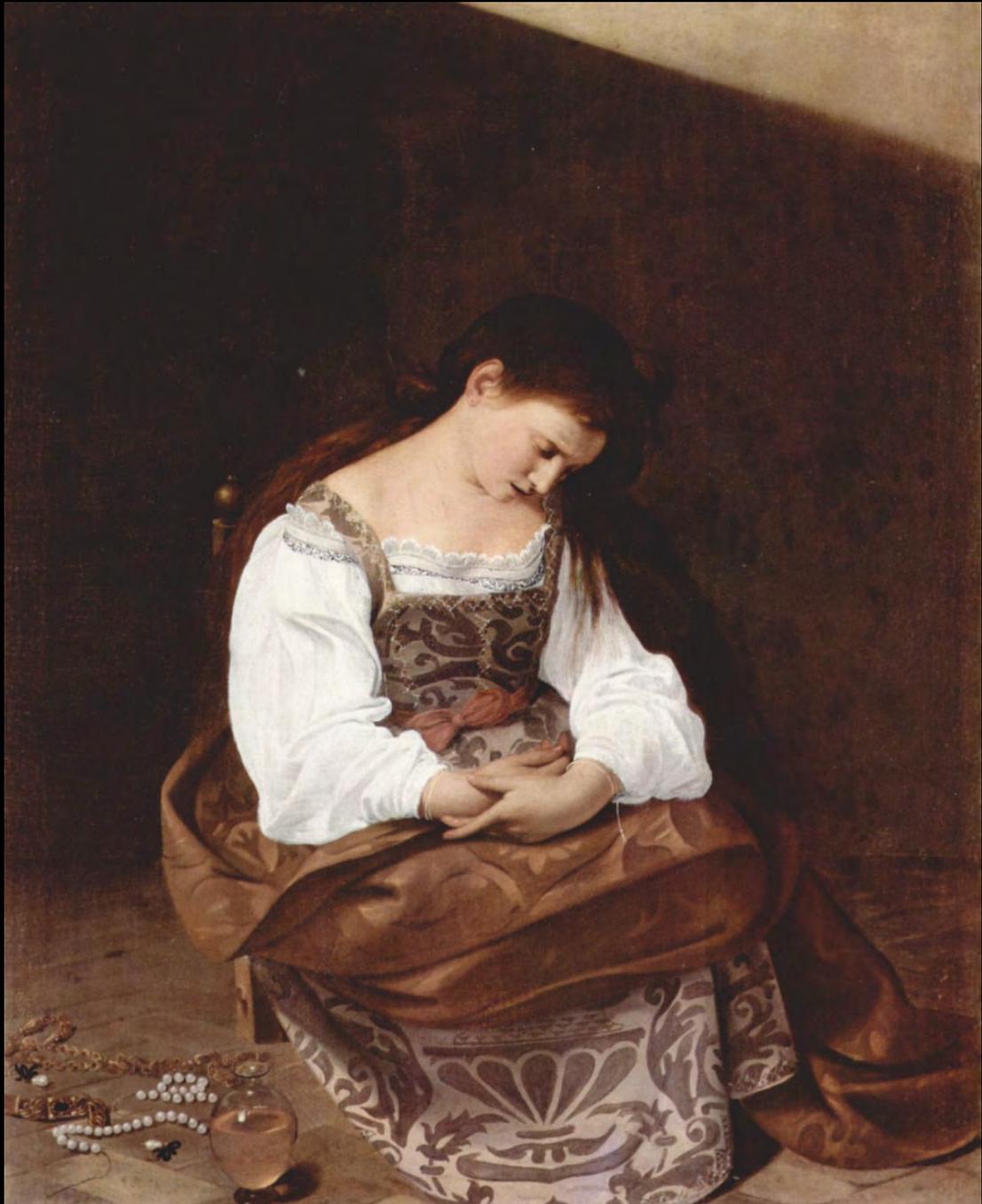


Pentwater Bible Church

Isaiah Message 111

May 16, 2021



The Penitent Mary Magdalene By Caravaggio Cir 1595

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The Book of Isaiah

One-Hundred-Eleven

THE POWER OF GOD OVER IDOLS

May 16, 2021

Daniel E. Woodhead

Isaiah 46:1–13

Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth; their idols are upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: the things that ye carried about are made a load, a burden to the weary beast. ²They stoop, they bow down together; they could not deliver the burden, but themselves are gone into captivity.

³Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, that have been borne by me from their birth, that have been carried from the womb; ⁴and even to old age I am he, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you; I have made, and I will bear; yea, I will carry, and will deliver. ⁵To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like? ⁶Such as lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, they hire a goldsmith, and he maketh it a god; they fall down, yea, they worship. ⁷They bear it upon the shoulder, they carry it, and set it in its place, and it standeth, from its place shall it not remove: yea, one may cry unto it, yet can it not answer, nor save him out of his trouble.

⁸Remember this, and show yourselves men; bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors. ⁹Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me; ¹⁰declaring 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; ¹¹calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country; yea, I have spoken, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed, I will also do it.

¹²Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness: ¹³I bring near my righteousness, it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry; and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory (ASV, 1901).

IDOLS ARE HUMILIATED

Isaiah 46:1

¹Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth; their idols are upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: the things that ye carried about are made a load, a burden to the weary beast ²They stoop, they bow down together; they could not deliver the burden, but themselves are gone into captivity (ASV, 1901).

God now speaks in a very caustic manner regarding the helplessness of the Babylonian idols, contrasted with His omnipotence and the foolishness of idolaters in general. It begins by speaking

figuratively of Bel and Nebo, the Babylonian deities. It is important to understand that the temptation of genuine idolatry, had long since been generally eliminated from Jewish life, but the warnings were and are still relevant. There are always new temptations that have a powerful influence on people. Some are political, sexual, economic, or theological. Above all the evil false prophets and teachers characterize this influence in the greatest degree. This admonition is addressed to everyone in every age, each according to its own challenges. These temptations have harmed the spiritual life of Israel and subsequently the Church. When God through Isaiah calls upon His people, He says that only the Word of God is valid truth in every age, and to each person according to his or her own challenges.

II Timothy 3:16–17

¹⁶ All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ¹⁷ that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works (KJV).

An evil drama is being enacted here, in which human actors are the visible figures of the demonic spirit-powers beneath them. Scripture gives us the clearest proof of this. Even today, when Bel is unknown, and Nebo is a strange and unintelligible false deity to most Christians, the New Testament writing of the apostle John tells us that all the multitude of false prophets of this age are really only “mediums” for the spirits behind them.

I John 4:1

¹Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world (KJV).

“Try the spirits he says, “because many false prophets are gone out into the world thus identifying the false prophets with the evil spirits.

Bel-Marduk, was the chief god of Babylon and Nebo also known as Nabu, was thought to be the son of Marduk (Jeremiah 39:3). They could in no way stop the execution of the Lord’s plan to liberate His people from the Babylonian captivity. Those gods could not prevent the overthrow of Babylon by Cyrus, the Lord’s “anointed” (Isaiah 45:1). Through the prophetic visions that the Lord gave Isaiah he envisioned Bel bowing down in shame and defeat while Nebo was stooping, and falling. Persia conquered Babylon, not only was it not saved by its false deities, but they, too, figuratively knelt and doubled over, like someone seized by intense intestinal pain. Isaiah saw prophetically their images loaded on beasts and transported to the land of their conquerors. This in ancient times was the means to more effectively control vanquished people (I Samuel 5:1; Jeremiah 48:7; 49:3; Daniel 11:8). Their carriages (the things borne or carried by them) would be heavy laden (burdensome, weighty), would even be a burden to the weary beast carrying them. This is seemingly a reference to the Persian conquerors under Cyrus, who loaded their carriages, and their beasts with the idols as plunder.

The prophet goes on mocking these idols saying: *their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle*; that is, being taken down, and broke into pieces for the sake of the silver, and gold, and

brass that they were made of, they were put into sacks by the Persians, and laid upon camels, and mules, and horses, and transported into Media and Persia.

