

Isaiah 46:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors.

Analysis

Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors. This powerful call to remembrance appears in the context of God's polemic against idolatry, demanding that His people demonstrate spiritual maturity by learning from their history and acknowledging their covenant relationship with the one true God. The Hebrew verb *zakar* (זָכַר, "remember") carries far more weight than casual recollection—it demands active, deliberate, transformative remembering that affects present behavior and future choices. Biblical remembrance always implies consequential action: when God "remembers" His covenant, He acts to fulfill it; when His people "remember" His works, they must respond in faithful obedience and worship.

The phrase "shew yourselves men" translates the Hebrew *hit'osheshu* (הִתְאֶשְׁשׁוּ), which literally means "act like men," "be strong," "take courage," or "conduct yourselves with masculine strength and resolve." This is not gender-exclusive language but a call to spiritual maturity, moral courage, and decisive commitment—qualities associated in ancient cultures with responsible adult males who protected families, led communities, and made crucial decisions. The prophet challenges passive, spiritually immature Israel to demonstrate the firmness, resolution, and steadfast character appropriate to God's covenant people. Stop wavering between Yahweh and idols; cease the spiritual weakness of compromise; abandon the moral cowardice of conforming to surrounding pagan nations. Act with the strength and conviction befitting those who claim relationship with the Almighty.

"Bring it again to mind" (הָשִׁיבוּ עַל-לֵב, hashivu al-lev) intensifies the command, literally meaning "return it to your heart" or "restore it to your inner being." The Hebrew lev (heart) encompasses mind, will, emotions, and moral center—the whole inner person. This isn't merely intellectual recall but deep, personal, transformative internalization of truth. What must they remember and internalize? The context (verses 3-7) demands remembering:

1. God's unique power to carry His people from birth to old age (vv. 3-4)
2. His absolute incomparability—no idol can match His nature or works (v. 5)
3. the absurdity of idol worship—man-made gods requiring human carriers versus the living God who carries His people (vv. 6-7)
4. God's sovereign ability to declare the end from the beginning and accomplish all His purposes (vv. 9-11).

The address "O ye transgressors" (פְּשָׁעִים, posh'im) is simultaneously confrontational and redemptive. Pasha denotes willful rebellion, deliberate transgression, conscious defiance of known authority—not innocent error but culpable revolt.

God addresses His covenant people as rebels, yet still addresses them, still calls them to repentance, still invites them to return. The term exposes their sin's true nature: their idolatry isn't cultural adaptation or innocent syncretism but treasonous rebellion against their covenant Lord. Yet the very act of calling them to remember demonstrates God's patient grace—He doesn't immediately destroy but appeals, reasons, warns, and invites restoration. The prophet essentially declares: "You are rebels, yes, but remember who your God is, what He has done, what He promises, and be transformed by that remembrance into loyal, mature covenant partners worthy of His name."

This verse stands at the theological heart of Isaiah 46's polemic structure. The chapter begins with Babylon's idol gods Bel and Nebo bowing down, unable to save themselves (vv. 1-2), then contrasts these impotent idols with Yahweh who has carried Israel from birth and promises to carry them to old age (vv. 3-4). Verses 5-7 expose idolatry's absurdity—gods made, carried, and positioned by humans cannot answer prayers or deliver from trouble. Verse 8 serves as the

turning point, calling Israel to active remembrance and mature response. Verses 9-11 then proclaim God's unique sovereignty and ability to accomplish His declared purposes, including using Cyrus to deliver Israel from Babylonian exile. Verses 12-13 conclude with God's promise of near salvation for those who are "far from righteousness"—grace offered even to stubborn rebels. The call to "remember" in verse 8 thus connects God's past faithfulness (vv. 3-4), His present incomparability (vv. 5-7), and His future salvation (vv. 9-13) into one unified appeal for covenant loyalty demonstrated through forsaking idols and trusting Yahweh exclusively.

