

TO GRAY HAIRS GOD WILL CARRY YOU BUT YOUR IDOLS WON'T

I. Isaiah 46:1-13

A. Growing up, when we had family devotions, especially during times like Advent or Lent, My Dad read from his Bible while we sat around the dining room table. Often he selected passages from the OT prophets and he seemed particularly fond of Isaiah. I had no doubt back then that it was the Word of God but many of those verses left me somewhere between bored and baffled.

B. With that said, I'm glad my parents read aloud from the Scriptures. I'm confident the verses they read went forth and did not return void. That promise is also from Isaiah. **Hebrews 4:12** (ESV) says: "*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*" I challenge you brothers here today, whether it be before a birthday meal or Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, or next time you get pizza, pull out your Bible and read some verses. Then thank God for the meal. Who cares if it leaves them dumfounded.

C. Isaiah's name means, "*The LORD saves.*" He's long been revered as Israel's greatest prophet, at least in terms of his writings. He was married and had children. He lived most of his life in Jerusalem and was close to Judah's kings. Jewish tradition says he was put to death by King Manasseh. **Hebrews 11:37-38** (ESV) tells of the death of God's faithful: "*They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated--of whom the world was not worthy--wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*" Isaiah is believed to be the one sawed in two. Why? For proclaiming God's truth!

D. Isaiah prophesied the exile of the northern ten tribes of Israel by Assyria (Is. 9:8-11:16) which happened in 722 BC. Isaiah foretells of Judah's Babylonian captivity 100 years in advance. Judah, like Israel, had turned away from God, putting their trust in false gods. They had gradually removed their trust in Yahweh. Their idolatry was an abomination to God and He arranges their plight. (i.e. 598-597 BC) Our text today addresses Judah's idol worship, their coming captivity, and their eventual restoration. But more broadly these words are for all of Abraham's children, even us grafted in Gentiles. (cf Gal. 3:6-9) Like many prophecies, they have an initial fulfillment followed by their ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Let's see if these words still speak...

E. Isaiah 46:1-13 (ESV) is for Judah and for us...

1) **V1-2:** *1 Bel bows down; Nebo stoops; (Babylonian gods) their idols are on beasts and livestock; these things you carry are borne as burdens on weary beasts. 2 They stoop; they bow down together; they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity.* (Picture God's people being led off to Babylon with their heavy metal idol statuettes carried in their backpacks and strapped on the backs of their beasts of burden. As they march off into the land of their ruthless captors, their beasts begin to fail under the weight of their idols. Their exhausted animals collapse and their god-trophies tumble forth, bowing down, eating the dust of their captor's land. These gods could not save God's people and they've rejected the only God who could. The imagery is foreboding.)

2) **V3: God speaks:** **3** "*Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by Me (nurtured, cared for) from before your birth, carried from the womb; (God not only created them as people, He made them descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He alone has carried them! They exist because of God!*

3) **V4: Listen to God's promise:** **4** *even to your old age I am He, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save. (This is also a promise to the Gentile children of Abraham-YOU!)*

4) **V5-6:** **5** "*To whom will you liken Me and make Me equal, and compare Me, that we may be alike?* **6** *Those who lavish gold from the purse, and weigh out silver in the scales, hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! 7 They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble. (People do this with their bank accounts and their 401Ks; with their estates and investment properties, their stocks and bonds, pensions and life insurance policies, gold & silver. 'Those things will carry me into old age and retirement won't they?!' Do you think they'll provide any more security than Bel or Nebo? I like the sound of V4 better: "Even to your old age I am He, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save."*

5) **V8-11: "I AM" keeps speaking:** **8** "*Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, 9 remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, 10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all My purpose,' 11 calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My counsel from a far country. I have spoken,*

and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it. (A reference to the future King Cyrus of Persia. Isaiah names him 150 years in advance. God will eventually use Cyrus to free His people from Babylon. Cyrus is a Gentile king who will do more for God's people than most of their own kings. They will return to rebuild and reoccupy Jerusalem. But Isaiah also prophesies of an even greater Deliverer. Who might that be?)

6) You might say: *'But I don't worship Bel or Nebo, what's this have to do with me?'* Has Christianity wiped out idolatry? Consider these powerful quotes:

* **Martin Luther** said: "Whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your God, your functional savior."

* **Scott Hafemann** writes: "Idolatry" is the practice of seeking the source and provision of what we need either physically or emotionally in someone or something other than the one true God. It is the tragically pathetic attempt to squeeze life out of lifeless forms that cannot help us meet our real needs."

* In his book *Counterfeit Gods*, **Tim Keller** writes: "An idol is anything more important to you than God. Anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God. Anything you seek to give you what only God can give. Anything that is so central and essential to your life, that should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living."

* A definition by an **unknown author** goes: "When you take a good thing and make it the ultimate thing--that's idolatry."

* **My description of idolatry is this:** Removing your trust in God and placing it in anyone or anything that is not trust-worthy. (Are you still sitting pretty?!)

