



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Basic Bible Doctrine

"The Attributes of God, part I"

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] ...for the Scriptures, for the revelation that is contained within them. We thank Thee for the way in which Thou hast unfolded the truths concerning the eternal God. And tonight as we consider some of the properties of the divine being we pray, Lord, that Thou would give us understanding. Enable us to profit from our time together. May the theology that we allow to enter our minds work itself out in our daily life.

We remember the apostle's exhortation to the Philippians, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure," and may, Lord, this be our experience. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight our subject is the first of three on the topic of the attributes of God. And this is still forming part of our studies in basic Bible doctrine. Now, I'd like for you to turn with me to Exodus chapter 3. And for our Scripture reading we'll read the first fifteen verses, particularly verses 13 through 15 bear on the first of the attributes that we will be discussing. So Exodus chapter 3, this is the account of the burning bush and the call of Moses as deliverer of the nation Israel.

"Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned (You notice incidentally, carefully, that reference is made here to the angel of the Lord. But notice what follows) the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. (Now, you see what is called the angel of the Lord in verse is referred to here as God. It's another one of the theophanies of the Lord Jesus Christ before the incarnation.) And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God. And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt. And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain. And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto

them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I Am that I Am, and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations."

The attributes of God, the importance of right thoughts about God cannot, cannot, cannot be overestimated. No nation, no individual can ever rise above their idea of God. And there is scarcely any error in Biblical doctrine or failure in Christian practice that is not traceable to imperfect and unworthy thoughts about God. All of our proper actions result from right thoughts about God and almost all of our wrong actions are traceable to imperfect thoughts about him. In the sixth chapter of the Book of Isaiah, in the great chapter of the call of the prophet, you remember he had a vision of the Lord high and lifted up. And he also saw the seraphim and in the third verse of that that sixth chapter we read, "And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." And then in the fifth verse Isaiah responds to the revelation of the nature of God, the character of God, "Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." So right thoughts about God lead to right actions and wrong thoughts about God almost always lead to wrong actions.

Now, some of you have heard me this say before but I'll say it again for some who may not have heard it. When Lyndon Baines Johnson was inaugurated as President after that assignation of John Kennedy for a few days in Washington some various new ideas were promulgated by those around President Johnson. Evidently he wanted to make an impression upon the nation in that particular time of trauma and wanted to give also the impression that he was a President who would be a very active

and vigorous President. And I remember seeing in the newspapers just a few days after he had been inaugurated that he had suggested that there be a memorial set up in Washington to God.

Now, that was a very startling thing, of course, because it was something that occurred about the time of the popularity of Thanatology, or the God is dead theology. But he wanted to set up a memorial to God. Well, I notice that that quickly was quashed and not another word was said about it because somebody with some theological understanding went to him and said, "Look, Mr. President, if you're setting up a memorial to God you are suggesting by the fact that you set up a memorial that he is not living, that he's really a dead God." Now, if you had none of that that really came from President Johnson as the newspaper said you could all ready put it down that there would be no revival of true spirituality in the presidency of President Johnson because anyone who had that thought about God is obviously so far from the thought of Scripture that there could be no possibility of anything spiritual proceeding from him.

The presence of wrong thoughts about God is really idolatry because at bottom wrong thoughts about God are aliable upon his character. When you have wrong thoughts about God you're attributing to him something that is not true of him. That is you're making up a new God. You are setting up an idol. It assumes that he is other than he is so that the way in which things work is to put it simply this; when men are unbelieving the result is wrong thoughts about God and when they have wrong thoughts about God their worship is the worship of idols.

Now, of course, the idols may not be physical idols, that is representations of the presence of person of God. Because the apostles and others make very plain that anything that we worship, whether it's something that is immaterial or material is our own particular idol. But unbelief leads to wrong thoughts and wrong thoughts lead to idol worship and idol worship leads ultimately to immorality. The psalmist says about those who make idols, "They that make them are like unto them," so that there is a harmony of

character between those that make the idols and the idols. So when the idol is a dead then the individual is not going to have spiritual life. There is a harmony between those who make and worship idols spiritually.

