

## Creating a Redeemed People

**Scripture Text:** Isaiah 43:1-2, 10-13, 18-19 **Devotional Reading:** Isaiah 42:5-13

**Background Scripture:** Isaiah 43.

### Isaiah 43:1-2, 10-13, 18-19

*But now, this is what the Lord says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. <sup>2</sup> When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.*

<sup>10</sup> *“You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. <sup>11</sup> I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior. <sup>12</sup> I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “that I am God. <sup>13</sup> Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?”*

<sup>18</sup> *“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. <sup>19</sup> See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.*

### Today's Aim

- Facts: to study how Isaiah portrayed God's people as courageous, witnessing, and blessed.
- Principle: to emphasize that ultimate encouragement comes from knowing the One who is Creator, Savior, and sovereign Lord.
- Application: to challenge believers to demonstrate courage rather than fear, boldness in witnessing rather than silence, and hope rather than despair.

### Introduction

While some scholars assert that there were actually two or three different individuals who penned the book of Isaiah, there is little evidence to support this conclusion. When referring to the prophecy of Isaiah, the New Testament recognizes but one author. There is also an unbroken tradition in both Jewish and Christian history that there was a single author of this book.

While some go to great lengths to try to discredit the book of Isaiah, the fact remains that Isaiah spoke for God. Thus we find often in Isaiah the familiar phrase "thus saith the Lord," which prefaced the messages of many of the Hebrew prophets.

There is, however, a change of tone beginning in Isaiah 40. The first thirty-nine chapters of the book of Isaiah generally reflect the time and circumstances of Isaiah's day, though there are a number of significant prophecies in the first part of the book. Beginning with chapter 40, though, the prophet began dealing with things that were in the more distant future. While some of these prophecies dealt with the return of Jewish exiles from captivity, others spoke of events that will occur in the end times. For example, the final prophecies of Isaiah speak of heaven and hell (66:22-24) and parallel Revelation 21 and 22.

This week's text comes from one of four servant songs (or poems) that are found in this part of Isaiah. "The word 'servant' is used twenty times in 41:8-53:12. In these verses the word 'servant' is used in a dual sense. Collectively, it refers to Israel, especially to the faithful nucleus that became the 'true' Israel. The word 'servant' also refers to the coming Messiah who would bring salvation both to Israel and the whole world. The 'servant' is exalted through suffering. For Isaiah, the 'ideal' servant is the one that suffers on behalf of others. The coming Messiah is righteous and innocent. He will bring pardon through vicarious sacrifice; His death will bring redemption to all" (Eggleton, *Discovering the Old Testament*, Christian House).

### Lesson Background

According to ancient Jewish tradition, Isaiah was a member of the royal family of Judah, being a nephew of King Amaziah. Over a ministry of about forty years, he prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jothan, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

According to the legend, he was martyred under King Manasseh by being sawed in half. Hebrews 11:37 presumably refers to him when it speaks of some who were "sawn asunder."

In 739 B.C. Isaiah received his dramatic call to the prophetic ministry. In a vision he saw "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Isa. 6:1). Realizing his unworthiness, Isaiah did not think he would survive the experience. God nevertheless called him to preach to an unresponsive nation. He responded with "Here am I; send me" (v. 8). "Isaiah" means "Yahweh is salvation."

Considering the major themes of the book, this was an appropriate for this messenger of God. He spoke not only of how Judah could be delivered but also of the coming Messiah. Because he had so much to say about Christ, Isaiah has also been called the Gospel Prophet. He foretold the virgin birth (Isa. 7:14), Christ's ministry in Galilee (9:1,2), John the Baptist's role (40:3), the Spirit's anointing of Jesus (61:1,2), the crucifixion (53:3-10), and the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles (49:6).

### **God's Watchfulness (Isaiah 43:1,2)**

"Jacob" was the name of Isaac's son through whom the promises made to Abraham would be fulfilled (Gen. 28:10-14). Later, Jacob's name was changed to "Israel" after he wrestled with the Angel of God (Gen. 32:24-28; Hos. 12:3,4).

In Isaiah 43:1 the name "Jacob" does not refer to the man but to the nation that was later formed through his children. The familiar designation "children of Israel" (Gen. 32:32; Exod. 1:1) thus refers to the descendants of Israel, or Jacob.

As a nation, Israel had been created or formed by God Himself. They did not take it upon themselves to declare their independence from Pharaoh and constitute themselves a nation. Rather, in His sovereign will, the Almighty chose them to be "*out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession*" (Deut. 7:6).

