

**CALVARY PANDAN
BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 48

ISAIAH

CHAPTER 48

Theme: "But not in Truth, nor in righteousness!"

THEME VERSES

Isaiah 48:12-13 (KJV) "Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I *am* he; I *am* the first, I also *am* the last.

13 Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: *when* I call unto them, they stand up together."

INTRODUCTION

Disciplining an errant child is not an easy thing to do. Disciplining an errant nation is impossible to do. Nations have tried to discipline errant nations today by means of economic sanction. Countries make alliances together and gang up on another nation that the rest think is not toeing the line. The nations of the world punish the "rebellious" nation by not doing any business with them. Hopefully, with this economic sanction, the people in that "rebellious" nation suffer and in turn bring about pressure, and political or military upheaval to bring about a change in leadership.

This is man's way of dealing with nations today that do not do what the majority of the nations demand. These pressures are increasingly more potent than before because of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). WTO has caused the economy to be so intricately intertwined that any nation that joins it will find herself so connected that it is impossible to extricate herself without destroying one's own economy. Therefore the smaller nations who are part of this WTO and dependent upon the bigger and stronger nation's economy for survival have to do what these "big" boys want all the time. If they do not, then they would be easily "punished" to get them back in line! This is the world of today.

The world in Isaiah's time was very different. Such global connectivity did not exist. When a nation of God sins, God has to intervene in His own sovereign way to direct Israel back onto the right path as set forth in Holy Scriptures. Isaiah 48 is one such passage. The LORD will use His almighty power to punish His own people so that they would stop bearing a false witness and stumble the world by their idolatry, thus condemning the Gentile nations into the darkness of Hell!

The LORD calls Israel back to obedience! Prophecy is used here effectively to bring about repentance. Will Israel listen and return back unto the LORD? God wants all His people to repent too if they have been wayward and brought shame to the Name of Christ. If we do not do so

willingly then the LORD will have to intervene with chastisement as a loving Father would. Israel must return back to the LORD by walking in the path of righteousness.

OUTLINE

1. The LORD's Charges! (vv.1-8);
2. The LORD's Long-suffering (vv. 9-11);
3. The LORD's Call to Obey! (vv. 12-19);
4. The LORD's Deliverance (vv. 20-22).

COMMENTARY

The LORD's Charges! – 48:1-8

Verse 1 – The LORD's attention shifted back to His own people the Israelites. They were called by the LORD as "O House of Jacob". "Jacob" means "usurper." Israel was to the LORD at this time nothing but a house full of usurpers! This house of Jacob was called "Israel" i.e. "prince of God" in name only. They do not deserve this wonderful name because of the way they lived. They ought to reflect the glory of the LORD but they did not. The charges against Israel begin from the very first verse. Israel came forth out of the waters of Judah is correct because this refers to the time of the division when the LORD divided Israel into two after the death of King Solomon. This northern Kingdom came out of the Judah since Judah has the only right place of worship in Jerusalem.

The house of Jacob did not and have not forgotten the Name of the LORD throughout her more than 200 plus years of existence. They still make their oaths in the name of the LORD. It is amazing that the Name of the LORD was not forgotten throughout all these many years even though there was not one good king in Israel! They also make mention of the name of the God of Israel. They know that the LORD and the God of Israel are part and parcel of Israel's history. The children were probably taught the name of the LORD and the God of Israel otherwise how did these names continue on from one generation to the next!

However, there was one very great problem! These were done "not in truth, nor in righteousness." The truth here has to refer to the Bible. The mere utterance of the name of the LORD including the God of Israel means nothing to God if they were not uttered by people according to God's holy and perfect Word. How does a person mention the Name of the LORD and yet is rejected by God, and in what manner is it NOT according to Truth? The explanation has to be that the person has no covenantal relationship with the LORD. He is still an enemy of the LORD. This means that Israel as a nation was not living right according to Holy Scriptures. That is why the word "righteousness" follows. The lives of the Israelites were immoral, evil, wicked, idolatrous, and filled with all sorts of sins that accompany the worship of idols as described in Romans 1.