F. Let's participate in a little idolatry assessment exercise:

- 1) Where'd you come from? Who made you? Who is your Creator?
- 2) Who or what is your source regarding happiness and security in life?
- 3) In whom do you place your trust when facing trials & tribulations?
- 4) In whom are you trusting regarding tomorrow? Your future? Your career? Your income? Your Health? Your time of gray hairs--your twilight season of life?
- 5) If all your future plans are suddenly dashed, where will you turn?
- 6) What is your source of truth? Is God's Word just one of many textbooks?
- 7) Is your trust in our Sovereign God or are there some competitors?

G. Back to Isaiah 46:12-13: **12** "Listen to Me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness: **13** I bring near My righteousness; it is not far off, and My salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel My glory."

H. While God certainly used Cyrus to deliver His people out of Babylonian bondage and back to Jerusalem, the *Righteous One* has come to deliver us from bondage to sin and death--all the way to New Jerusalem with life forevermore! Here's some affirmation that God's righteousness has indeed been brought near:

* **1 John 2:1-2** (NIV) **1** My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. **2** He is the atoning sacrifice (**propitiation**) for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (The ultimate Deliverer Isaiah heralds is Jesus!)

* **Philippians 3:7-9** (NIV) **7** But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. **8** What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

* **1 Corinthians 1:26-31** (NIV) **26** Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. **27** But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. **28** God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, **29** so that no

one may boast before Him. **30** It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. **31** Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

* **Tim Keller once more:** "You don't realize Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have."

* **Close with Prayer...**

Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff

Isaiah 46:1-13 (ESV)

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Quote by Tim Keller

"An idol is anything more important to you than God. Anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God. Anything you seek to give you what only God can give. Anything that is so central and essential to your life, that should lose you it, your life would feel hardly worth living."

- Tim Keller, Counterfeit Gods.

Unknown Author on Idolatry:

"When you take a good thing and make it the ultimate thing--that's idolatry."

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"You don't realize Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have."

Film Clips & Article Links

Fulfilled Prophecy Demonstrates the Divine Inspiration of Scripture - Nathan W. Bingham

<https://www.ligonier.org/blog/fulfilled-prophecy-demonstrates-divine-inspiration-scripture/>

Talking About Idolatry in a Postmodern Age - Tim Keller

<https://www.monergism.com/talking-about-idolatry-postmodern-age>

Amazing Prophecy: King Cyrus Mentioned 150 Years Before Born - Onehopeyouhave

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNPotWp9pZ4>

Bonus Stuff

Exodus 20:3-6 (NASB)

3 "You shall have no other gods before Me. **4** "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. **5** You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, **6** but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

Quote by Os Guinness

"Idolatry may not involve explicit denials of God's existence or character. It may well come in the form of an over-attachment to something that is in itself perfectly good... An idol can be a physical object, a property, a person, an activity, a role, an institution, a hope, an image, an idea, a pleasure, a hero, anything that can substitute for God."

- Os Guinness and John Seel, *No God but God*, pp. 32-33.

Quote by Ken Sande

"Most of us think of an idol as a statue of wood, stone, or metal worshiped by pagan people. But the concept of idolatry is much broader and far more personal than that. An idol is anything apart from God that we depend on to be happy, fulfilled, or secure. In biblical terms, it is something other than God that we set our heart on that motivates us, that masters and rules us, or that we trust, fear, or serve. In short, it is something we love and pursue more than God."

- Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, p. 104.

Quote by J.D. Greear:

"When something becomes so important to you that it drives your behavior and commands your emotions, you are worshipping it."

Quote by Richard Keyes

"A careful reading of the Old and New Testaments shows that idolatry is nothing like the crude picture that springs to mind of a sculpture in some distant country. The idea is highly sophisticated, drawing together the complexities of motivation in individual psychology, the social environment, and also the unseen world. Idols are not just on pagan altars, but in well-educated human hearts and minds"

Quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson

"A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming."

Quote by Henry Fielding

"If you make money your god, it will plague you like the devil."

Leviticus 19:32 (NIV)

32 Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD.

Psalm 71:9-12 (NIV)

9 Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone. **10** For my enemies speak against me; those who wait to kill me conspire together. **11** They say, "God has forsaken him; pursue him and seize him, for no one will rescue him." **12** Do not be far from me, my God; come quickly, God, to help me.

Psalm 71:18-19 (NIV)

17 Since my youth, God, You have taught me, and to this day I declare Your marvelous deeds. **18** Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare Your power to the next generation, Your mighty acts to all who are to come.

Psalm 92:12-14 (ESV)

12 The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. **13** They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God. **14** They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, **15** to declare that the LORD is upright; He is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

Proverbs 16:31 (ESV)

31 Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.

Proverbs 17:6 (ESV)

6 Grandchildren are the crown of the aged, and the glory of children is their fathers.

Proverbs 20:29 (NIV)

29 The glory of young men is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old.

Quote by Dwight L. Moody

"Preparation for old age should begin not later than one's teens. A life which is empty of purpose until 65 will not suddenly become fulfilled on retirement."

