

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes: Isaiah Chapter 47 - 49

5/21/14

Chapter 47 Study Notes

The Fall of Babylon

"Go down, sit in the dust, Virgin Daughter Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, queen city of the Babylonians. No more will you be called tender or delicate. ² Take millstones and grind flour; take off your veil. Lift up your skirts, bare your legs, and wade through the streams. ³ Your nakedness will be exposed and your shame uncovered. I will take vengeance; I will spare no one." ⁴ Our Redeemer—the LORD Almighty is his name—is the Holy One of Israel. ⁵ "Sit in silence, go into darkness, queen city of the Babylonians; no more will you be called queen of kingdoms. ⁶ I was angry with my people and desecrated my inheritance; I gave them into your hand, and you showed them no mercy. Even on the aged you laid a very heavy yoke. ⁷ You said, 'I am forever—the eternal queen! 'But you did not consider these things or reflect on what might happen. ⁸ "Now then, listen, you lover of pleasure, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.' ⁹ Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells. ¹⁰ You have trusted in your wickedness and have said, 'No one sees me.' Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you when you say to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me.' ¹¹ Disaster will come upon you, and you will not know how to conjure it away. A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom; a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you. ¹² "Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror. ¹³ All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you. ¹⁴ Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame. These are not coals for warmth; this is not a fire to sit by. ¹⁵ That is all they are to you—these you have dealt with and labored with since childhood. All of them go on in their error; there is not one that can save you.

47:1-15 Here Isaiah predicted the fall of Babylon more than 150 years before it happened. At this time, Babylon had not yet emerged as the mightiest force on earth, the proud empire that would destroy Judah and Jerusalem. But the Babylonians, Judah's captors, would become captives themselves in 539 B.C. God, not Babylon, has the ultimate power. He used Babylon to punish his sinful people; he would use Medo-Persia to destroy Babylon and free his people.

47:8-9 Caught up in the pursuit of power and pleasure, Babylon believed in its own greatness and claimed to be the only power on earth. Babylon felt completely secure, and Nebuchadnezzar, its king, exalted himself as a "god." But the true God taught Nebuchadnezzar a powerful lesson by taking everything away from him (Daniel 4:28-37). Our society is addicted to pleasure and power,

but these can quickly vanish. Look at your own life and ask yourself how you can be more responsible with the talents and possessions God has given you. How can you use your life for God's honor rather than your own?

47:12-15 The people of Babylon sought advice and help from astrologers and stargazers. But like the idols of wood or gold, astrologers could not even deliver themselves from what was to come from the hand of God. Why rely on those who are powerless? The helpless cannot help us. Alternatives to God are destined to fail. If you want help, find it in God, who has proven his power in creation and in history.

Chapter 48 Study Notes

Stubborn Israel

48 "Listen to this, you descendants of Jacob, you who are called by the name of Israel and come from the line of Judah, you who take oaths in the name of the LORD and invoke the God of Israel—but not in truth or righteousness—² you who call yourselves citizens of the holy city and claim to rely on the God of Israel—the LORD Almighty is his name: ³ 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. ⁴ For I knew how stubborn you were; your neck muscles were iron, your forehead was bronze. ⁵ Therefore I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, 'My images brought them about; my wooden image and metal god ordained them.' ⁶ You have heard these things; look at them all. Will you not admit them? "From now on I will tell you of new things, of hidden things unknown to you. ⁷ They are created now, and not long ago; you have not heard of them before today. So you cannot say, 'Yes, I knew of them.' ⁸ You have neither heard nor understood; from of old your ears have not been open. Well do I know how treacherous you are; you were called a rebel from birth. ⁹ 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 destroy you completely. ¹⁰ See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. ¹¹ For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.

48:1 The people of Judah felt confident because they lived in Jerusalem, the city with God's temple. They depended on their heritage, their city, and their temple—but this was false security because they did not depend on God. Do you feel secure because you go to church or live in a Christian country? Heritage, buildings, or nations cannot give us a relationship with God; we must truly depend on him personally, with all our hearts and minds.

48:9-11 There was nothing in the people's actions, attitudes, or accomplishments to compel God to love and to save them. But for his own sake, to show who he is and what he can do, he saved them. God does not save us because we are good but because he loves us and because of his forgiving nature.

48:10 Do you find it easy to complain when your life becomes complicated or difficult? Why would a loving God allow all kinds of unpleasant experiences to come to his children? This verse shows us plainly that God tests us in the "furnace of affliction." Rather than complain, our response should be

to turn to God in faith for the strength to endure, and to rejoice in our sufferings (see Romans 5:3; James 1:2-4). For without the testing, we would never know what we are capable of doing, nor would we grow. And without the refining, we will not become more pure and more like Christ. If you are facing adversity or suffering, seek God and his refining work in your life.