Verse 2 – The LORD expands on what He stated in verse 1 regarding the claims of Israel that He had rejected. Israel calls themselves people of the Holy City. They stay themselves i.e. lean upon the God of Israel. The name of this God of Israel is the LORD of hosts! Wow! Israel really knows the facts regarding the LORD. They sincerely and truly believe that they were the people of God and were reflecting His attributes by the way they lived in sin and idolatry! For example when they offer their sons to the gods, Baalim and Aseroth, they really and sincerely thought that the LORD was pleased with them and that they were worshipping the God of Israel!

What cunning devices Satan has woven so marvelously that a nation could be deceived into believing such a dastard and evil manner of life and worship could be that of the LORD God of Israel! He did it for more than 200 years! This phrase "they call themselves" is a very deadly phrase because what man says of himself is meaningless but he thinks that it is meaningful and even has power to become reality! Therefore if one were to say it often enough that he is a child of God then he soon believes that he is one even though in reality he is not!

Leaning on the God of Israel for support and life is what many professing believers believe today too. The large number of followers they garner when they declare the name of Christ has enhanced this deception of Satan to the point of no return! These leaders and pastors have duped

themselves and their thousands of followers into believing God when in reality they have been and continue to believe in Satan! Israel was like that in the days of Isaiah.

Verse 3 – The LORD now appeals to prophecies in Holy Scriptures to prove His point. The LORD said that He had declared the former things from the beginning. This means that what has happened in the past regarding Israel's history had been prophesied by the LORD before they happened. These have to include the birth of Isaac (Genesis 12), the birth of Israel as a nation when the LORD took her out of Egypt (Genesis 15), among many others. These came out of the mouth of the LORD and he revealed them in Holy Scriptures for Israel to know. Then the LORD did them suddenly and they all came to pass.

The direct appeal to prophecies by the LORD here reveals a wonderful truth about the purpose of prophecies. Prophecies have this impact of emphasizing the presence and power of the LORD in the midst of His people. He worked and continued to work in the midst of Israel. Israel has no basis to replace the LORD with idols.

Verse 4 – The reason for the prophecies was because the LORD knew that Israel was obstinate. Her neck was an iron sinew and her brow brass. These metaphors of the LORD describe Israel very accurately. Israel was obstinate which means that she was stubborn and churlish. The stubbornness of Israel was compared

to an iron sinew neck. This means that the neck will never yield to anything. Iron then was the hardest known metal. When a person humbles himself or submits to another he bends his neck. When the neck is unyielding like that of Israel it means that there is nothing that the LORD did that would soften the neck of Israel, not even one tiny little bit! Remember that the mighty miracles of Elijah and Elisha did not even dent the hardness of Israel for she did not turn from her evil ways but held on to them and wanted to kill these servants of the LORD in the process!

Israel's brow is compared to brass which means that she will not weep or mourn for her sins. She would never admit that she was wrong and has sinned against the LORD. She will remain in her sin as she believes that she has not sinned against the LORD. It is a most frightful state to be in not admitting that one has sinned even when the sins are so blatantly revealed when compared to Holy Scriptures.

Verse 5 – The LORD argued that he had done this from the very beginning when he dealt with His people, Israel. The perfect Word of God was given to Israel from the very beginning when the LORD dealt with Israel since the time of Abraham. Before the LORD actually did anything He would reveal it first. Like when the LORD opened up the womb of Sarah, the LORD had already revealed to Abraham when he was 75 years old that he will have a son. Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 years old.

The reason He did this was so that Israel cannot say that her idols did this and did that since the LORD had already revealed in advance through prophecies that he was the One who will and He did do all that He had prophesied. The LORD did not want Israel to say that her molten image and graven image had revealed to them what in reality was the LORD's doing! This means that Israel has no excuse for committing the sin of idolatry and her many evils and wickedness against God.

Verse 6 – Israel has heard all that the LORD has prophesied because His prophets had told them. Israel had seen all that the LORD has prophesied fulfilled before their very eyes. There is no excuse for Israel as they had this experiential knowledge of the LORD's doings in their midst. Why would Israel not declare that it is the LORD God alone and not these idols!