So how important then is the question, "What is God like?" Now, when we study the attributes we are really studying answers to the question, "What is God like?" What is an attribute of God? Well to put it simply, the attributes of God are the perfections of the divine essence. They could be called the properties of the divine essence. They could be, to use Biblical expressions, they could be called the excellencies of him who, "has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light," as Peter does in 1 Peter 2, 9.

But the attributes are the excellencies, the properties, or the perfections of the divine essence. There are two classes of attributes. Now, the classifications of the attributes is a complicated thing and I don't want to confuse you very much by saying much about it because there are probably a half a dozen classifications of the attributes that have been made by very good theologians. Now, this is one that is very popular and that's the only reason that we are using it, not because it is the classification. The attributes of God are divided into two parts or two classes; incommunicable attributes and communicable attributes. The incommunicable attributes are attributes that have very little relationship to human attributes. For example, no human being is a self-existent being. No human being receives life from himself and perpetuates his existence from himself. Simplicity is something that we do not have. Unity is something that we do not possess. Spirituality, in the sense in which this is true of God, is something that we do not possess. Infinity is something we certainly do not possess. Immensity, omnipresence, eternity, immutability, these are things concerning which man is only an observer. He does not know these things.

Now, in a sense we may be spiritual. In a sense there may be certain unities about our person. But generally speaking incommunicable attributes are those attributes of God which do not bear a very close relationship to human attributes. On the other

hand, the communicable attributes are attributes that have a great deal of relationship to the attributes of men. Knowledge, wisdom, veracity, power, will, goodness, and goodness may be classified in these various ways. Holiness, justice, these are things that may appear in measure in human beings. So we speak then of them as being communicable. These are incommunicable and these are the communicable ones. And in our studies we'll just begin with self-existence and we will go down the list spending more time on a few of them that are important, such as self existence, infinity, and immutability, and so on. But this is the classification.

I'd like to put the outline back up and I'll put that again before you next week so that you will be able to copy it again if you didn't get all of those attributes. But we're just following down the line. So the first thing that we want to talk about tonight is the self-existence of God. Children often ask, "Where did God come from?" And that question of theirs is a very natural question because they are thinking about origin and source. And there's nothing wrong with thinking about origins and sources.

Now, many adults are hard put to answer that question but they should be answered. They should be told that God comes from God, that he does not come from anyone. He is the uncaused being. There is no cause for God. There is no cause of being in the very idea of the true God. It is possible for us to argue for self-existence from a philosophical standpoint. But these arguments are always probable arguments. They are not convincing to people that know philosophy. They may be convincing to some of us who are not real skilled in logical thought. And they certainly make sense to believers. But it's impossible to reason a person into faith and reason a person into truths concerning God. Ultimately, they come through the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit who brings an objective testimony to us. Remember when we talked about how do we know that we know, an objective testimony that comes from God and that testimony is a divine testimony that the Scriptures are the word of God. It's convincing because it is a divine testimony.

But it's possible to argue and to argue quite well philosophically. For example, we might start out and say, without anyone disputing us generally, something "is". Now, if something "is" it cannot be its own cause. The reason that something that exists cannot be its own cause is simply that it would act before it is. The very fact that it "is" means that it is not its own cause nor it could not exist as a result of nothing as a cause since then it would be something caused without a cause. So there are these possibilities, there is the possibility of an infinite series of causes without any original cause. In other words, we may begin with something and say this caused by something else, and that in turn is caused by something else, and that in turn is caused by something else so that we have an infinite series of causes without any original cause. And we might seek to explain existence in that way. But then we would have the strange result of everything being caused by preceding cause but the whole series caused by nothing. And that does not make a whole lot of sense.

And on the other hand we might have this as a possibility; there might be some first cause that is an eternal being existing from necessity of his own nature, unnecessary being. And of course, that is the explanation that most satisfies individuals who are atheist. They believe that it is much more reasonable to think of a first cause, an eternal being who exists from necessity out of his own nature that is he himself has life from himself. And if such a being does exist that explains why we have things about us and why we have effects from causes. He is the ultimate cause. He is the only uncaused being in this universe.