Frequently, God or His angels urged people, "*Fear not*" (Gen. 15:1; 21:17; 26:24; Exod. 14:13; Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:13, 30; Acts 27:24). Some think that the admonition "*Fear not*" in Isaiah 43:1 was spoken to give hope to those future Jews in exile who thought their nation was beyond being revived. Regarding the nation of Israel, there was no reason to fear, for they had been "redeemed" and "called" by God Himself.

Their call, however, was not to keep them so aloof from the rest of the world that they would not be a witness for the true God. Isaiah 42:6 says, "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles." In the New Testament, Paul saw this fulfilled in the preaching of the gospel to Jews and Gentiles (Acts 13:47; Rom. 1:16).

For God to say to Israel, "*You are mine*" (Isa. 43:1) would inspire both joy and confidence in their future. Those who know Christ also have the assurance of redemption and of God's providential work in their lives (Rom. 8:1, 28).

### ***1. How is the name "Jacob" used in Isaiah 43:1?***

Just as God had delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage centuries before, so now He was promising to be with Israel in their present and future trials. Whether one sees the fulfillment of this text in some immediate trial or at some more distant point, the thrust of the passage is the same.

Whether flood or fire, God would be with His people. They need not be afraid. To be sure, one of the greatest promises of the Bible is that God is with His people (Matt. 28:20; Rom. 8:31).

Those who teach that Christians will never face trials have ignored not only the testimony of Scripture (Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12) but also the shared experience of the vast majority of believers. That one has a strong faith does not mean difficulty and illness can be avoided. Certainly, the Apostle Paul had a deep faith; yet he was afflicted with some "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7) about which he had prayed repeatedly (v. 8). Instead of removing this thorn, God declared, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness*" (v. 9).

### ***2. What did God mean when He promised to be with the people when passing through fire and water (v. 2)?***

### **God's Witnesses (Isaiah 43:10-13)**

The assurance we saw in verses 1-2 is continued in verses 3-9, which are not included in our printed text. God affirms His love for His people; He promises to gather again those who are scattered; He challenges the pagan world to produce witnesses to prove that anyone among them has foretold future events as God has done. Then God names His own witnesses, as we see next.

In the preceding verses, Isaiah envisioned a future time when God's people would be restored to their homeland. Verses 5,6 say, "<sup>5</sup> Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. <sup>6</sup> I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth."

The context of this passage suggests that "*witnesses*" and "*servant*" both refer to the nation of Israel (v. 10). As noted earlier, though, the larger truth expressed in these servant songs is that God would send the Messiah to deliver His people.

That God keeps His word to His people was a means whereby Israel might "know and believe." Similarly, God's trustworthiness is a confirmation to His people today that we can rest assured in the promises of the Almighty. Isaiah also reminds us that the God we serve is the one, true God. The Lord God is eternal; there were no gods before Him; there are no gods after Him. While in the eyes of people there may be "gods many, and lords many" (1 Cor. 8:5), there is only one God, Creator of all things, visible and invisible.

### **3. Why was Israel chosen to be a witness for God (v. 10)?**

Human beings have always been tempted to trust in themselves or someone else to provide deliverance from their problems and to meet their needs. The Lord, however, is our only "savior."

The pagan world is full of false gods (e.g., 2 Kings 23:13). Over and over, the Jewish people find themselves seduced by these idols. Long before Isaiah's time, God had saved them from Egypt, from starvation in the wilderness, and from strong nations in the promised land.

In Isaiah's time God saved the southern kingdom of Judah from the Assyrians, who defeated and scattered their kinsmen to the north in 722 BC. After Isaiah's time God will save His people from the Babylonian exile that is to begin in 586 b.c. His witnesses should testify to all of these facts by their right behavior and worship.

In verse 12, among the first and last phrases: "I have declared ... that I am God." we see ample evidence that the Lord is indeed the only true God. Time after time He has saved His people from powerful forces.

In this way He has "showed" that He is God, more powerful than all pagan earthly forces or make-believe gods in Heaven. He did this "when there was no strange god among you"—when His people were giving Him their undivided devotion. But when the people turned away from the Lord and looked to fictitious gods, they were defeated. The captivity of northern Israel proves it. God's people have seen the evidence: they are witnesses. Again, their right behavior and worship ought to be testifying to these facts.

The church of the Messiah has likewise been called upon to be witnesses to the saving power of the gospel. To His disciples Jesus said, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). While not all have the gift of evangelism (Eph. 4:11), all believers can witness for the Lord in some way (Matt. 5:16).