Quote by C.S. Lewis

"The long, dull, monotonous years of middle-aged prosperity or middle-aged adversity are excellent campaigning weather for the devil."

Quote by George MacDonald

"Age is not all decay; it is the ripening, the swelling, of the fresh life within, that withers and bursts the husk."

Quote by Shelton Smith

"Do you want a happy heart when you are old? Then get with the Lord and stay with Him. That is how it works."

Quote by Elisabeth Elliott

"A grandmother's special calling is to pray and to be a fellow worker in the battle in which her children or her grandchildren are engaged."

Quote by Leonard Ravenhill

"Maturity comes from obedience, not necessarily from age."

Quote by Thomas Fuller

"History maketh a young man to be old, without wrinkles or gray hairs, privileging him with the experience of age, without either the infirmities or inconveniences thereof."

Quote by C.S. Lewis

"You are never too old to set a new goal or dream a new dream."

Quote by Benjamin Franklin

"Those who love deeply never grow old; they may die of old age, but they die young."

The Fulfillment of Prophecy

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“As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” - [Mark 1:2-3](#)

Of all the Gospels, Mark spends the least amount of space establishing the context for Jesus’ ministry. Matthew and Luke provide lengthy accounts of the birth of Christ before recording the ministry of Jesus’ forerunner, John the Baptist (Matt. 1–2; Luke 1–2). Prior to his description of the work of John the Baptist, John writes a lengthy prologue that stretches all the way back to eternity in its explicit affirmation of the Son of God’s eternal preexistence ([John 1:1–18](#)). Mark, however, gives only an Old Testament quote before talking about John the Baptist ([Mark 1:2–3](#)).

But this brief quotation speaks volumes about our Lord’s ministry. In beginning his gospel with a citation of the Hebrew Scriptures, Mark shows that we cannot understand the life of Jesus apart from the history of Israel. Jesus’ ministry fulfills God’s old covenant revelation. The new covenant community our Savior established is not wholly new; it is the continuation of the old covenant community.

Mark’s source for this quote is “Isaiah the prophet” (v. 2), yet the actual quote combines [Exodus 23:20](#); [Isaiah 40:3](#); and [Malachi 3:1](#). Only Isaiah is mentioned specifically because ancient Jewish writers commonly cited only the author of the most well-known text when they combined various passages as Mark has done. It is possible that Mark is not the first to combine these texts; some scholars suggest he might have taken his quote from a preexisting source that collected important messianic passages from the Hebrew Bible.

In any case, the text has a multilayered theological significance as Mark applies it to the work of John, the one who went before “the Lord.” [Isaiah 40:3](#) comes from the second half of the book of Isaiah, wherein the prophet describes a new exodus that follows the Babylonian exile. This exodus includes the final atonement for sin and is consummated in the new heavens and earth (Isa. 53; 65:17–25). In applying it to John, Mark reveals that God’s salvation from our bondage to transgression and His renewal of all things takes place through Christ, whom John announced. That Mark’s quote also refers to [Exodus 23:20](#) and Moses, the leader of the first exodus, confirms that Jesus brings about a new exodus for His people. Also, we note that [Isaiah 40:3](#) is about a voice that prepares the way for Yahweh, the one true God and covenant Lord of Israel. By applying this text to the voice that prepares the way for Jesus, Mark identifies Jesus as this one true God, implicitly teaching the deity of Christ.

Coram Deo

Many believers neglect to study the Old Testament because they find it confusing or because they assume that it is less important to the Christian faith than the New Testament. As Mark’s gospel shows us, however, this is not the case. We cannot understand Jesus or His gospel without a proper grounding in the Old Testament Scriptures. Thus, it is important for us to read and study the whole counsel of God. Let us not neglect the study of either testament.

Passages for Further Study

[Isaiah 40:1–5](#)

[Mark 14:49](#)

[1 Corinthians 10:1–6](#)

[2 Timothy 3:16–17](#)

Why Did Israel Want To Worship Idols?

NLT Life Application Study Bible

Worshipping God

- * Long-range benefits
- * Gratification postponed
- * Morality required

Worshipping Idols

- * Short-range benefits
- * Self-gratification immediate
- * Sensuality approved

*** High ethical standards demanded**

*** Neighbors' sins disapproved**

*** Unseen God worshiped**

*** Unselfishness expected**

*** Business relations hindered**

*** Strict religious practices maintained**

*** Changed life demanded**

*** Ethical stand expected**

*** Concern for others taught**

*** Low ethical standards tolerated**

*** Neighbors' sins approved**

*** Visible idols worshiped**

*** Selfishness condoned**

*** Business relations improved**

*** Religious practices loosely regulated**

*** Changed life not demanded**

*** Compromise & cooperation practiced**

*** No concern for others expected**

*** The temptation to follow false gods because of short-term benefits, good feelings, easy "rules," or convenience was always present. But the benefits were deceptive because the gods were false. We worship God because He is the one and only true God.**

- From the *NLT Life Application Study Bible*, Tyndale House Publishing, p. 475.