Not only did the LORD reveal things to Israel in times past but He has also revealed in the present to Israel regarding future events. The LORD called them new things even hidden things that Israel did not know. What the LORD had written in the past few chapters regarding Babylon and His dealings with the remnants and returnees are part of the new things that the LORD had revealed to Israel that she did not know.

Verse 7 – The clause "they are created now" simply means that they LORD had made them now i.e. revealed these prophecies to Israel now. They were not found in past Scriptures but are new revelations.

The LORD had "created" these new revelations for Israel to know and understand. Before the LORD revealed them, there was no way Israel could have known them. They were not found in past revealed Scriptures. When progressive revelation was still in operation, these verses make very good sense for these are the verses in the Bible that support the doctrine of progressive revelation. The reason is that the LORD did not allow Israel to ever say that she knew them before they were revealed.

Prophecies could be used as a light to guide the lives of the obedient children of God where their lives would be lived in light of these new prophetic revelations. Or these prophecies could be used as incontrovertible evidence against the disobedient to condemn them for their rejection of God's prophecies. The revelations regarding the rise and fall of the Babylonian kingdom is a case in point here.

Verse 8 – Yea, Israel has never heard of what the LORD had revealed to Israel that will take place only many years later in the future. Israel had not known these truths before. Her ears were not opened to these truths of God as they were revealed only recently by the LORD through Isaiah.

The LORD knows the treacherous hearts of the Israelites. Israel would deal very treacherously with the LORD! Israel had been a transgressor from the mother's womb. The treachery of Israel here has to be her ascribing to idols what the LORD had done in her life from the very

beginning of her existence. Man today has this thing called 'patent' to protect the originator or owner of that design. To copy without permission is stealing. The LORD did everything for Israel like a father bringing up his son since birth. When the son has grown up he says that another has brought him up even though the evidence is made very clear that it is his own father and not another. This is indeed treachery! Israel has been like this since the very beginning.

The LORD's Long-suffering – 48:9-11

Verse 9 – The LORD explains why Israel has not been destroyed since she has been a transgressor since birth! It is not because the LORD has overlooked the sin of Israel and her treachery. It is for the LORD's own name sake that he has deferred His anger against Israel. The LORD's name sake would include the plan of salvation to save mankind. If the LORD had not put His blessed Name on the line i.e. based upon His faithfulness, Israel would have been destroyed and wiped clean like a man wiping his bowl clean after a meal. The plan of God to save mankind cannot be thwarted by sinful man, even by his unfaithfulness.

The praise of the name of the LORD is another reason the LORD had deferred His anger against Israel and not cut her off. The LORD held back His anger against Israel because of the praise of the name of the LORD from His people after salvation. If there is no salvation there is no saint. The saints would experience God's grace

and mercies and His salvation. This brings forth praises from genuine hearts filled with His Holy Spirit. The praise of saints for the LORD is not because the LORD is desperate for the praises of man. There are praises in heaven from all the angelic beings but none of them could praise the LORD because of God's grace and mercies. Only believers in Christ could do that. This is the will of God because of His great grace and mercy that man could praise Him. It is because of man's benefit that the LORD did not cut Israel off.

Verse 10 – The LORD says that He has refined Israel but not with silver. What it means is that Israel was refined not because she has been good and obedient but that she has been evil and needed chastisement. If the LORD has said that He has refined Israel with silver it means that Israel has been building herself with gold silver and precious stone. These refinement or rather "punishment" would not been regarded as punishment but the testing of faith to make faith more mature and stronger. The more silver is tried the purer it becomes. Israel was not dealt with by the LORD in this manner.

Israel was in disobedience. Therefore the punishment was to stop Israel from sinning further. That is why the LORD says here that she was placed in the furnace of affliction. Israel has been a terrible witness for the LORD. There was nothing that Israel did that was pleasing in the eyes of the LORD. The LORD had to stop Israel from sinning further and if it

means punishment by exile then so be it! It is called the furnace of affliction because it will hurt Israel very badly in order for Israel to be brought back onto the right path. Israel did not willingly choose to destroy the golden calves worship. Therefore the LORD had to intervene and destroy them Himself using the Assyrians. This was true of Judah too in years to come. In the case of Judah it was the worship of multiple gods such as Baalim and Asteroth and Molech!