### **4. How is God's uniqueness and power seen in verses 11,12?**

Thus, the Lord gives the conclusion drawn from the evidence presented. Before the day was I am he means that the Lord was God before the creation of the world, and He has been God ever since. No one can deliver anyone from His power, for He is all-powerful (cf. John 10:27-29). He will do what He ought to do, and no one can prevent it.

The word "let" is an example of how our language has changed since the King James Version of the Bible was translated. Today the word let means "permit, allow"; however, when this version was made, the word let meant "hinder, prevent." No one or no thing in the world will keep the Lord from doing what He chooses to do. He is God! His people are witnesses of this. May their actions testify!

### **5. What does "from ancient days I am he" mean (v. 13)?**

Verse 13 of our text is quite similar to Deuteronomy 32:39. The promise is that those under God's protection cannot be taken away from Him. Neither is there any other god who is able to deliver you from your trials of life. Our most important deliverance, of course, is from the bondage to sin through the death of His Son. As we follow Jesus, He continues to deliver us from the evil one as He guides us in paths of righteousness. (See John 16:33.)

### **6. Because of the fact that the God of the Bible is the one true God, He has all power to deliver His people. In what ways has God delivered you? In what areas do you still need God's deliverance?**

#### **God's Way (Isaiah 43:18,19)**

The last part of verse 13 assures us that God will go on with His work, and no one will prevent it. Now the final part of today's text tells a little about what He will do. To assure us of His ability, He also reminds us of what He has done in the past (vs. 14-17). Has the Lord reminded us of great events in the past, only to tell us to forget them (v. 18)? Not at all. What the Jewish people are to remember ... not is the old order of things such as their slavery in Egypt. What is important is to wake up and realize what God is doing now. See the next verse.

To dwell on the hardships of days gone by is pointless. To cherish the record of what God did in the ancient past to overcome those hardships is valuable, but is not a stopping point. What's most important is the "new thing" (v.19) that God is doing and will be doing right before their very eyes. God's ancient leadership of His people for forty years in the desert was no less remarkable than the spectacular crossings of the Red Sea and the Jordan River. But thinking ahead to the end of captivity in Babylon, God is laying the foundation for another journey to the ancient homeland. This future trip will lead the people there directly; they will not wander for a generation in a desert. God will keep them all the way.

This, however, was only the beginning of God's "new thing" for Israel and the world. In next week's lesson we will learn of the new covenant God promised to Israel (Jer. 31:31-34). "The new thing in itself is the wondrous new redemption accomplished in the death and resurrection of the Messiah.

### **7. What was the "new thing" (v. 19) God was going to do?**

The apostle Paul spoke of forgetting what was behind and straining toward what was yet ahead (Philippians 3:13). Paul could have "rested on his laurels" in remembering past victories; on the other hand, he could have wallowed in his failures to the point where he couldn't function. Instead, he chose to focus on his future.

All of us have things from our past that we are proud of. But we can't dwell on these things. We rejoice in them, we learn from them, and we move on. In the same way each of us have things from our past that we are ashamed of. Again, dwelling on the past will not advance us in the present or the future. There are lessons to be learned from these situations, but there is a time to move on. The realization that spiritual victories are from God's hand keeps us from becoming smug and inactive. The knowledge that God is a God of new beginnings and continual renewal helps us deal with past sin and its guilt as we move to higher levels of spiritual life and growth.

### **8. God's desire is that we be made new, continually renewed, in our relationship with Him. How will the knowledge of God's continuing work of renewal in your life cause you to face life differently this week?**

#### **CONCLUSION**

##### ***Trust and Obey***

What we have been reading in Isaiah was given as prophecy. It was given in the past tense because it was fully established in the mind of God: it surely was to come to pass, but not in the time of Isaiah. God promised captivity in Babylon for His people (Isaiah 39:5-7). That captivity served as punishment for long-continued sin. God also promised to provide a way by which His people would be able to return to their ancient homeland (Isaiah 43:15-19). We maintain our faithfulness when we trust Him and obey Him. We must listen to the Word of God. When we do, our obedience will be a natural outflow of our love for Him (John 14:15, 23, 24). As with the ancient Israelites, we need to be courageous, we need to witness, and we need to anticipate God's blessings.

**PRAYER** Father in Heaven, while we stand in awe of Your majesty and power and knowledge, we take delight in Your love and goodness. Thank You for the Bible and the strong but gentle way it guides us in this confusing world. Give us understanding as we read, and give us courage to obey. In Jesus' name, amen.

***THOUGHT TO REMEMBER*** Only redeemed people have hope!