With this load, their wagons were ready to break down, and their cattle groaned under the weight of it is a sarcastic mocking at the idols which had become the plunder and prey of the soldiers. It was usual at the taking of cities to demolish the idols of them. So, the Babylonians, who at the time of the giving of this prophecy (cir. 710 B.C.) will (in the future) be going into captivity themselves, could not save their idols or be saved by them. Therefore, they who had led captive the Jews are led captive themselves along with their foolish idols.

LISTEN TO GOD

Isaiah 46:3–4

³Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, that have been borne by me from their birth, that have been carried from the womb; ⁴and even to old age I am he, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you; I have made, and I will bear; yea, I will carry, and will deliver (ASV, 1901).

God now provides an admonition to His people to listen to Him. This is given frequently in Isaiah's prophecies (Isaiah 44:1; 46:3, 12; 47:8; 48:1, 12, 14, 16; 51:4; 52:8; 55:2). Besides caring for and carrying His people, God also keeps us/them throughout our/their lives. From the time of conception to old age the Lord watches over His own and rescues us/them from trouble. We are frequently unaware how He guides us as believers and followers of Him as we obey His commands for us.

The idols would be a heavy burden even to dumb animals. But the Lord gladly carries His people in safety from birth to old age (Deuteronomy 32:11-12; Psalm 71:6,18). He has done so in the past and here the Lord through Isaiah gloriously promises to do so in the future.

He says I am He Who is with you for all your needs. He rescued them from the Babylonian exile and from the slavery Egypt. We should not fret about the sufficiency of His provisions.

Matthew 6: 25–34

²⁵ Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? ²⁶ Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? ²⁷ Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? ²⁸ And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: ²⁹ and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? ³¹ Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall

we be clothed? ³² (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek): for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. ³³ But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. ³⁴ Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (KJV).

THE LORD HAS NO EQUAL

Isaiah 46:5–7

⁵To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like? ⁶Such as lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, they hire a goldsmith, and he maketh it a god; they fall down, yea, they worship. ⁷They bear it upon the shoulder, they carry it, and set it in its place, and it standeth, from its place shall it not remove: yea, one may cry unto it, yet can it not answer, nor save him out of his trouble (ASV, 1901).

As the Lord has said many times in this book, “*⁵To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me.*” This verse is transitional; it concludes what has preceded and also introduces what follows. The subjects of *they will weigh* refers to those who refine and weigh out gold. This also refers to the container where specimens of gold were weighed. This is essentially saying is; “Those who pour out gold from the bag will weigh silver with a balance”; literally, *They who pour out gold from a bag, even silver with a balance they will weigh*. The reason for this activity is to provide the metal necessary for the idol. Idols, useless and helpless as they are, cost gold, hence the stress here upon gold. Once the metal is purchased and obtained, the next step is the hiring of a goldsmith who will fashion it into a god. This he will do by overlaying the base of wood so that dead gold and silver now becomes in their mind a living god. The worshippers themselves cannot make the metal into a god; they can but hire a smith at their own expense, and in return for this hire he fashions gold and silver that they have provided for him into a god. When the work is completed and the dead gold that came from mines under the ground is made into a god, the worshippers engage in the act of excessive foolishness when they bow down to what has just been created at their own expense. This is the fourth time that the making of idols is described in this book (Isaiah 40:19; 41:7; 44:9). It is emphasized to demonstrate that the materials come from beneath the earth and the foolish human craftsmen make them resulting in even more foolish people worshipping them. God in no way approves and hence the mocking of this supreme foolishness.

They bear it upon the shoulder is not the removal by the conquerors using the beasts of burden. It is the conveyance of the image by the workman from his own workshop to the temple where it is to be set up. *From its place shall it not remove* means that the god will have no power of moving an inch from the spot on which he is set up. There he will stand motionless, until someone comes and pushes him or pulls him from his place. There is no life giving animation in any idol. They are dead.

