

-{1}. **Isaiah 48:1-16** **Man Is Stubborn, but God Persists**

A. Introduction

1. those of you who have studied foreign languages will know about conjugating verbs
 - a. for those who studied French, there was 'je suis, tu es, il est, nous sommes, vous êtes, ils sont', or 'I am, you are, he is, we are, you are, they are'
 - b. or Latin: 'amo, amas, amat, ...': 'I love, you love, he loves'
 - c. but there is another humorous way of conjugating English verbs, the way we always try to put ourselves in the best light
 - d. some examples to explain this to you are
 - (A) he/she is silly, you are frivolous, I am witty; or,
 - (B) he is miserly, you are cheap, I am thrifty; or,
 - (C) he is pig-headed, you are obstinate, I am determined
 - e. perhaps my title may sound a bit the same:
 - (A) Man is Stubborn, but God Persists
 - (B) yet really there is a world of difference between man's attitude in this chapter and God's
2. this chapter is a study of that difference, of the contrast
 - a. on the one hand, there is man
 - (A) stubborn, obstinate and rebellious
 - (B) not man in general, but the OT chosen people of God
 - (C) so it is very apt for those who are the NT chosen people of God to pay attention to what it has to say
 - b. on the other hand, there is God,
 - (A) persisting in His mercy and love for His people
 - (B) faithfully carrying out His redemptive plan
 - (C) being true to His promises
 - (D) seeking their restoration to a love-relationship with Himself

- c. let us just re-read the first sixteen verses of this chapter
 - (A) God is the Speaker throughout, and,
 - (B) God's OT people are those being addressed

B. In the first two verses we see this people's religious profession

1. Verse 1 begins: 'Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are named Israel,' (or, it can be translated, 'who call themselves Israel'); 'And who came forth from the loins of Judah,' (or, literally 'from the waters of Judah') – the patriarch Judah the spring or source from which comes the river representing the tribe of Judah
 - a. this people, like many since, prided themselves on their heritage – and they had a godly heritage
 - b. they were descendants of Israel – who as a prince had struggled with God and prevailed (Gen. 32:28)
 - c. they were descendants of Judah – out of which tribe was to come the ruler of Israel (Gen 49:10)
 - d. but spiritually they were still descendants of the old Jacob, the supplanter, the deceiver; with his old nature
2. Verse 1 continues: 'Who swear by the name of the Lord And invoke,' (or, 'make mention,' or 'extol') 'the God of Israel,'
 - a. this people knew all the evangelical, born-again words
 - b. they could make their vows using the right formula and employing the name of their covenant God
 - c. they sprinkled their conversation with religious phrases and fine sounding devotional terms
 - d. but they were hypocrites for ...
3. Verse 1 concludes: 'But not in truth nor in righteousness.'
 - a. that is God's assessment of their religious profession
 - b. professors of God, yes; possessors of a right relationship with Himself, no.
 - c. 'true worshippers,' said Jesus, 'shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers.' (John 4:23)
 - d. the true God deserves true worship
 - e. and practical righteousness will accompany true worship

4. Verse 2 completes their claims: 'For they call themselves after the holy city And lean on the God of Israel; The Lord of hosts is His name.'
 - a. the holy city is Jerusalem, called that because it was the place where the Temple of God stood, the place where God had put His Name, to which prayer and worship could be addressed to God, with His promise that He would hear it
 - b. so they depended upon their God
 - c. they took strength that He is the Lord of hosts, heavenly armies by which He had delivered them over and over

- C. How does God deal with such a people?
 1. Verse 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.'
 - a. He has spoken to and acted for this people
 - b. they have been the beneficiaries of His revelation: the word of God, spoken directly from the mouth of God
 - c. He told them long ago what He was going to do; in the books of Moses, in the former & latter prophets, He made known his purposes and plans for Israel: for good, for bad
 - d. and, that His words were true, He proved, by carrying out what He had said: punishing them, delivering them

 2. 'Because,' God says in verse 4, 'I know that you are obstinate, And your neck is an iron sinew And your forehead bronze,'
 - a. an animal – a horse, ox or donkey – with an iron neck is one that cannot be turned by the reins, it cannot be guided
 - b. such was their character: they would not let themselves be guided by a gracious, redeeming God
 - c. brass or bronze is a zinc or tin alloy of copper; it is easy to drive an iron nail through a copper penny, it is so soft; but when zinc or tin is added, it is hard and was used for shields which neither arrow nor spear could penetrate
 - d. truth didn't penetrate their minds; they just didn't get it

- e. & their attitude was brassy or brazen – they had no shame in the way they treated their God; that was why God ...
3. Spoke through prophets so clearly to them, verse 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."'
- a. the Divine predictions of God were intended to be constant evidences of God's Divine working
 - (A) God told His people what He would do
 - (B) when the time came, He did it, proving His word
 - b. God did this because God's people often have a chronic tendency to explain away God's acts – to forget God's answer to prayer, or belittle it as just happening; of healing as being the result purely and simply of the surgeon's hand
 - c. so this should not be seen as foreign to our own thoughts
4. Yet, says the first part of verse 6, they needed prodding to admit it was God's work: 'You have heard; look at all this. And you, will you not declare it?'
- a. God had long foretold that Judah would be displaced from their land because of their sin and idolatry.
 - b. yet, those who went to Egypt, blamed it on their having ceased sacrificing to the 'queen of heaven' (Jer. 44:18)
 - c. so God in the rest of verse 6, says, 'I proclaim to you new things from this time, Even hidden things which you have not known.' – for a time even future to the return from exile
 - d. and now there begins to be introduced the coming of the Suffering Servant, the Servant who can be neither Isaiah nor the people of Israel: the Servant par excellence.
 - e. what Isaiah is going to be saying in the coming chapters is completely new: how Messiah will deliver His people
5. Verse 7 tells us of these messages: '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."'
- a. the message of the Suffering Servant Messiah – who will deliver, not as Cyrus from Babylon, but as