Now of course our minds, generally speaking when we begin to think about these things and reason backwards, we'll we finally reach the place where we seem to be on a boundless and trackless ocean. And when we get beyond time our mind seems to break down. And then we turn it over to somebody else to do the thinking for us because it becomes too burdensome to try to reason beyond those simple things that I've been talking about.

But Job said, "Canst thou by searching find out God?" And he meant the answer to that question to be no. No one can by searching and a man cannot by philosophy, he cannot by arguments for the divine existence prove the existence of God. He can set up some nice probable arguments that might be helpful to ones who all ready believe for other reasons but that is the limit to which those arguments may go.

Now, the biblical argument is simply citation from the word of God. I'd like to just turn to two or three passages and then we want to concentrate a little attention on that passage in Exodus. Let's turn first to John chapter 5 and verse 26, John chapter 5 and verse 26. What we're trying to show by these texts is that God is a self-existent being. That is that he derives his being from himself. He didn't get it from anyone else. John chapter 5 and verse 26 we read this, "For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in himself." Notice the first clause, "For as the Father hath life in himself." He did not have life conferred upon him by anyone. He has life in himself. He is a self-existent being. His life proceeds out of himself. He has no fear of dying. He cannot die for life comes from himself.

Let's turn to 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verse 16, 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verse 16. The Apostle Paul writes here and his is writing concerning the father. He says,

"Which in his times he shall show who (this is the person who shows the Lord Jesus Christ who is the blessed and only potentate, King of kings and Lord of lords. Now notice the sixteenth verse) who only hath immortality dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto whom no man hath seen nor can see. To whom the honor and power everlasting. Amen. Who only hath immortality in himself."

Now that word, translated immortality, is a word that comes from a Greek root that means undying or the quality of not dying. Immortality, it is the Greek word *athanasia*. *Thanatoo* means "to put to death." *Thanatos* is death and the negative in

Greek is the alpha privative and so this undying immortality, the quality of not being able to die. "Who only hath immortality," that incidentally is not endless existence but rather deathlessness.

Now, those of us who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have eternal life and we have also endless existence. As a matter of fact, even the unbeliever has endless existence. He shall appear before the great white throne of judgment and be judged with eternal death. But that does not mean that he will not exist for he will exist under the penalty of eternal death so that every human being has endless existence. We have endless existence in the knowledge of God with the possession of the life of God. God not only has endless existence but he has deathlessness. He cannot die. Someone says, "Well, did not Jesus Christ die on the cross?" Yes, our Lord died on the cross. The Son of God may die but God does not die. Therefore, it is obviously that when our Lord cried out, "My God, my God why hast Thou forsaken me?" And was dying spiritually at that moment and then later on said, "Into Thy hands I commit my spirit," that that death that he was dying is a death that pertained to his other nature, the nature that had been his since the conception. That is his human nature, he may only die in human nature not as a divine being.

So God has immortality. He has deathlessness. He has life from himself. Now, in the Old Testament there are some titles that are given of God, which fit this very well. For example, in Jeremiah chapter 10 verse 9 and 10 we have that familiar expression that occurs often in the Old Testament. He is the living God. That's the way he's marked out. He's distinguished from all of the gods by the fact that he is the living God. And that in itself suggests his deathlessness. It suggests his self-existence. He's the living God.

Now, we turn to this passage in Exodus chapter 3 and I want to say just a word or two about the name that Moses was given by the Lord God. He had asked the Lord, "Well, now when they ask me who sent me to deliver them from the land of Egypt. Who shall I tell them has sent me? And God said to Moses, I Am who I Am." (Or I Am that I

Am.) Isn't that striking? Moses asked for his name? He said, "I Am." And what he meant by that was that there is no way in which he may define himself from the standpoint of his essential being. If he were to define himself by something that is part of our universe that would limit him and so all he can say is that he is the absolute being, "I Am who I Am." So tell him I Am sent you.

Now, there's a relative name that may be given and that relative name is given in verse 15. It is, I'm the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. So the absolute name of God is simply "I Am". You cannot give him anything. You cannot define him absolutely. He fills everything and overflows. But so far as a relative name is concerned, he's the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. He's entered into covenant with them.

