI** wanted to make sure **she** understood that **her** physical and spiritual deliverance would not come from **her** own goodness or planning, but from **His** grace.

In view of **God's** firsthand understanding of **Isra'el's stubborn** tendencies to **idolatry (48:5)** and rebellion **(48:8)**, why had **He** not abandoned **them (48:9-11)**? **He** could have. **He** had the right to. **Her** sin was great enough for total destruction. So why was **He** going to do those **new things** to make **her** deliverance possible? **Isaiah** answered with a theme that began in **Exodus 34** and reached its inevitable conclusion in **Ezeki'el 37**.

When **ADONAI** entered into a covenant with the people of **Isra'el, His** name, **His** reputation, became forever linked with them. **For My own name's sake, I delay My wrath; for the sake of My praise I hold it back from you, so as not to cut you off (48:9).** Moses presented the argument to **the LORD** when **God** asked why **He** should not destroy **Israel** after the golden calf incident (see the commentary on **Exodus Gs – Now Leave Me Alone So That My Anger May Burn Against Your People**). The question was not one of legality or justice, but, more accurately, what the Gentile nations would think of **ADONAI** if **He** would abandon or destroy **her**. Consequently, the real question was not whether **God** was just, but whether **He** would be gracious to **her**. Will the nations observing **God's** justice accuse **Him** of being fickle like all the other gods? Or would they see **the One** who was unlike any **they** had ever seen because of **His** incredible patience and mercy? **He** didn't want to destroy **Jacob**, but **He** did hope to bring **her** to **her** senses as **she** experienced the fruit of **her** rebellion.

See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction (48:10). The purpose of the exile was to refine **her** so **she** would return to the Land in faith. The captivity was like a **furnace**, to test **her**, not to destroy **her**.

The story is told of a group of women that met for Bible study. While studying in the book of **Malachi**, they came across verse three which says: **He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver (Malachi 3:3a).** This verse puzzled the women and they wondered how this statement applied to the character and nature of **God**. One of the women offered to find out more about the process of refining **silver**, and to get back to the group at their next Bible study. The following week, the woman called up a silversmith and made an appointment to watch him while at work. She didn't mention anything about the reason for her interest, beyond her curiosity about the process of refining **silver**. As she watched the silversmith work, he held a piece of **silver** over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining **silver**, one needed to hold it in the middle of the fire, where the flames were the hottest as to burn away all the impurities. The woman thought about **God** holding us in such a hot spot, then she thought again about the verse, that **He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver**. She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the entire time the **silver** was being refined. The man answered yes, that not only did he have to sit there holding the **silver**, but he also had to keep his eyes on it the entire time it was in the fire. If the **silver** was left even a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed. The woman was silent for a moment. Then she asked the silversmith, "But how do you know when the **silver** is fully refined?" He smiled at her and answered, "Oh, that's easy . . . when I see my image in it."

If **ADONAI** would go back on **His** word about **her** return, **His** reputation would be **defamed**. So, **He** declared: **For My own sake, for My own sake, I do this. How can I let Myself, I do this? How can I let Myself be defamed? I will not yield My glory to another (48:11).** There are three reasons why **God** did not totally destroy **Isra'el**.

First, **for God's own name's sake** and **for the sake of His praise. God** has a covenant relationship with **Isra'el** and therefore is a covenant keeper, part of which marks the eternity of Jewish existence. If **the Jews** cease to exist, it would reflect badly on **God**.

Secondly, for **Isra'el's** refinement. There is a time coming in which **Isra'el** will be

tested in the furnace of affliction. In **Ezeki'el 20:34-38** it is clear this **furnace of affliction** is the Great Tribulation. Therefore, although **God** judged **Isra'el** partially, ultimately, **they** will be totally refined.

Thirdly, so that Gentile nations could not claim it was their **idols** or gods who cut **Isra'el** off forever. If **Isra'el** were to be cut off, the Gentiles would not give glory to **God**, but to their **idols** and idolatry. **The LORD** would not allow that to happen. **He** would demonstrate **His** covenant relationship with **them**, by delivering **His people** against all odds, whether political or spiritual. Similarly, **ADONAI** declared at Mount Sinai: **But I dreaded the taunt of the enemy, lest the adversary misunderstand and say, "Our hand has triumphed; the LORD has not done all this" (Deuteronomy 32:27).** On **the people's** part, **they** needed to make up **their** minds once-and-for-all to give **Him their** absolute loyalty. Is the same not true for us today?