

FPFWC Christian Development



God's Promises

January 2023

Winter Quarter

January 7, 2023

Lesson #1 – God Promises to Restore

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Isaiah 43:1-4, 10-12

ICE BREAKER –

1. How does confidence in God affect our perspective?
2. How does faith in God help you to endure in your difficult circumstances?

Key Verse – “Thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.”—Isaiah 43:1

LESSON BACKGROUND

As we open today’s study from Isaiah 43, time has moved forward about 300 years since last week’s lesson about King Solomon. Various kings have come and gone, and the nation of Israel has been split into two parts. The Israelites have been through multiple cycles of sin and repentance.

Isaiah 1:1 allows us to date Isaiah’s lengthy prophetic ministry to between 740 and 680 BC. Hosea, an older contemporary of Isaiah, warned the northern kingdom of Israel to repent and recommit their ways to the Lord (examples: Hosea 1:1; 3:4–5). Sadly, the Israelites refused. Within a few years after Hosea’s ministry, the northern kingdom was defeated and dispersed by the Assyrian Empire in 722 BC. Isaiah’s ministry to the southern kingdom of Judah had only slightly better prospects. Isaiah 36–39 tells of Jerusalem’s deliverance from the Assyrian army of King Sennacherib, as well as other events from the time of King Hezekiah (ruled approximately 727–695 BC). Those were dark days for the little nation of Judah. Unfortunately, the original readers in Judah mistook the miraculous deliverance from the Assyrian army in 701 BC as a sign that God would never allow Judah to fall (Jeremiah 7:2–26).

This narrative section ends in Isaiah 39 with an ill-advised action by Hezekiah: the king welcomed Babylonian envoys to Jerusalem and gave them a private viewing of all his wealth. Isaiah then gave Hezekiah a dire prophecy that the Babylonians would carry Judah and all its treasures into captivity (Isaiah 39:5–7; compare 2 Kings 20:12–19).

Beginning in Isaiah 40 (considered the start of the second section of the book, sometimes called “The Book of Comfort”), Assyria, so prominent in the first 39 chapters, is no longer a threat to God’s people; Babylon is the new menace. There is also a greater emphasis in Isaiah 40–66 on promises of hope and a brighter future for God’s people, in contrast with the theme of judgment that is so prevalent in the previous chapters. In this second section, Isaiah developed an important theme of God’s people acting as God’s witnesses to the other nations of the earth

(Isaiah 45:20–21; 48:20; etc.). This was not witness in the sense of “evangelism” but that of “testimony” (see 43:10, below).

Just so we don’t get too confused by terminology, we should point out that sometimes the word *Israel* in the book of Isaiah means only the northern kingdom of that name, as distinct from the southern kingdom of Judah. At other times, however, the word *Israel* refers to all the Jewish people in both northern and southern kingdoms together. The context will tell us what is meant at any one time.

LESSON COMMENTARY

43:1–4. At the outset, the prophet grants Israel assurance of God’s continued loving presence. God is Jacob’s **Creator** and Redeemer. His actions against Israel are not permanent. The nation will not be imprisoned in exile forever because no one may steal God’s possession (v. 1). The reference to Israel’s redemption in v. 1 may be intended to recall the exodus from Egypt. Moreover, the imagery of passing through waters is reminiscent of the exodus (v. 2). The Targumim make specific reference to the Exodus: “When you first passed through the Red Sea my word sustained you, Pharaoh and the Egyptians, who were like the waters of the river, did not stand against you.” Though the Targum’s paraphrase is not definitive, it does suggest that certain segments of the broader interpretive community understood v. 2 as referring to the exodus.

While it is tempting to agree with the Targum, other factors must be taken into account. For instance, the second half of the verse does not refer to water, but to walking through fire, which does not appear to have any particular connection to the exodus from Egypt. The reference to Egypt in v. 3 is not related specifically to the exodus, either. Instead, Egypt is given as **ransom** for Israel. In addition neither **Cush** (Ethiopia) nor **Seba** (modern Yemen) appear in the Exodus narrative. It may be best to recognize that the exodus from Egypt, which would be ingrained in Israel’s memory, is difficult to avoid in this context. Activating this memory, however, does not require that the entire verse be connected to the exodus. Instead, the passage brings to mind the ongoing protection of the Lord with an echo from the exodus reinforcing the point. God promises to redeem Israel because the nation is **precious** to God (v. 4). The word “precious” describes that which has great value either because of rarity or intrinsic worth. Since there are many nations, likely here, Israel is precious to God because of the nation’s value to Him. Nevertheless, it was God’s choice of Israel that gave the nation its intrinsic value (Dt 7:7–8). God considers Israel so precious, honored, and loved that He will sacrifice other nations, namely Egypt, in its stead.

God’s comforting assurance also promises that He will not change Israel’s calling. This section begins with the familiar imagery of those who have eyes and ears, but cannot see or hear. Though this description has previously been used of Israel (42:19), it appears that all the nations are in view in this case (43:9). The nations are again pictured as incapable of predicting what has happened to them. They could not have foreseen their fate. The nations cannot produce **witnesses** to prove they were right about the way things would turn out. Their means did not produce the expected ends, so they cannot claim that they were right.

Though the nations have no witness to defend them, God calls His **servant** Israel as His witness. Service as God's witness was part of Israel's mission. As Kaiser notes, "... Israel herself was a standing witness to the power and reality of who Yahweh was and what he had done in their history" (Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012], 54). The obedience and ultimate success of Israel stands as the testimony to God's uniqueness. God is not only the God of Israel, but the only God in existence, period. This testimony becomes clear in the assertion that no god was **formed** before the Lord and none will be formed **after** (v. 10). Verse 11 sharpens God's uniqueness. He is not simply the only God, but also the only **savior**. Israel's calling stands as witness that the Lord alone has **declared** and **saved** and **proclaimed** (v. 12), in contrast to the so-called gods of the foreign nations. God is the ruler of all and there is nothing that can stand against Him. His will is irresistible (v. 13).

LESSON NUGGET – There is no reason to be afraid when you realize what God has done for you. He formed you (v.1) and made you for Himself and for His glory. When you trusted Jesus Christ, God redeemed you and blotted out all your sins. He is "the Lord, your Holy one, the Creator of Israel, your King. He loves you and knows your name. What a privilege to belong to such a great and gracious God. Even more, God promises to be with you and take you through the water and the fire (v.2).

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, Wiersbe Study Bible, The Word In Life Study Bible and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*