Now, I want to analyze for a moment this expression, "I Am who I Am," because that is something that gives us a clue to the nature of God. You tell them I Am has sent you. Now this word "I Am", I don't have anything to write here so let me just spell it out for you. "I Am" is a tern that come from the Hebrew word *hayah* which means to be. Now, you can just transliterate it as say H-A-Y-A-H, hayah. So that I am, *eyeh* comes from the verb "to be".

Now, the expression that is used to refer to the Lord God in the Old Testament so frequently in translated Jehovah in some version and then translated the Lord in the King James Version by the capital letters, capital L-O-R-D is a word that is a form from the verb "to be". As a matter of fact, it is an old archaic imperfect-cal form and what it means is "he is". That is his name, "he is". So that was the name, Yahweh, Y-A-H-W-E-H is the name the probably most represents the Hebrew references and most of our Old Testament scholars speak now of God as being Yahweh. That means simply, "he is". And stress rests upon the deathlessness of this true God referred to and revealed in the Old Testament. He is the one who is. He is the one who is and, therefore, he can speak of himself as "I Am" or "I Am that I Am". So what we have then in Yahweh itself is a

testimony to the undying nature of God. "He is," it's a testimony to his self-existence. He's the living God. He is Yahweh. "I Am," he is the one who has life in himself. He has deathlessness.

Some years ago I saw a bumper sticker. It was a bumper sticker by, I presume, one of the young people who involved in the Jesus moment. The bumper sticker said simply, "Jesus is". Well, that was true. That was a confession of the self-existence of God even though the person who has the bumper sticker on his bumper probably couldn't give you any definition of what it referred to at all. But he really was making a claim for aseity or self-existence on the part of God. So theology, some good theology, is found on bumpers. Almost all bumper sticker theology is bad theology. But that was a pretty good [laughter] little piece of theology, "Jesus is" because our Lord as the son of God by virtue of the fact that he possesses a divine nature has self-existence.

Now, what is the practical significance of the doctrine of the self-existence of God? Well, in the first place it's the ground of immutability. God may be immutable and unchangeable because he has an undying nature. If he was a person who died then he could not be immutable. He could not make us promises and be sure of keeping them. So consequently we know since he's immutable he makes a promise and we know that promise is a promise we can count on because he does not change. Well, he does not change because basic in his being is the fact that he is a self-existent God. He has life from himself. So the very first practical significance of the self-existence of God is that it is the ground of immutability upon which we rely when we believe the promises of God.

All of us as parents have experienced times when we are changeable and of necessity. Sometimes we forget our promises too. We say certain things to our children and they'll come and say to us, "Well, Daddy you said you were going to do such and such." And we'll say either, "I have forgotten that I told you that." That's terrible to forget of course. Or we'll say, "Well, I now know some things that make it probably unwise to do that. Or, "You have been a bad boy and as a result of that you cannot do it."

So we are changeable. God is not changeable. His promises are always to be counted upon and they're to be counted upon because he is self-existent. It is also the ground of his self-sufficiency. That is he doesn't have any necessary relationship to anyone outside of himself. He would be otherwise incomplete if he had some necessary relationship to someone outside of himself. Now, this has the greatest practical significance for our churches because almost, I don't want to exaggerate but I really believe that ninety percent of our Christian churches, our evangelical churches in one way or another preach a frustrated deity. They preach a deity who cannot very well get along without our help.

Now, for example, if you'll go to a missionary conference, nothing wrong with going to a missionary conference, but almost inevitably the appeals in missionary conferences are, "Come out to the mission field and help God get his work done. And if you don't come then there are people out there who are perishing and who will perish simply because you do not come." In other words, God is unable to help them unless you help God. And so the idea that is preached is of a God who is frustrated, who is not really sovereign. He's not able to carry out his purposes. He is dependent upon us. But the Bible says that, "He is the self-existent God." He is not dependent upon us at all.

Now, he gives us the inestimable privilege of being an agent, in instrument in the work that he is doing and he calls us to go to mission fields. He calls us to preach the word of God but he is not dependent upon us. And if we do not go he's going to get his work done. There is not going to be in heaven anyone person who should not have been there. And there's not going to be anyone standing before the judgment seat of Christ lost because of man. You can be sure of that. Our God is not a frustrated deity and he is not confused. Why, he says this over and over again in the Bible. People often look at me and look at me as if they were mad at me because I say things like this and it's just right here in the Bible, just as plain as day. [Laughter] I don't know why they're mad at me. They ought to be mad at the Lord God. [Laughter] This is what he says,

"Remember the former things of old for I am God and there is none else. I am God and there is none like me declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure."

