

January 15, 2023

"God Promises to Guide"
Lesson 3 of Unit

Isaiah 48:3-8a, 17

Intro

Many people seem very interested in knowing what's coming in the future. They read a daily horoscope to see what their day will be like. They consult a person claiming to be a mystic or a palm reader. They use devices like tarot cards or Ouija boards. All these attempts to know the future are in the least faulty, and in the worst, dangerous.

The only one who knows the future is God Himself. Isaiah 46:10 says that God knows "the end from the beginning." Today's study focuses on what God chooses to reveal to the people of Israel in guiding them in the way He wants them to live. Only God, who knows all things, can tell the people all that they need to know. Chapter 48 begins with God noting the ways the people have themselves as people of God, but God Himself says their identification was "not in truth or righteousness" (48:1).

Read Isaiah 48:3-8, 17

1. vs. 3: God shows that He is the One who knows all there is to know
 - "I foretold former things long ago...I made them known"
 - Nothing that happens is a surprise to God
 - Nothing that He tells His people to do comes from a hastily-developed plan
 - He has known "former things", things that happened "long ago"
 - God told Abraham that he and Sarah would have a child when they were old and childless
 - He told Abraham he would become "the father of a great nation"
 - This came to pass
 - God told Jacob that He would bring his descendants from Egypt to the Promised Land
 - God foretold both the Babylonian exile and the people's return from it

Sometimes, there was a gap of time between when God told and when it came to pass
 Long waiting can cause some to doubt, but each event "came to pass" as God said
 He may have seemed to act "suddenly", but He brought all to pass in His time

2. vs. 4: Israel being stubborn is a common theme in both the Old and New Testaments
 - They are described as "stiff-necked" in Exodus 33:3 and Deuteronomy 31:27
 - They are described as "hard-hearted" in 2 Chr. 36:13 and Psalm 95:8
 - They are "refusing to hear" in Zech. 7:11-12, Matt. 13:15, and Acts 7:51, 57-58

Israel's stubbornness has always led to negative consequences
 The Exodus people who wouldn't trust God weren't allowed into the Promised Land
 Rehoboam listened to a friend instead of God, and Israel divided into two kingdoms

Steel and bronze were the two hardest materials known at the time Isaiah wrote
 God says their "neck muscles were iron, your forehead was bronze"
 Think of the yoke of a work animal like a donkey

An obedient animal will respond to the directions of the driver
Israel is like a disobedient animal
Their necks are iron, incapable of moving
Their foreheads were bronze, incapable of accepting new information
They are completely unalterable, even to avoid their own harm/destruction
This fits Israel's behavior and mindset perfectly

3. vs. 5: The first half of this verse is a repeat of what God said in vs. 3

“I told you these things before they happened”

Repetition of ideas is a typical aspect in Hebrew writing

Repetition always adds emphasis to the point being made

This technique will be used several times in our passage and throughout Is. 48

Also, there weren't copies available for people to read

Using repetition makes it easier for people to hear and remember

Just think of all the commercials you know by heart that you don't want to!

The second half of the verse uses repetition again regarding idols

“My images...my wooden image...metal god”

God is saying He told them long ago (the 1st and 2nd Commandments) not to do this

The people cannot say the “gods” they made brought about any good

It was bad enough that people were worshipping the things they made

They were attributing God's good works to these false gods

4. vs. 6a: God finishes this line of ideas with a statement and a question

“You have heard these things; look at them all. Will you not admit them?”

God is acting Fatherly here—

“I told you not to do that, didn't I? You remember what I said, right?”

He is calling on the people to admit that they did know, but didn't do it anyway

Confession begins with acknowledging a fault, and agreeing with God's view on it

The Israelites at this point seem to be unwilling to take this step.

5. vs. 6b-7: The people have been unwilling to admit that God knew and told them what would happen

So here he shows His power in a way that will be hard to refute

“I will tell you of new things...They are created now...you have not heard of them before”

God is the creator of “new things”

The things He is referring to haven't been spoken of before by prophets

The people have no reference to them before now

God is showing them that He, not false gods, is all powerful

This action will prevent the people from arrogantly saying, “Yes, I knew of them”

6. vs. 8: God says to Israel, “You have neither heard nor understood”

Deut. 6:4-5 is the command to “love the Lord your God with all your heart” etc

The verse begins, “Hear, O Israel...”

But God says that Israel has not heard nor understood

This is a violation of the foundational law in God's covenant with Israel

Hearing always includes obedience to what God has commanded

God says “From of old your ears have not been open”

That means Israel has been this way a long time, maybe from the beginning

In the beginning of their relationship with God, their ears were not open

In the exodus, there were many who grumbled after God had just helped them

Their ears don’t appear to have been open to hearing

7. vs. 17: “This is what the Lord says”

Isaiah is speaking to the people, but this emphasizes God’s words, not Isaiah’s

The phrases used emphasize God’s relationship to His people—

Your Redeemer shows his care of and closeness to His people

The Holy One shows his distinctness, his “otherness” from His people

“who teaches you what is best for you”

God is not usually referred to as a teacher, though He is teaching His people always

God is the source of correct teaching

Israel got this teaching first from the Law of Moses

We learn and grow from following all the teaching in both the OT and the NT

“who directs you in the way you should go”

“The way” indicates a life/path that one takes—the choices that are made

God wants His people to go down the path He directs—a path “for good, and not evil”

God shows Himself to be both teacher and leader

This model is fulfilled in Jesus in the NT

He says he is “the way”, leading us where we should go

Paul sought to kill those who followed “the Way” before his conversion

Paul said that Felix had knowledge of “the Way”

Our faith is the very way that we live, day by day

Application: Israel and Judah did not listen to God’s warnings, but were hard-hearted and stiff-necked.

Their punishment was inevitable because of those attitudes. We seem to have an advantage over them—we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to help us. His empowering helps us to hear and heed God’s directions for our lives, to follow His way more closely.

Prayer: Father God, forgive us for the times we have been too stubborn to hear You or to seek after You.

Please help us hear You so that we can follow in Your way always. In Jesus’ name, Amen.