Israel Freed

¹² "Listen to me, Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: I am he; I am the first and I am the last. ¹³ My own hand laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I summon them, they all stand up together. ¹⁴ "Come together, all of you, and listen: Which of the idols has foretold these things? The LORD's chosen ally will carry out his purpose against Babylon; his arm will be against the Babylonians. ¹⁵ I, even I, have spoken; yes, I have called him. I will bring him, and he will succeed in his mission. ¹⁶ "Come near me and listen to this: "From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there." And now the Sovereign LORD has sent me, endowed with his Spirit. ¹⁷ This is what the LORD says—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. ¹⁸ If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your well-being like the waves of the sea. ¹⁹ Your descendants would have been like the sand, your children like its numberless grains; their name would never be blotted out nor destroyed from before me." ²⁰ Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians! Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it. Send it out to the ends 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 water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and water gushed out. ²² "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."

48:14-15 "The LORD's chosen ally" refers to Cyrus. That the Lord would choose Cyrus as his "ally" must have shocked Isaiah's audience. How could the Lord choose a pagan king, an enemy? But it was Cyrus whom God would use to free his people from their captivity in Babylon. Cyrus's mission was to set Israel free by conquering Babylon, then to decree that all Jews could return to their homeland. Who but a prophet of God could predict such an inconceivable but true story almost 200 years before it happened?

48:17-18 Like a loving parent, God teaches and guides us. We should listen to him because peace and righteousness come to us as we obey his Word. Refusing to pay attention to God's commands invites punishment and threatens that peace and righteousness.

48:20 Do you see the captives leaving Babylon many years later? No wonder they are shouting with joy, as their ancestors shouted joyfully after they crossed the Red Sea, free from slavery at last! What is holding you captive? Be free! The Lord has redeemed his servants from slavery to sin. When you let him free you from your captivity, you will feel like shouting with joy.

48:22 Many people cry out for comfort, security, and relief, but they haven't taken the first steps to turn away from sin and open the channels to God. They have not repented and trusted in him. If you want true peace, seek God first. Then he will give you his peace.

Chapter 49 Study Notes

The Servant of the LORD - Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name. ²He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. ³He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor." ⁴But I said, "I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all. Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God." ⁵And now the LORD says—he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength—⁶he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." ⁷This is what the LORD says—the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel—to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: "Kings will see you and stand up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

Restoration of Israel

⁸This is what the LORD says: "In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, ⁹to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!' "They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. ¹⁰They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water. ¹¹I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up. ¹²See, they will come from afar—some from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Aswan." ¹³Shout for joy, you heavens; rejoice, you earth; burst into song, you mountains! For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. ¹⁴But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me." ¹⁵"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! ¹⁶See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me. ¹⁷Your children hasten back, and those who laid you waste depart from you. ¹⁸Lift up your eyes and look around; all your children gather and come to you. As surely as I live," declares the LORD, "you will wear them all as ornaments; you will put them on, like a bride. ¹⁹"Though you were ruined and made desolate and your land laid waste, now you will be too small for your people, and those who devoured you will be far away. ²⁰The children born during your bereavement will yet say in your hearing, 'This place is too small for us; give us more space to live in.' ²¹Then you will say in your heart, 'Who bore me these? I was bereaved and barren; I was exiled and rejected. Who brought these up?

I was left all alone, but these—where have they come from?" ²²This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "See, I will beckon to the nations, I will lift up my banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their hips. ²³Kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet. Then you will know that I am

the LORD; those who hope in me will not be disappointed.” ²⁴ Can plunder be taken from warriors, or captives be rescued from the fierce? ²⁵ But this is what the LORD says: “Yes, captives will be taken from warriors, and plunder retrieved from the fierce; I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save. ²⁶ I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood, as with wine. Then all mankind will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”

49:1-7 Before the Servant, the Messiah, was born, God had chosen him to bring the light of the gospel (the message of salvation) to the world (see Luke 2:30-32). Christ offered salvation to all nations, and his apostles began the missionary movement to take this gospel to the ends of the earth (see Acts 13:47). Missionary work today continues Jesus' great commission (Matthew 28:18-20), taking the light of the gospel to all nations. Do you support evangelism and missionary efforts with your money? Do you have talent or other resources to help spread the message of Christ? God wants you to be involved. How can you help?

49:14-15 The people of Israel felt that God had forgotten and forsaken them in Babylon; but Isaiah pointed out that God would never forget them, as a loving mother would not forget her little child. When we feel that God has forsaken us, we must ask if we have forsaken and forgotten God (see Deuteronomy 31:6).

49:24-25 God would prove to the world that he is God by doing the impossible—causing warriors to set their captives free; and these warriors would even return the plunder they had taken from the captives! God had done this before at Israel's Exodus from Egypt, and he would do it again when the exiles returned to Israel. Never should we doubt that God will fulfill his promises. He will even do the impossible to make them come true.