

## ***Isaiah Part 29: “My glory I will not give to another...”***

### **Isaiah 48**

#### ***Israel refined for God's glory (Isaiah 48 v 1 to 8)***

There seems to have been a party among the exiles who received God’s message concerning Cyrus with disapproval. God had already rebuked them on more than one occasion (see Isaiah 45 v 9 to 13; Isaiah 46 v 12, 13), and now in the first few verses of this chapter God answers an objection they seem to have raised that the teaching was novel, and not in accord with God’s usual procedure. But God tells them that in spite of their rebellious attitude, he will carry out his plans...

God notes the hypocrisy of Israel: “O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel” (v 1) – the name Jacob essentially means ‘deceiver’, and God says that they have the name of Israel, but not the character of Israel, which means ‘governed by God’. “Who came from the waters of Judah” – here God reminds them of their tribal ancestor, Judah, who was noted for his cruelty (e.g. Genesis 37 v 26, 27), and for his immorality (see the story in Genesis 38). “Who swear by the name of the LORD... but not in truth or right” – God exposes the sin of his people. They take his name, and identify with the holy city, and give appearance that they “stay themselves on the God of Israel” (v 2) – yet it is only image, and not reality...

- What does God condemn in the nominal religious observances of the Jews? Why did this cause God to announce his intentions beforehand (v 3 to 5), and yet keep some of his purposes hidden (v 7, 8)? Do we grieve God by failing to acknowledge him, and give him glory?

“The former things I declared of old; they went out from my mouth... then suddenly I did them, and they came to pass” (v 3) – God had shown Israel his power to declare the future in predictive prophecy. He did this because he knew that they were “obstinate” (v 4). Knowing Israel’s love of idolatry, he gave them irrefutable evidence. “Lest you should say” (v 5) – this means that the Israelites were without excuse. They knew the greatness of God, yet they still lived with only a religious image, without spiritual reality.

“You have heard; now see all this; and will you not declare it?” (v 6) – it is as if God is amazed that his people have seen all of his great power and glory, yet they still stand in obstinate rebellion against him. “For I knew that you would surely deal treacherously, and that from before birth you were called a rebel” (v 8) – God states the reason why his people are so deeply sinful: they are sinners ‘from before birth’, so their sinfulness is deeply entrenched. It is a difficult concept for our modern, individualistic ears, but the Bible teaches that we are sinners ‘from before birth’, that we inherited a sinful nature because we are descended from Adam and ‘sinned in Adam’ (Romans 5 v 12). It isn’t our individual acts of sin that make us sinners; it is our descent from Adam. Our individual acts of sin merely prove that we are rebels from before birth.

#### ***The LORD’s mercy and call to Israel (Isaiah 48 v 9 to 22)***

“For my name’s sake I defer my anger” (v 9) – knowing how deeply sinful his people are, why would the LORD ever show mercy to his people? He does it for his name’s sake. It is not because Israel deserves mercy; indeed mercy can never be deserved. God gives it to glorify himself and to further his eternal purposes. “I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake... I do it... My glory I will not give to another” (v 10, 11) – why has a disobedient Israel felt the refining fires from God? Again, it is for God’s sake and honour and glory. God allows trials and refining fires in our lives – we should remember that everything he does and allows furthers his eternal purposes.

***[MORE OVER...]***

“I am he; I am the first, and I am the last... my right hand spread out the heavens” (v 12, 13) – to answer any resentment among his people, God reminds them why he allows things for his glory and to further his praise. He can do it because of who he is – the only true God, the God of all glory, the God of all eternity, the God of all creation...

“Assemble, all of you, and listen! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him...” (v 14) – ‘all of you’ refers to Israel; ‘who among them’ refers to the nations; ‘the LORD loves him’ refers to Cyrus. Though the LORD is the God of all glory and power, he is motivated by love for his people.

“Draw near to me, hear this, from the beginning I have not spoken in secret...” And now the Lord God has sent me, and his Spirit” (v 16) – this is the Servant of the LORD, the Messiah himself speaking. Only he was from the beginning. The Messiah is pleading with his people!

- According to verses 17 to 22, what conditions does God lay down before we can experience the fullness of his grace and peace in our lives?

“Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments!” (v 18) – in the light of his power and love for Israel, God laments their unfulfilled potential, unfulfilled because of their disobedience. (i) If they had only obeyed, then their peace would have been like a river – peace as flowing, bountiful and life-giving as a river! (ii) If they had only obeyed, then their righteousness would have been like the waves of the sea – righteousness as certain, as unending, as reliable as the sea! (iii) If they had only obeyed, then their descendants would have been like the sand – descendants as numerous and as dense in population as the sand! It is sobering to think what unfulfilled potential we have, and yet what disobedience or unbelief keeps us from everything God has for us...

“Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy” (v 20) – despite Israel’s disobedience and unfulfilled potential, the LORD still loves them and will still free them from their captivity in Babylon. When they leave Babylon, they will go out with shouts of joy. “Send it out to the end of the earth...” – God tells his people to declare his praises even to the end of the earth. The whole world should know how great and merciful God is!

“There is no peace,’ says the LORD, ‘for the wicked” (v 22) – together with praise for God’s greatness is a contrast: the destined misery for the wicked. Often it seems that the way of the wicked is peaceful. This was how it seemed to the psalmist in Psalm 73 (v 3, 16, 17); yet when he gained perspective in the “sanctuary of God” and saw the end of the wicked, he knew that ultimately, there is no peace... for the wicked.

*Isaiah Chapters 40 through to 48 has focused on the promise of God’s deliverance of his people from their captivity in Babylon, and the specific prediction of the Gentile king who would deliver them, Cyrus. Throughout this section, God shows that his desire to deliver his people proves his love, his ability to deliver his people proves his power, and his prophetic knowledge of the deliverer proves his uniqueness among all gods. Starting with Chapter 49, there is no longer a mention of Cyrus – now the focus is on the ultimate deliverer, the Messiah. Though there is still reference to the deliverance from Babylon’s captivity, the real focus is on the ultimate deliverance the Messiah will bring...*

*Prayer – Lord God, as we read these verses, we are reminded of your greatness and power, and that your glory you will not give to another. Help us to remember that you are the first and the last, the only true God, the God of all glory, the God of all eternity, the God of all creation. Help us to remember this when trials and refining fires come our way – help us to remember that everything you do and allow in our lives is designed to further your eternal purposes. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you endured ‘trials and refining fires’ for us, through your death upon the Cross, and that your blood was shed to ransom us from sin and eternal judgment. We put our trust in you afresh, and we give you humble thanks. Amen.*