That's Isaiah chapter 46 and verse 10. That's just one of many verses. The only reason I referred to that one is because I was going to refer to Isaiah 46 and the first part of the chapter later. But if you want to look at Daniel chapter 4, my goodness if start listing verses that speak of the sovereignty of God and the fact that he is not frustrated we'd be here through the next hours.

Now, let's turn to the simplicity of God and we don't have to say too much about this because this is a property of God that is important but it's practical significance is not too clear. When we say that God is simple we mean simply that he is free from compositeness. That is he's not the product of some parts put together. If he were the product of parts put together then it's obvious there would be some things older than he. And so he is a simple being. He is free from compositeness. He's not put together as if there were parts. And it means also that he is free from distinction. That is that when we speak about his essence and his attributes we're not talking about attributes being added to his essence. It's not as if God one time existed in ages past and then these attributes of self-existence, and unity, and simplicity, and goodness, etcetera, were added to his essence. No, his essence and his attributes are simple. That is his essence involves his attributes and his attributes involve his essence. His essence is in all of his attributes and his attributes attach to his essence. The attributes are not added. He always is what he is, a pure and simple being. Now, let's move on to consider the unity of God.

Now, the unity of God is a term that is used in two senses. It is used in the sense of oneness. That is numerical oneness. The Lord Jesus said, "I and my Father are one."

Now, in the Greek text in John 10 verse 30 that's literally, "I and my Father are one thing, one essence." And so what is meant simply is that God is one. When we talk about God being one, we mean there are not three gods. Now, we don't deny that there are three persons but Christians worship one God who subsists in three persons, one God however. So it may refer to the oneness of God. When a Jewish man says to you, "We believe in one God but you Christians believe in three." Well, you must correct him. We don't believe in three gods. We believe in one God. But we believe in one God who subsists in three persons. When the Mohammedans say to you, "We believe in one God and not three like you Christians." We must correct them. So oneness.

There is another sense in which it is used. It is used in the sense of unicity or uniqueness. That is when we say that God is one; we mean he is the unique God. There is no one like him. He is the true God in and excludes all other gods. And the text that is so prominent in Judaism is a text that pertains at this point. It's Deuteronomy chapter 6 and verse 4. And if you'd like to turn there you might make note of it. It's the famous Shema Yisrael. It's very much like a banner for Judaism. It's like the Westminster Confession of Faith for the Jews. It's the fundamental doctrinal assertion of Judaism. "Here O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. Adonai Elohenu, Elohenu Echad, O Adonai Echa, O the Lord our God is one Lord." Literally, "The Lord our God is the Lord one."

Now, this particular text is a text that may be translated in two ways. They are very similar and I'll just mention them and I don't think there's a great deal of importance to be attached to this. That text may be rendered, "Jehovah, our God, is one single Jehovah." Now, that's something of a paraphrase but that's the sense. The Lord our God is the Lord one. Or we would say, "Jehovah, our God, is one single Jehovah." Not two, one.

Now, the word that is used and translated on here is a word that does refer in the Old Testament to a compound unity. That's very interesting and I don't think that Judaism has ever paid sufficient attention to this. For example, in the Book of Genesis

chapter 2 when it says concerning and wife, two people who have the nerve to get married, it says with reference to them, "They too shall be one flesh." And that is the word "Echad", one flesh but there are two people in a compound unity. It's possible that in this great affirmation of Judaism, "Jehovah our God is one single Jehovah," that there may be implicit in it an acknowledgement of a compound unity which would allow for the Christian interpretation of "three persons one God."

The other way in which this may be rendered is, "Jehovah is our God, Jehovah alone." Or, "Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone." Whatever is the correct interpretation, this text teaches an absolutely monotheism. That is we are as Christians monotheists. There is one God. There are not many gods. There are not idols. No idols can truly represent this God. No idol can represent a God who is self-existent because an idol is a dead material thing. Whenever anyone puts an idol up they all ready are blaspheming the nature of God. That's why it's so wrong for someone to say, "Well, I don't worship this little image, I just use it as a help in worshipping the true God." But what you're using is something that denies his being. You are using a dead piece of material, something that cannot move except someone moves it, and you're saying that that represents the true God.