Verse 11 – For the LORD's own sake (He mentioned this twice for emphasis) He will do it, for why should the Name of the LORD be polluted by Israel! The LORD must stop Israel for dirtying the name of the LORD through the worship of idols.

The LORD did everything for Israel and how can He not do anything to stop Israel when Israel gives God's glory to another! This is not because the LORD is selfish and was in need of Man's praise and acknowledgement but this is for man's sake that the LORD insists on ensuring that the glory is due to Him and not idols. When Israel was supposed to point Gentiles to Christ by her life, instead she points Gentiles to idols and deceive them into thinking that idols can give life, the LORD has to stop Israel from continuing with such a deception! If Israel was not designed by the LORD to be His witness as he carries out His plan of salvation through her then Israel was excused. But Israel had agreed to take on this task (cf. Exodus 20) and cannot renege on this covenantal relationship.

She must live up to the reputation that the LORD has placed upon her. Not to do so is deception. Therefore it is for the sake of the name of the LORD and the praises of the LORD that Israel is not cut off by Him.

The LORD's Call to Obey! – 48:12-19

Verse 12 – Who is the LORD that Israel must obey Him! The LORD introduced Himself in a very unique to Israel as if Israel had not known the LORD. Using the imperative, the LORD called Israel to listen to Him. He deliberately address Israel as Jacob first and the Israel. This describes the transition from usurper to being the prince of God. To affirm this wonderful transition, the LORD addressed Israel as "my called." The personal pronoun emphasized ownership. Israel was called by the LORD and belongs to the LORD. Israel was no accidental existence but a designed existence made by the LORD.

The LORD said that He is the first and the last. The emphasis is that the LORD is first and last in all things. Everything on this earth has a beginning and an end. The LORD spoke the first Word and will have the last Word as well. The LORD did the first deed and will also have the last. All mankind exist somewhere in between. Generations come and generations go. But this is not so with the LORD. He was there at the beginning of time and man's existence and continues to exist throughout man's existence on this earth. The LORD will be there at the last just as He was at the beginning. There is no escaping Him from the beginning to

the end. The LORD has always been in sovereign control. All believers must lean and trust Him to see things through according to His will.

Verse 13 – To show forth the magnitude of the power of God and how big He is, God used the universe. The hand of the LORD laid the foundation of the earth. The earth exists because it is founded on the LORD Jesus Christ's good hand. He can easily destroy just as He creates. Man must not forget this awesome power of God most high.

The right hand of the LORD has spanned the heavens. The word "span" simply means that the LORD knows how large this universe is. He simply measures it by stretching forth his hand and measuring from the tip of his thumb to the tip of his small finger. Man has just discovered in outer space that there is a galaxy that is so large that scientists could not fathom such a huge universe. It is a few lights years apart from one end of the galaxy to the next! When the LORD called to them they stand upright and await the command of the LORD. They stand upright when called by their commander. This is an apt description of every believer today!

Verse 14 – The call of the LORD is for all Israel to come together and listen carefully to what He has testified thus far. Using a rhetorical question the LORD drives home the significance of prophecies. Which among them i.e. the idols and the priests of these idols have declared these things in the manner which the LORD had! Not one of them! The

LORD said that He loved him. Who is the "him" referred to here? If it is with reference to the one whom the LORD would use to destroy and punish Babylon for what they did to Israel, then it has to be the king of Persia i.e. Cyrus. The King of Persia will do his own pleasure on Babylon and his arm shall be on Babylon. Babylon would be helpless against the Persians. Babylon would be thoroughly destroyed according to the pleasures of the Persians.

The LORD alone prophesied all these events. This was to teach Israel the important lesson that the LORD God of Israel is not only the LORD God of Israel but that of the whole world. He controls not only Israel but also the empires of the world. They all do His holy and sovereign will even though they do not believe in Him or acknowledge Him. They are the LORD's instruments of chastisement as the LORD wills. They might think that they are doing their own will in conquering nations after nations but they are actually doing the will of the God of Israel.

