

The Millennium Forecast

The Book of Isaiah

Text

Isaiah 46:1-13

Topic

Impotent idols weigh down their followers while Jesus relieves our burdens by carrying us from womb to tomb.

Title

"You'll Never Be God's Beast Of Burden"

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.

Scenes from my life flashed across the sky. In each, I noticed Footprints in the Sand. At times there were two sets of footprints; other times there was only one. Curious to know why, I asked the Lord.

The Lord replied, "The times when you have seen only one set of footprints, My child, is when I carried you. The times when you have seen two sets of footprints, My child, *you insisted I put you down so that you could go your own way, in your own strength.*"

That's not the way it goes...But maybe it should be?

In the original composition there is no concern about the two sets of footprints. They are only there to make the point that there are times the Lord must carry you. Turns out, *those times are all the time!*

God says so in verses three & four. "Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, And all the remnant of the house of Israel, Who have been **upheld** by Me from birth, Who have

been **carried** from the womb: Even to *your* old age, I am He, And even to gray hairs I will **carry you!** I have made, and I will **bear**; Even I will **carry**, and will deliver you.”

“Upheld,” “carry,” “carried,” and “bear,” “from the womb even to your old age.” The Lord carries us through our entire life.

I’ll organize my comments around two points: **#1 The World Is Out To Crush You**, and **#2 The Lord Is Here To Carry You**.

#1 - The World Is Out To Crush You (v1-2 & 5-13)

When we use the term “the world” we mean the fallen condition of God’s Special Creation that now exists on account of Adam & Eve disobeying the LORD in the beginning. Satan has installed an antagonistic, chaotic system. He is a liar and a murderer.

Satan’s psychologies, philosophies, politics, and religions are lies. They blind you from seeing your need for a Savior who can take your burden of sin upon Himself so that you are forgiven.

I have a bachelors degree in psychology from the prestigious UC campus in Riverside. *I’ve asked forgiveness often!* The psych department focused on Comparative Psychology. We studied animals to try to understand human behavior. Why would we do that? It’s the evolutionary approach.

They have (had?) a colony of macaque monkeys. One assignment was to sit all day to observe their behavior. I’m being serious. Most of their time was spent grooming one another.

While I’m confessing... I also have a bachelor’s in philosophy. Existentialism was all the rage at UCR. Here is all that you need to know about existentialism. At the graduate level, they urge you not to commit suicide. I’m serious. Existentialism poses an existential threat to your life.

Meanwhile the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Don’t make the mistake of thinking that a godless person with a worldly education has more wisdom than even a new believer in Jesus. Which one, for example, is going to be in Heaven?

Isa 46:1 Bel bows down, Nebo stoops; Their idols were on the beasts and on the cattle. Your carriages were heavily loaded, A burden to the weary *beast*.

“Bel” and “Nebo” were the father-and-son god team of Babylon. Their idols rode on carts that beasts of burden hauled - with some difficulty because of their weight. Rather than lifting burdens, these idols created them for their worshippers.

There is no single agreed upon biblical definition of idolatry. We define it as “idols, images, or any God-substitutes.” It is helpful in discussing and determining idolatry to remember the biblical statement that “covetousness is idolatry.” *Anything* or *anyone* you covet substitutes for God because it is evidence you are not content with Him.

Your God-substitute can only make things worse because its source is satanic and it has no power to help.

Regarding religion Jesus said, “For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men’s shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers” (Matthew 23:4).

The apostle Paul chastised the believers in Corinth saying, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?” (First Corinthians 6:2-3).

Isa 46:2 They stoop, they bow down together; They could not deliver the burden, But have themselves gone into captivity.

Isaiah is describing the near-future of Israel. The Jews would be conquered by Babylon and taken there, held captive there. Babylon’s so-called gods would figuratively “bow down together” when King Cyrus of Medo-Persia conquered them.

Skip to verse five.

Isa 46:5 “To whom will you liken Me, and make *Me* equal And compare Me, that we should be alike?

Isa 46:6 They lavish gold out of the bag, And weigh silver on the scales; They hire a goldsmith, and he makes it a god; They prostrate themselves, yes, they worship.

Isa 46:7 They bear it on the shoulder, they carry it And set it in its place, and it stands; From its place it shall not move. Though *one* cries out to it, yet it cannot answer Nor save him out of his trouble.

We immediately agree that idols and images are powerless. Covetousness, however, is pervasive. It can be hidden in our hearts where it becomes septic.

Isa 46:8 "Remember this, and show yourselves men; Recall to mind, O you transgressors.

Has God done things for you? *Of course He has.* Remember them; recall them. Then "Act like a Christian!"

Singer Johnny Fontaine went to his Godfather for help. He started to sob, saying he didn't know what to do. The Godfather grabbed him by the hands and told him, "*You can act like a man!*" Then he slapped him and said, "What's the matter with you!"

We all have some of Johnny Fontaine in us and we often require a *spiritual "slap in the face."*

Isa 46:9 Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and *there is* no other; I am God, and *there is* none like Me,

Isa 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times *things* that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,'

Several times in the last few chapters the LORD reminded His chosen nation that He alone can, with 100% accuracy, predict the future. Not only that, but His "counsel," i.e., His plan, will succeed.

Isa 46:11 Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken *it*; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed *it*; I will also do it.

King Cyrus was "the bird of prey from the East."

Cyrus would help the Jews return to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls and the Temple. He would serve the Lord. As far as we can tell, Cyrus was never saved. All the more our surprise at God using him.

Isa 46:12 "Listen to Me, you stubborn-hearted, Who *are* far from righteousness:

Isa 46:13 I bring My righteousness near, it shall not be far off; My salvation shall not linger. And I will place salvation in Zion, For Israel My glory."