Saviour from sin

- b. is not one that can be known by human thought
 - c. a new theme to be made known by the prophets: first by Isaiah, and after him by Jeremiah and the rest
 - d. this is something that up until this moment, as we read in
6. Verse 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.'
- a. this news of redemption was one that was completely foreign to the mind of Judah, filled as it was with the ideas of this pagan, idolatrous world
 - b. that is why they deal treacherously, have been rebels
 - c. The Bible tells us that the 'word (or preaching) of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing' (1 Cor 1:18) – that word of the cross is the message of the Suffering Servant Messiah (Christ) found in Isaiah's next chapters
 - d. how sad it is when Christians, too, become entangled with the things of this world and act as though these truths were the foolishness that the world makes them out to be
7. But God is gracious all through this, both with His errant OT nation and wandering NT people, giving these reasons:
- a. verse 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.'
 - (A) though we may fail God – as Judah was doing – yet God's nature is such that He will never forsake or fail His people (Hebrews 13:5)
 - (B) for He has respect to His own Name – the statement of who He is and what He is – His Name conveys to all that He is faithful, changing never
 - (C) and if Judah were to be cut off – entirely destroyed – in order that He indeed be worthy of their praise
 - (D) but deferring the day of wrath until salvation's work at Calvary be complete and the opportunity to repent be given to all nations (Matt 28:20-21, Mark 13:10)
- b. verse 10 gives a second reason: 'Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested (better,

chosen) **you in the furnace of affliction.**'

- (A) why then the current trials and tribulation (did you notice that the world didn't end yesterday? the person making that prediction said the tribulation was over) to Judah? ... to the church of Jesus Christ?
 - (B) it is not in the manner of refining silver – a human skill – but in a manner only God's wisdom could do
 - (C) **In 1991 a fire destroyed some 2,500 homes in California; one owner in sifting through the rubble of his house found a tiny, delicate porcelain rabbit, unharmed by the raging inferno. Others discovered similar pottery and porcelain items. How did these survive when the houses were ashes? Because they had passed through the fire once before.**^{-{2}}.
 - (D) it is judgement not for destruction but transformation
- c. verse 11 give the third reason for God's graciousness: **'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.'**
- (A) part of God's Name and Nature is Love
 - (B) love that shows itself in mercy, lovingkindness, grace
 - (C) were God to fail to show grace it would deny His own nature – God cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:13)
 - (D) that would make His Name profaned, common, no better than any other name
- D. So God's grace persists toward His wayward people
1. The first part of verse 12 repeats the call to hearken: **'Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; ...'**
 - a. in verse 1 we had such a call, but then it was addressed to Judah as they thought they were; now it is addressed to Judah as God intends them to be
 - b. they are the people that He has called
 - c. Christians are the NT people that He has called
 - d. and God's calling is effectual and powerful, because
 - e. the rest of verse 12 says: **'... I am He, I am the first, I am also the last.'** and continues into verse 13: **'Surely My hand founded the earth, And My right hand spread out the heavens; When I call to them, they**

stand together.'

- (A) **I am He** – is the statement of God's absolute being, that He is because He is; independent of His creation
- (B) He is first: before all history, and He is last: beyond all history – Alpha and Omega – the Eternal one
- (C) He is Creator of all
- (D) moreover He continually sustains His creation and there it stands, at attention, ready to obey His orders

2. So, says verse 14 and 15: '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. I, even I, have spoken; indeed I have called him, I have brought him, and He will make his ways successful.'

a. there are several interpretations to these and the next verse

- (A) I believe that this to mean that the Lord still loves His people, wayward as they are, and He will, through Cyrus His instrument and servant, deliver His people out of Babylon –
- (B) Cyrus will succeed because God will give him success

b. by declaring this, and when Judah will experience it, God thus gives assurance that a greater Servant will also come to deliver from a greater bondage, that to sin; so God says

3. verse 16: 'Come near to Me, listen to this: From the first I have not spoken in secret, From the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord God ('the Lord Yahweh,' or, 'the Sovereign Yahweh') has sent Me, and (or, with) His Spirit.'

- a. God's OT people are invited to hear the new proclamation promised in verse 6; this is to be a major announcement – this is something which took place in the past in the God's presence – in the counsels of eternity – now declared
- b. and there is an abrupt change of person here introduced by the words 'and now' introducing this declaration
- c. who is speaking? not simply the prophet; not Cyrus; the declaration with its special title for God, is too

solemn, a title used again by Messiah in Isaiah 50:4, 7 and 9

- d. the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, now steps forward and says that He has been sent, along with the Holy Spirit, by the 'Lord Yahweh' whom Jesus calls in the NT, 'His Father' (e.g. John 5:30, 14:24, &c)

E. Conclusion

1. one application of the chapter is readily apparent, for in each believer there is an old nature
 - a. a nature directly inherited from Adam
 - b. a stubborn nature; an obstinate nature; a sinful nature; a rebellious nature; the NT calls it the flesh or the old man
 - c. we need the Holy Spirit refining work to overcome it
2. the second is that as God the Son has announced here
 - a. so he carried out the will of the Father
 - b. though that led to Gethsemane, to Calvary
 - c. then how can we not put all our trust in Him; obey Him; walk with Him: Oh what love purchased salvation for us!

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Various other English versions of the Holy Bible may be used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in {braces}. The versions are identified as:

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AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
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NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
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NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
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2. Adapted from ‘A Tiny Porcelain Rabbit’ – Kerux illustration #30060