Verse 15 – To make sure that Israel knows that it is the LORD who prophesied and will do what He has prophesied, the LORD said, "I, even I have spoken." The use of the double personal pronoun is dead giveaway that the LORD wants to emphasize Himself as the ONE who is in control. He said that He was the One who called the Persian King to do His bidding in punishing the Babylonians. Israel must not be blind to this when it happens. Of course Isaiah was

referring to a future generation that would be born in and grow up in captivity as well as a generation who was born in Israel and grew up in exile. To read about oneself in the Bible in prophetic literature is most reassuring especially when one is in captivity because of the sins of one's forefathers. It is not the forefather's fault or the Gentile's power that they are in captivity but it is the LORD's doing. The LORD was the one who brought Cyrus and He shall make his way prosperous against the Babylonians.

Verse 16 – The LORD's call to Israel is to come near to the LORD and listen carefully to the Word of God. When a person is nearer he is supposed to hear better. When the person is close to the LORD he hears the voice of the LORD clearer and better. The voices of man and the world are many. It drowns out the Word of God at times when the people of God would not listen. But the Word of the LORD was not spoken in secret from the beginning. It had been proclaimed loud and clear for all of Israel to hear.

From the beginning the prophecies of the LORD were spoken openly to the time when they were fulfilled, the LORD was there. The LORD had never deserted Israel. Prophecies demonstrate the presence of the LORD in the midst of His people. Prophecies fulfilled also demonstrate the presence of the LORD in the midst of His people no matter whether the prophecies regard chastisement upon Israel or not. The

LORD's presence is a very comforting assurance in times of trouble as well as in times of confusion and chastisement. Then Isaiah changes the focus from the LORD to himself. He declares that the LORD God and His Spirit has sent him to do His bidding. These words were not Isaiah's words but the Word of God.

Verse 17 – Isaiah continues by saying "Thus saith the LORD." The LORD who had introduced Himself in such a spectacular fashion and in such greatness has these words to say to Israel. He is also Israel's Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. The LORD will redeem Israel i.e. ransom Israel in due time. He will not let Israel be an orphan. He is the Holy One of Israel means that He also wants Israel to stop sinning and be in holiness. The ransom will be based upon Israel's holiness and not before. These are the terms of Israel's redemption.

The LORD is the One who teaches Israel to profit i.e. to do good. This was what Israel was designed by God to become. Israel was to do good so that the whole world would see Israel as the people of God. This is the way the LORD wants Israel to go. By the chastisement of the Babylonians and the prophecies of the LORD to comfort Israel, Israel must come back to the LORD in holiness and do good.

Verse 18 – If only Israel had hearkened i.e. obey the commandments of the LORD then she would not be in such a state of chastisement. She would experience peace in great abundance like a river. The blessing of Israel to the rest of the

world would be like a river. The river Jordan would probably be the reference as this river collects the water from the Sea of Galilee and then flows through her main tributary and then meanders downward toward the Dead Sea. In the meanwhile as it meanders, tributaries that stem forth from the River Jordan would carry the life-giving water to irrigate the fields of Israel to bring life to all vegetation. The Israel that obeys the commandment of God would be like such a river.

Israel's obedience to God's commandments would also bring forth righteousness like the waves of the sea. The waves of the sea never stop beating against the shores. It is unending and they keep on coming without limit. The righteousness of Israel would be an unending source of righteousness to the whole world and they would keep on beating against the shores of darkness and sin so that sinners would be converted and become righteous.

Verse 19 – The seed of Israel would be like the sand and the offspring of their bowels like the gravel thereof. The children of an obedient Israel would be in great numbers. They would not need to be punished and killed by the Babylonians. What God had prophesied regarding Babylonians and the Persians are a result of Israel's rejection and disobedience to God's holy Word. The LORD wants to bless Israel more than Israel wants to be blessed by the LORD!