Well, it may represent your conception of God but it's a wrong conception of God. And that's why in the Old Testament and in the new we are exhorted to keep ourselves from idols. He's the incorruptible God. He cannot be represented by anything. It's questionable if it's even right to have a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ in your house. Sorry, but it questionable. In his case, perhaps it's permissible. But we must be very careful and not regard things like that as aids to worship. What is the significant of this attribute of the unity of God? Well it pertains just to this, the poor vision of images in the Old Testament and in the new for God immeasurable is reduced to a five-foot or a one-foot measure by the idols.

Now, I'd like for you to turn just as I close to Isaiah chapter 46 and I want to just point out to you one of the most vivid passages in the Old Testament in which the Lord God contrasts himself with all idols. You know some people have a religion that exhausts themselves. It's a religion of doing this and doing that. It's no wonder they go around looking rather defeated and tired and sour. The kind of religion that exhausts a person is not the thing that is taught in the Bible. The truths of the Bible are truths that make individuals happy and rejoicing in the things of the Lord. Now, he's talking about Babylon and the destruction of Babylon. And he's talking about Babylon's gods. He says, "Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle," he's talking about the city being overthrown. And the people who overthrew city came in, went into the temple and they took down all these big statues of Bell and Nebo.

And in order to get them out through the door they had to turn them down and put them on something that carried them. And so you have the picture of these idols coming out headfirst. And Isaiah is speaking of them ironically, "Just look at the temple over there. There they are. There are the gods Bel, Nebo, and the rest of them. They're coming out on little platforms headfirst out of their temple. They're helpless." He says, "and upon the cattle: your carriages were heaven laden; they are a burden to the weary beast." In other words these idols, instead of being helpful, they're burdens. They stoop. They bow down together. They could not deliver the burden for themselves are going into captivity. Those who trusted in them were lost because their idols couldn't do them any good.

Now, he contrasts himself with the idols. He says,

"Harken unto me O house of Jacob and all the remnant of the house of Israel who have been born by me from their birth, who are carried from the time of the womb. And even to your old age, I am He (the self-existent one) and even to gray hairs will I carry

you. I have made and I will bear. I will carry and I will deliver you. (Now, notice that expression in verse 4.) I have made and I will carry."

That's the difference between the true God and the false idols. They are gods made by men and they not only cannot carry you, they not only cannot take care of you, they not only cannot help you in the midst of the burdens of life, you have to carry them around. They are exhausting burdens. But the true God is someone who has made you and he will carry you. He's the living God. And because he's the living God, and the only God, and there's no one like him, he is able to bear you and your burdens. So what kind of God do you want? Do you want one who's so exhausting that you're tired out trying to live up to what you consider to be the legalistic requirements of this God? Or do you want someone who promises to carry you? And not only that, in the New Testament we are told he not only will carry us but he will live within us and be our very life.

I always think about the woman who was converted. And someone asked her, she'd been gloriously converted, but someone asked her, she knew very much about the community, someone asked her, "Well now, what are you going to be? Are you going to be a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or a Methodist, or what now that you're converted?" She said, "I've always wanted to be a Baptist but I'm afraid my health won't stand it." [Laughter] And she referred to the fact that in many of the churches in her community they were busy all the time and burdensome with their requirements. But you know, in all spiritual endeavor we can do that. We can fall into the trap of legalism and set up our taboos and standards that are not biblical at all and then seek to live up to them and seek impose them on others so that pretty soon all of the joy is gone out of the Christian life. But the Bible presents a God, the only God, who is a burden bearer. "He has made you and he will carry you." What a glorious thing it is to worship such a God. Let's close in a word or prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are thankful to Thee for the wonderful relationship that we enjoy with Thee. We praise Thee that Thou hast not only made us and redeemed us but Thou hast promised to bear us and all of our burdens. Enable us, Lord, to cast our care upon Thee, to roll our burdens upon Thee.

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]