Historical Context

Isaiah 46 belongs to the "Book of Comfort" (chapters 40-55), prophetic oracles addressing Israel's future Babylonian exile (586-538 BC) and promised restoration through a Persian deliverer named Cyrus. Though written in the 8th century BC during Isaiah's ministry in Jerusalem (approximately 740-681 BC), these chapters demonstrate supernatural foresight—naming Cyrus specifically over a century before his birth (44:28; 45:1) and describing exile's circumstances, emotions, and eventual reversal before the Babylonian Empire had even conquered Judah.

The immediate context involves Babylon's patron deities Bel (another name for Marduk, chief Babylonian god) and Nebo (Marduk's son, god of writing and wisdom). Isaiah envisions these gods bowing down, loaded on weary beasts during Babylon's eventual fall to Persia (539 BC). Historical records document that when Cyrus conquered Babylon, processions of idol gods occurred as priests attempted to protect divine images—a futile effort Isaiah prophetically mocks. Archaeological discoveries including the Cyrus Cylinder (found 1879) confirm Cyrus's policy of allowing exiled peoples to return to homelands and restore worship—precisely as Isaiah prophesied.

The eighth-century audience hearing Isaiah's prophecies faced Assyrian threats (Samaria fell 722 BC; Sennacherib invaded Judah 701 BC). Yet Isaiah looked beyond immediate crises to future Babylonian exile and restoration. For later readers during actual Babylonian captivity (586-538 BC), these prophecies provided crucial theological perspective: their suffering wasn't divine

abandonment but discipline; their exile had duration limits; their God remained sovereign over Babylon's supposedly powerful deities; and their restoration was certain because Yahweh had declared it.

The command to "remember" resonated throughout Israel's covenant relationship. Moses repeatedly commanded Israel to "remember" Egypt's bondage (Deuteronomy 5:15), wilderness provision (Deuteronomy 8:2), and God's mighty acts (Deuteronomy 7:18). Joshua erected memorial stones so future generations would "remember" Jordan's crossing (Joshua 4:7). The Passover feast institutionalized corporate remembrance (Exodus 12:14). Israel's covenant faithfulness depended on active, transformative remembrance of God's character and works. Conversely, spiritual decline began when "they forgot the LORD their God" (Judges 3:7; 1 Samuel 12:9). Isaiah 46:8 stands in this tradition: remember God's uniqueness, power, and faithfulness, and let that remembrance transform present allegiance.

Church fathers applied this text to the church's struggle against various forms of idolatry. Athanasius cited it against Arianism's subordinationist Christology, arguing that worshiping created beings (even exalted ones) was idolatry. Augustine referenced it regarding the heart's tendency toward disordered loves—any created thing elevated to ultimate worth becomes an idol. Reformers like Calvin used it to confront medieval religion's multiplication of mediators and objects of devotion, calling believers to exclusive worship of God revealed in Scripture. Puritan expositors emphasized the necessity of active, deliberate remembrance as spiritual discipline—regular meditation on God's attributes, works, and promises as antidote to worldliness and spiritual lethargy.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. What specific truths about God's character, works, or promises do you most need to actively 'remember' and 'bring to mind' to strengthen your faith and resist contemporary idolatries?
2. In what areas of life are you demonstrating spiritual immaturity or weakness (failing to 'shew yourself a man') rather than the courage and conviction appropriate to God's covenant people?
3. What are the functional idols in your life—created things or human achievements you're tempted to trust for security, identity, or satisfaction instead of God alone?
4. How does remembering God's past faithfulness to you personally (how He has 'carried you' from spiritual birth until now) affect your trust in His future promises?
5. If God addressed you as 'O transgressor' while simultaneously calling you to remember and return, how would this combination of confrontation and invitation shape your understanding of repentance and grace?

Interlinear Text

זָכוֹר	זֹאת	וְהִתְאָשׁוּ	הָשׁ יבֹ	פּוֹשְׁעֵי יָם
Remember	H2063	this and shew yourselves men	bring it again	O ye transgressors
H2142		H377	H7725	H6586
עַל	לִבִּי			
H5921	to mind			
	H3820			