The name of Israel should not have been cut off nor destroyed from before the LORD if only Israel would

obeyed God's commandments! All Israel had to do was to obey and not stubbornly remain in her sins and all would be well. The LORD did not expect perfection or else He would not have provided the Levitical system of worship for the restoration of fellowships with the LORD. What the LORD wanted from Israel was holiness i.e. whenever sins were pointed out to Israel, Israel has to repent and make right with God. Is that so hard to do?

The LORD's Deliverance – 48:20-22

Verse 20 – Israel will be brought out of Babylon. The exile in Babylon will not be permanent or forever. By the command of the LORD Israel will come out. Israel will flee from the Chaldeans i.e. the old Name of Babylon. Using five imperatives in this verse alone, the LORD guarantees Israel's return. It will be swift and certain. Israel shall do so with singing declaring to the world that the LORD will bring His people back. Israel will tell this to the end of the earth. Let the whole world know that the plan of salvation for mankind is on track! Israel will return from exile and remain in the Land of Promise. Jacob is used here to highlight her rebellious nature now.

The LORD has redeemed His servant Israel. The LORD deliberately used the past tense here to describe an event that will only take place nearly 200 years later. This use of the past tense is also known as the prophetic past. The emphasis is to show that as far as the LORD is concerned it is already a thing of the past. This redemption of Israel by the LORD will definitely take place. The

LORD cannot fail His people and not fulfill His prophecies and promises!

Verse 21 – Israel did not thirst when the LORD brought Israel through the deserts the first time when she came out of Egypt in the days of Moses and Aaron. The LORD caused the waters to flow out of the rock for Israel so that Israel would not be without water. The LORD also split open the rock so that Israel will have water gushing out for her to drink.

Likewise when the LORD brings Israel out the second time, He knows how to take care of them as they travel from Babylon back to the Promised Land. Israel will not only be safe but sure in her departure all the way home. The LORD never does anything in half measures. He makes sure that all things are cared for regarding His people, Israel. Nothing slips His planning. The LORD thinks of every single detail and He will carry them out in His time to ensure that Israel sees and knows that it is the LORD who has done it all for her.

Verse 22 – To sum everything up, the LORD said that there is no peace unto the wicked! Then, stop remaining in a state of wickedness and turn back unto the LORD and peace will surely return! It is as simple as this then as it is today! Chastisement from the LORD is always for restoration not destruction. Pastors and elders today must not forget this truth whenever they have to discipline. Hold in one hand the rod of correction and the other hand stretched out to offer a way back to the LORD. Amen.

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Isaiah 48:1-8

TUESDAY: Isaiah 48:1-11

WEDNESDAY: Isaiah 48:1-22

THURSDAY: Isaiah 48:1-22

FRIDAY: Isaiah 48:1-22

3. How do churches today fall into the same sin of Israel as described in verse 1? Please explain and cite modern day examples to support your reasoning.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does any church come to your mind today that is like this Israel where the name of Christ is uttered for hundreds of years but not in truth nor in righteousness? Is there any BP church that you would dare say is of the same mould, perhaps not hundreds of years but long enough to have similar traits?

4. What is the only antidote that could prevent churches and lives of God's people from falling prey to the wiles of the Devil in these last days? Please elaborate.

2. Is syncretistic worship more deadly than the mere worship of other gods in the name of the gods? Please explain.

5. Why is it that people find it so hard to see the sin in their lives even when the Bible reveals their sins to them so clearly? Please explain and cite current examples.

6. Is it possible for a local church to pollute the Name of the LORD today? How? Is it possible for an individual to pollute the name of the LORD today? Is there a difference between the two? Please explain.

7. Do you think that the LORD needs to emphasize "I, even I, have spoken" when it comes to the local churches of today seeing the hand of God in their existence? Would they be able to see if God were to use Gentiles to teach and show forth the power of God?

8. Do you think that it is possible for God's people to say "thus saith the LORD" today? Under what circumstances, if possible, would such a phrase be uttered today?

9. Do you think it is easy to obey the Word of God?

10. What lessons have you learnt from this chapter about God's Word and about yourself?