Commentators argue whether God was addressing Babylonians or Jews who were "far from righteousness." Probably His chosen nation - *but why not both?*

In verse thirteen God promised that all of their drama with Assyria, Babylon, and Persia would not hinder the plan of redemption. He would "bring [His] righteousness near." I think God was talking about the first coming of Jesus to die & rise from the dead. Righteousness was near because Jesus was here. The apostle John said that their "hands" "handled" the Lord (First John 1:1). They touched the God-man.

Jesus' sacrifice of Himself makes it possible for God to declare people righteous. He has taken upon Himself the sins of the world. Those who believe have their sins exchanged for His righteousness.

Someone has insightfully said, "There are two kinds of gods in this world: The kind you carry and the One who can carry you."

If you are burdened in any way, *it isn't from the Lord.*

#2 - The Lord Is Here To Carry You (v3-4)

The LORD considers Israel His child. Children are carried in the womb, miraculously protected and provided for. They are carried for some time after. The LORD portrays Himself carrying His children **all** their days.

Isa 46:3 "Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, And all the remnant of the house of Israel, Who have been upheld *by Me* from birth, Who have been carried from the womb:

The imagery of Jesus constantly carrying me suggests an effortlessness on my part. I add nothing except that I must by faith believe He will never leave me or forsake me.

Expand on that as a personal devotion. It's amazing.

Let's modernize this idea of being carried and say I'm in a wheelchair that the Lord is pushing. He is setting the speed and choosing the direction. I am resting.

Why would I bail? Two reasons. First - *Because the Lord pushes my wheelchair like it's Mr.Toad's wild ride.*

The Lord has what I call 'opposite thinking:'

- He tells us to rejoice in trials.
- Weakness is strength.

- If you humble yourself He exalts you.
- You are expected to take “pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake” (Second Corinthians 12:10).
- God “has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are” (First Corinthians 1:27-28).

Every step in the the life of Jesus on earth was a mind-boggling opposite of what was expected. Born of a virgin? In Bethlehem? From Nazareth? Learning obedience for the first thirty years of His life on earth? The Cross before the Crown? It is all weirdly wonderful.

Secondly, *I want to leave footprints in the sand*. No one wants to be carried or confined to a wheelchair. It is a surrender to weakness and handicap. God’s strength being revealed in my weakness is poetic on the pages of Scripture. In my own life - not so much.

Isa 46:4 Even to *your* old age, I *am* He, And *even* to gray hairs I will carry *you!* I have made, and I will bear; Even I will carry, and will deliver *you*.

The very fact we age to “gray hairs” and die reminds us something is fundamentally wrong. God’s plan to send Jesus rights all wrongs. But not yet.

So I’m in my wheelchair, trusting Jesus, when all of a sudden a burden gets dumped in my lap. Maybe, as with me, a diagnosis you’d rather not have.

Jesus is still handling the load. Allow me to illustrate. People in wheelchairs at Disneyland will have kids & grandkids sitting on them. They’ve got packages hanging off them and off the chair. Everyone in their party uses the wheelchair as storage.

None of that weighs them down; it is added weight for the one pushing. We, however, believe we are being burdened, sometimes beyond what we can bear.

James begins his NT letter, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials” (1:2). Do you? Do I? If we did we would sing,

*Joy in the World, My Trial has Come,
Let Gene Receive it's Sting*

The apostle Peter understood that the believers he was writing to were “grieved” by their trials. But he immediately told them the purpose of trials was to refine them as a refiner refines gold in the furnace. He told them to “rejoice with joy, inexpressible and full of glory” (1:8).

Believers in Christ enjoy fellowship with their Lord. One particular kind of fellowship is “the fellowship of His suffering” (Philippians 3:10).

The early apostles believed that participating in the fellowship of Christ’s suffering was part of our preparation for sharing in His future glory.

Like Job before me, I want to be able to declare, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You” (Job 42:5).

The apostle Paul suffered from a long-term illness or disability which he called “the thorn in his flesh.” He let Jesus carry him, saying, “[Jesus] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (Second Corinthians 12:9).

I’ve used the illustration many times, but it’s just too good not to. You remember that scene in *Jaws* when Quint, Hooper, and Brody were below deck on the *Orca*. They started comparing wounds that they had received over the years. They were boasting, wanting to have the worst wound.

The apostle Peter was told by Jesus, “When you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and **carry you** where you do not wish.” This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me” (John 21:18-19).

The church fathers say that Peter was crucified at Rome, about 34 years after this, with his head downward. Clemens says that he was led to the crucifixion with his wife, and sustained her in her sufferings by exhorting her to remember the example of her Lord. He also adds that he died, not as the philosophers did, but with a firm hope of heaven, and patiently endured the pangs of the cross.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary reads, “As Jesus followed the Father’s will, so His disciples should follow their Lord whether the path leads to a cross or to some other difficult experience.”

Sometimes I feel sorry for believers who have no trials. They are missing the fellowship of His suffering.

You can't be upset with me about ruining Footprints in the Sand for you. My version extols the single set belonging to Jesus.

Maybe we rewrite it again to show tire tracks.

- If you came today burdened and seeking relief, one way to get it is to help another believer with their burden(s). "Carry **each other's** burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2 NIV).
- If you are not a believer, please perk-up:

In Isaiah 53:11 we read, "By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will **bear** their iniquities."

Hebrews 9:28 says, "Christ also, having been offered once to **bear** the sins of many."

First Peter 2:24, "He Himself **bore** our sins in His body on the cross."