REMEMBER ME SAYS GOD

Isaiah 46:8–11

⁸*Remember this, and show yourselves men; bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors.*
⁹*Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me; ¹⁰declaring 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; ¹¹calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country; yea, I have spoken, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed, I will also do it.*

Once again, Isaiah points out the absurdity of comparing the Lord God to the false heathen gods. lavish idols of gold and silver are just as impotent and useless to help or deliver anyone as an inexpensive image of wood. Let Israel remember this and show themselves men, that is, “be firmly assured” the folly of idolatry (44:21). Transgressors (those of Israel who found idolatry an alluring temptation) were warned to recall the plain facts concerning image worship set forth by the prophet. God admonishes His children to let the past be a lesson as they *Remember the former things of old*. He is asking for the Jews to remember what He did with them in times past. For example, the miracles in Egypt, the passage of the Red Sea, the deliverances from Midian, and Ammon, and the Philistines, and Zerah, and Sennacherib, all which proved Him their God. in a sense in which the word could be applied to no other. In the original Hebrew He says “I am *El* ... I am *Elohim*.” *El* is “the Mighty One,” “the Omnipotent;” *Elohim*, plural for “the Godhead” in all its fulness.

By foretelling accurately, the course of future events God proves that He is the only true God (Isaiah 41:22, 23; 43:12; 44:26). The phrase ‘*shall stand*’ means that it shall be stable, settled, fixed, and established. This then is the proof that God has a *purpose* or *plan* in regard to human affairs. If he had not, he could not predict future events, since any event cannot be foreknown or predicted exactly as it will occur; that is, it cannot be foretold that an event shall certainly occur or not at all.

God’s plan will not be frustrated or stopped in any way. He has *power* to enact His plans. He will exert that power to make all his plans happen exactly as He has told us through His prophets will be accomplished. If his plans were *not accomplished*, it would cause us to lose our faith in Him. If there was any power that could defeat the purposes of God, that would also cause us to lose our faith and be full of worry and distress. It is imperative to see that God has formed a plan over all things, and that all things will occur exactly as prophesied. This then gives us the peace He provides that surpasses all understanding.

Calling a ravenous bird from the east is an illustrating reference of Cyrus and *east* here relative to Israel means Persia. The word rendered ‘ravenous bird’ in Hebrew is *aiet*. It is also rendered *fowl* in Job 28:7; *bird* or *birds* in Jeremiah 12:9; *fowls* in Genesis 15:11; Isaiah 18:6; and *ravenous birds* in Ezekiel 39:4. It does not occur elsewhere in the Bible. It is here used as an emblem of a warlike king, and it seems to denote the rapidity of his movements, and the sense of the quickness with which they subdue their prey.

It is not uncommon in the Bible to compare a warlike prince to an eagle (Jeremiah 49:22; Ezekiel 17:3); and the idea here is, probably, that Cyrus would come with great power and velocity upon nations, like the king of birds, and would pounce suddenly and unexpectedly upon capturing his prey.

Now God seems to punctuate His declaration with a final assurance by saying, *“I have spoken of it by my servants the prophets, and what I have spoken is exactly the same as what I have purposed.”* And he *will do it*, for He will never change his mind. Stedfastness is one of His characteristics. He *will bring it to pass*, for nothing is able to control him. Heaven and earth shall pass away sooner than one small portion of the word of God as the Lord Jesus said to us.

Matthew 5:18

“For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled (KJV).

GOD CALLS THE APOSTATE JEWS TO SALVATION

Isaiah 46:12–13

¹²Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness: ¹³I bring near my righteousness, it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry; and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory (ASV, 1901).

This is directed to the nation Israel but it may be applied to all persons who have not accepted salvation through the offer of the grace of God. The stout are the stubborn-hearted. They have hard hearts, are proud and haughty and are also proud of their wisdom, power, and strength. They are stout in their hearts against God, as appears by their words and actions, which includes the mocking of the people of God. They ridicule His word and ordinances; and they even mock at sin, religion, and a future state as described in the Bible.

This verse has the points to the last great deliverance of the Jewish people preceding the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom at the Second Coming. At that time Messiah will place salvation in Zion (Isaiah 61:3; 62:11; Joel 3:17) for Israel, His glory. Then Israel will realize the mission to which God has called Her be His glory, making Him known all the nations through the Bible they were given and the Messiah they brought forth.

Next message VARIOUS JUDGMENTS UPON BABYLON

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