

Isaiah 46:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: your carriages were heavy loaden; they are a burden to the weary beast.

Analysis

Bel (Marduk) and Nebo (Nabu), Babylon's chief deities, are depicted as burdensome cargo loaded on weary beasts, contrasting with Yahweh who carries His people (v. 3-4). This reversal exposes idolatry's fundamental irrationality - worshipers must bear their gods rather than being borne by them. The gods 'stoop' and 'bow down' in defeat, foreshadowing Babylon's fall and anticipating Philippians 2:10 where every knee bows to Christ.

Historical Context

During Babylon's fall to Cyrus (539 BC), Nabonidus had gathered images of regional deities into Babylon for protection - they became liabilities in evacuation. Archaeological evidence confirms Marduk and Nabu worship dominated Babylonian religious life.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. What 'burdens' in your life are actually false gods you're carrying instead of being carried by the true God?
2. How does the futility of ancient idolatry expose modern idols of wealth, power, or pleasure?

Interlinear Text

כָּבַע	בֵּל	קִרְס	נְבוֹ	הָיוּ	עֲצִבֵּיהֶם	לְתִי הָ
boweth down	Bel	stoopeth	Nebo	H1961	their idols	were upon the beasts
H3766	H1078	H7164	H5015		H6091	H2416
וְלִבְהֶמָּה הָ	נִשְׂאֲתֵיכֶם	עֲמוֹס וְ	מִשָּׁא			
and upon the cattle	your carriages	were heavy loaden	they are a burden			
H929	H5385	H6006	H4853			
לְעֵיפָה:						
to the weary						
H5889						

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 21:9 (Parallel theme): And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.

Jeremiah 51:44 (Parallel theme): And I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed up: and the nations shall not flow together any more unto him: yea, the wall of Babylon shall fall.

Jeremiah 50:2 (Parallel theme): Declare ye among the nations, and publish, and set up a standard; publish, and conceal not: say, Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces; her idols are confounded, her images are broken in pieces.

Isaiah 2:20 (Parallel theme): In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats;

Jeremiah 51:52 (Parallel theme): Wherefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will do judgment upon her graven images: and through all her land the wounded shall groan.

Jeremiah 51:47 (Parallel theme): Therefore, behold, the days come, that I will do judgment upon the graven images of Babylon: and her whole land shall be confounded, and all her slain shall fall in the midst of her.

Jeremiah 10:5 (Parallel theme): They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good.

Exodus 12:12 (Parallel theme): For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.

1 Samuel 5:3 (Parallel theme): And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again.