

# End from the Beginning

Isaiah 46

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**BIG BEND  
BIBLE  
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## **Isaiah 46:1-13 – Dead Idols & the living God (NIV)**

*Bel bows down, Nebo stoops low; their idols are borne by beasts of burden. The images that are carried about are burdensome, a burden for the weary. <sup>2</sup> They stoop and bow down together; unable to rescue the burden, they themselves go off into captivity. <sup>3</sup> “Listen to me, you descendants of Jacob, all the remnant of the people of Israel, you whom I have upheld since your birth, and have carried since you were born. <sup>4</sup> Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you. <sup>5</sup> “With whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared? <sup>6</sup> Some pour out gold from their bags and weigh out silver on the scales; they hire a goldsmith to make it into a god, and they bow down and worship it. <sup>7</sup> They lift it to their shoulders and carry it; they set it up in its place, and there it stands. From that spot it cannot move. Even though someone cries out to it, it cannot answer; it cannot save them from their troubles. <sup>8</sup> “Remember this, keep it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels. <sup>9</sup> Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. <sup>10</sup> I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.’ <sup>11</sup> From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do. <sup>12</sup> Listen to me, you stubborn-hearted, you who are now far from my righteousness. <sup>13</sup> I am bringing my righteousness near, it is not far away; and my salvation will not be delayed. I will grant salvation to Zion, my splendor to Israel.*

### **v1 – Who were Bel and Nebo?**

Bel and Nebo were names of two false gods the idol-worshipping nations served. It is as if now God gets personal, “naming names” when it comes to idols; and now these false gods are brought low.

- The names Bel and Nebo are familiar to us in the names Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar.
- In chapter 45 Isaiah declared that every knee will bow to the Lord, and here he pictures the gods of Babylon stooping low in humiliation.

### **v1-2 – What does it mean the idols themselves go off into captivity?**

Isaiah pictures God’s people going into captivity, in a forced relocation. Loaded on to their beasts and carriages are their idols — even their idols are carried away into captivity, and loaded on the moving trucks! The bottom line is they could not deliver the burden, but have themselves gone into captivity.

### **v3-4 – Who has God carried from the womb?**

The false gods represented by silent and dead idols must be carried; but God carries His people. He carried them from before their birth, and He promises to continue to carry them (*even to gray hairs I will carry you!*).

### **Does God carry His people today?**

This is the same Fatherly care Jesus spoke of...

*Luke 12:6-7 – Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*

When we understand that God has made us, and we are valuable to Him, then we can trust Him to carry us.

- It’s a worthy question: do you have to carry your gods, or does your God carry you?

### **v5-7 – What is the ironic folly of idolatry?**

*They lavish gold out of the bag:* Much money and attention are given to the production and care of our idols. Yet, though one cries out to it, yet it cannot answer nor save him out of his trouble.

### **v8 – How may transgressors man-up (NKJV)?**

*Remember this, and show yourselves men:* We can gain the courage of men when we remember the things God tells us to remember. How much defeat we suffer in the Christian life through simply forgetting.

### **v9 – What should we remember?**

*Remember the former things of old...there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning:* God knows the end of every matter, of every course of circumstances, just as clearly as anyone else can see the beginning of it.

### **v10 – How can God declare the end from the beginning?**

*Saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure”:* God knows the end from the beginning because He is much more than a passive observer of events. His counsel shall stand. His works and plans never fail, because He will do all His pleasure. God isn't just watching the entire parade of history; He is directing the parade.

### **v11 – What example is given here of God declaring the end from the beginning?**

*Calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel:* This is another reference to Cyrus. God's people need to remember that God always has a deliverer for His people, even if He has to find one among pagan kings.

### **v12 – Why are the stubborn-hearted far from righteousness?**

People who insist on holding on to their idols and will not open their heart to the Lord are far from spending eternity with Him.

### **v13 – What does it mean, *My salvation will not be delayed?***

God's people need to remember that God's timing is always precise and wise. When we are stubborn-hearted we need to listen to the LORD and remember He never delays and is never late. God always has His deliverer, and always knows exactly when to bring His deliverance.

### **What is the significance of God declaring the end from the beginning?**

Only God can do this because He is outside the confines of time. It reveals that the Bible really is God's Word.

### **Why should we study Bible prophecy?**

*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*  
(Revelation 19:10)

It is a critical part of learning about Jesus...

### **Why do most churches neglect prophecy?**

It is considered controversial since there are so many interpretations. Bible prophecy is thus avoided because it is seen being too divisive. But it is part of the good news of Christ and this is unavoidably divisive:

*Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword* (Matthew 10:34)

### **Why are there so many divergent interpretations of Bible prophecy?**

Flawed hermeneutics. But the myriad of divergent interpretations can be cleared up if everyone just interpreted prophecy literally. Jesus literally fulfilled the prophecies of His First Advent so why wouldn't prophecies of His return be fulfilled literally as well?

### **Why might churches neglect prophecy due to this verse?**

*“the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” says the LORD of hosts* (Malachi 4:1)

It is too scary - with judgments, fire & brimstone and people dying... fire & brimstone preaching is passé.

### **How should we regard “scary” Bible passages?**

*The fear of the LORD leads to life, and he who has it will abide in satisfaction; he will not be visited with evil.* (Proverbs 19:23)

If fear of God's judgment sends us to Jesus for salvation, then it is a good thing.

### **Why might churches neglect prophecy due to this verse?**

*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.*  
(Matthew 7:15)

Prophecy has gotten a bad reputation due to date setters, sensationalists and others trying to instill fear to manipulate people. Out of a fear of false prophets, churches avoid prophecy altogether.

### **How can we avoid being duped by false prophets?**

*You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?*  
(Matthew 7:16)

We can know them by other aspects of their lives that are contrary to Scripture revealing they don't really have a biblical worldview.

## How does this verse explain why churches neglect prophecy?

*scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."* (2 Peter 3:3-4)

People are so distracted or compromised by the world that they don't want to believe Jesus is really coming back.

- This is characteristic of the lukewarm Laodicean church age we are in, not taking Scripture seriously.
- This is also a characteristic of the apostasy of the church that is a sign of the end of the age.

## How does this verse explain why churches neglect prophecy?

*you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe* (Hebrews 5:12-13)

Digging into Bible prophecy isn't consistent with the feel-good, fast-food, sound-bite culture we live in. It takes more than a superficial look at Bible prophecy to understand it...

*it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given* (Matthew 13:11)

Scripture has sufficient depth that the spiritually mature will understand more of His mysteries.

## Is Bible prophecy too pie-in-the-sky escapist?

*seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.* (Colossians 3:1-2)

We are commanded to have an eternal perspective which Bible prophecy helps us to have. Indeed, Jesus wants us to look forward to escaping the Great Tribulation...

*Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man* (Luke 21:36)

## What do we need to know about Bible prophecy?

*Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world* (Acts 15:18)

We must know that God knows the future

*Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.* (Amos 3:7)

We must know that God reveals the future before it happens

*no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.* (2 Peter 1:20-21)

We must know that God inspired Bible prophecy

Given: there are 18 books of prophecy in the Bible & 25-40% of the Bible is prophecy

We must know that the Bible is full of prophecy... to neglect it dumbs us down.

*The prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die* (Deuteronomy 18:20)

We must know that Bible prophecy is reliable

Given: O.T. records >300 prophecies of first advent, 108 different prophecies of Jesus' first coming and all were fulfilled.

We must know that the Bible prophesy has been proven to be accurate.

*we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts* (2 Peter 1:19)

Bible prophecy is more reliable than our experiences; we should pay attention to it; prophecy shines a light on reality

## Why is it wise to study Bible prophecy?

*Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book* (Revelation 22:7)

There are great blessings to knowing that God is in control no matter how chaotic things get. And it is a blessing to know we are on the winning side of His-story.

*we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ* (Titus 2:12-13)

Jesus is our blessed hope

*It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment* (Hebrews 9:27)

Bible prophecy teaches accountability & helps us prepare for what comes after this life

*when He is revealed, we shall be like Him... everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure* (1 John 3:2-3)

Bible prophecy changes lives and is a catalyst for sanctification

*there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8)*

There will be rewards for those who study Bible prophecy

*as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age (Matthew 13:40)*

The lost will be removed and condemned

*I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. (John 9:4)*

The day is coming when we will no longer be able to warn the lost

*Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3)*

Jesus addressed His disciples' interest in it

*you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet (Matthew 24:6)*

Jesus does not want us to be troubled by the things leading up to the end

*this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14)*

Jesus said the end would come; our purpose is to prepare for eternity

*the children of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do (1 Chronicles 12:32)*

God praised those who had an understanding of the times

*Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times (Matthew 16:3)*

Jesus rebuked those who could not discern the signs of the times

*if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. (Revelation 22:19)*

Those who take away from a literal understanding of Bible prophecy are in great danger of eternal punishment. God is serious about properly understanding His revelation.

*Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man. (Luke 21:36)*

Jesus commanded that we watch for Him to return

### **What applications come to mind from our discussion?**

- Only God carries us... we have to carry our idols.
- We grow closer to God when we remember the great things He has done.
- Only God declares the end from the beginning proving that the Bible really is God's Word
- Most churches avoid studying Bible prophecy for various reasons, but we as individuals don't need to be like most churches.
- Bible prophecy is a key part of the gospel of Christ.
- It is wise to study Bible prophecy.