

God Promises to Restore

Frank Lehman was only four years old in 1872 when his family immigrated from Germany to the United States. Settling in Iowa, it was seven years later that Frank, while “walking up the country lane, skirted by a wild crab-apple grove on the right and an osage fence, with an old white-elm gate in a gap at the left, suddenly Heaven let a cornucopia of glory descend.” It was then the 11-year-old boy put his trust in Jesus for his salvation. Later, he entered the ministry, eventually pastoring churches. But he was devoted to writing sacred songs. By the end of his life (in 1953), he had published hundreds of songs he had written himself.

But in 1917, no longer pastoring and having fallen on hard economic times, he found work in a fruit packing factory in Pasadena, California, moving 30 tons of lemons and oranges a day. One morning, even in the midst of arduous labor, he sensed a new song forming about the vastness of God’s love, about how assured he was of God’s love regardless of his present situation. So on his break times, he sat on a crate and jotted down lyrics with a stubby pencil. In the evenings, he sat at his old upright piano composing music for his words:

“The love of God is greater far / than tongue or pen can ever tell. / It goes beyond the highest star / and reaches to the lowest hell. / The guilty pair, bowed down with care, / God gave His Son to win. / His erring child He reconciled / and pardoned from his sin.”

- 1. In what ways does God personally show His love for you?**
- 2. How does His love for you restore and protect you?**
- 3. Why do you need to give witness to His love for you to others?**

LESSON FOCUS: Bear witness! God, the only God, loves you.

The Lord as Israel's Savior

Isaiah 43:1-4, KJV

1 But now 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.

2 When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

3 For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee.

4 Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.

Isaiah 43:1-4, NIV

¹But 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.

²When 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.

³For I am the LORD your God,

the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;

I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead.

⁴Since you are precious and honored in my sight,

and because I love you,

I will give people in exchange for you,

nations in exchange for your life.”

Within the context of God's chosen people being notoriously prone to look anywhere but to Him for strength and protection, Isaiah 43—45 stresses that the Creator alone would free them from captivity and restore them to the promised land. In 43:1-4, Israel's God declared that He brought “Jacob” (the patriarch's name before the Lord changed it to “Israel”; both names were used as references to God's chosen nation) into existence. Likewise, it was the Lord who “formed” His people.

God was worthy of His people's attention, trust, and obedience. As the "Holy One of Israel" (43:3), He would redeem them from their plight. Their Protector not only had "called" (43:1, KJV) them by "name," but also in doing so signaled that they belonged to Him. The all-powerful Lord of Israel stood in sharp contrast to the powerless and lifeless idols of Babylon.

In verse 2, the all-powerful Lord pledged that His people would not drown, even in the deep waters of difficulty. This likely alludes to Israel's crossing the Red Sea and Jordan River (Exod. 14:21; Josh. 3:14-17). Similarly, God would prevent them from being consumed by the flames of oppression (Ps. 66:12; Dan. 3:25-27).

Here we see that God controls all the forces of nature. From a New Testament perspective, we learn that nothing in all creation can ever separate us from God's love (Rom. 8:38-39). In fact, the power of God will preserve us until the day of redemption when we receive our full salvation in Christ (1 Pet. 1:5).

In Isaiah 43:3, the "Holy One of Israel" proclaimed that He alone was the Lord and God of His chosen people. Moreover, as their "Savior," He pledged to give the nation of "Egypt" as a "ransom" to free His people. Similarly, in exchange for their deliverance, the Creator would offer up "Cush" (NIV; the territory south of Egypt), or "Ethiopia" (KJV— but ancient Ethiopia should not be confused with modern Ethiopia, which is located farther to the southeast) and "Seba" (presumably located in the same general area). Metaphorically speaking, no cost was too great to make on behalf of Israel to secure the nation's well-being.

The preceding truth is reinforced in verse 4, where God made the threefold declaration that His people were "precious," "honored" (NIV), and loved. This being the case, the Lord would not hesitate to hand over people, such as their Babylonian oppressors, in exchange for the life of the exiles. When the divinely appointed time came for them to return to their homeland, God's loved ones were not to be afraid (vs. 5, immediately after today's lesson passage). After all, He pledged to be with them every step they took to journey back to Judah.

Throughout Israel's years of existence, the nation had been

buffeted by internal and external forces. Yet, rather than be frightened, they were to respond in faith. After all, the Creator, their covenant God, pledged to watch over and rescue them. The Lord, Israel's true Redeemer, would never vacillate in His commitment.

4. *To whom did God's people owe their existence?*

5. *How would God's people be able to endure hardship?*

6. *What view of Israel did God have?*

The Uniqueness of Israel's God

Isaiah 43:10-12, KJV

10 Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.

11 I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.

12 I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God.

Isaiah 43:10-12, NIV

¹⁰"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.

¹¹I, even I, am the LORD,
and apart from me there is no savior.

¹²I 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."

Isaiah's messages are near, more remote, and most remote prophecies blended together into a coherent, literary whole. For instance, God's restoration of His people after the captivity in Babylon anticipates the new age of righteousness to come at Jesus' second advent. Likewise, the deliverance of God's people by the Persian king, Cyrus (Isa. 45:1-13), was a prelude

to the greater salvation that the Messiah, God's Servant, would bring His people.

But the future prospects for the people of Judah were depressing—they were going to be dragged into exile in Babylon. Yet, the Lord had emphasized in verses 1-4 that He would enable the exiles to overcome every obstacle hindering them from returning to their homeland.

So beginning in vs. 8 (just before today's lesson text), in an imaginary courtroom scene, the Lord urged Israel and the nations to consider His claim to be the only true God. As a nation they had experienced the great works the Lord did on their behalf. So, they were a logical choice to be God's "witnesses" (vs. 10). Similarly, it was reasonable to expect them to serve their Maker. After all, the Lord had graciously chosen His people to know and trust in Him, as well as to understand that He alone is God.

None of the false gods venerated by the pagans ever existed before the Creator, or in reality were ever real. Only the eternal, living God, the Redeemer of Israel is real and able to deliver people as "savior" (vs. 11). No other entity could claim to be the Lord, and no other could assert to be the Rescuer of Israel. Only God declared what He would do and then successfully brought it to pass. Judah knew this to be true and was called upon to affirm it. In particular, the nation was to testify that the Lord alone is God (vs. 12).

Verses 10-12 served as a reminder to God's chosen people to abandon all forms of idolatry. Throughout the Israelites' history, they were tempted to abandon their faith in the Lord and give their allegiance to heathen gods and goddesses. And yet none of the idols the pagans venerated had ever foretold and executed the deliverance of His people.

7. What was the purpose of the Israelites being God's "witnesses" (Isa. 43:10)?

8. What was distinctive about the Lord?

9. What had God done on behalf of His people?

Boldly Tell Your Story

In *How (Not) to Save the World*, evangelist Hosanna Wong inspires Christians not to believe Satan's lies, but to boldly tell their story about how the Lord's love redeems them and guards them from spiritual harm to everyone who is ignorant of His transforming love. She encourages us not to give up sharing the Gospel no matter how futile it may seem and not drown in anger, disappointment, and insecurity. Instead, she urges us to embrace our unique story in Christ and allow God to empower us with His grace and His wisdom.

Hosanna Wong concludes her book by saying, "May God open doors. And may we have the courage to walk through them when they open." Of course, she is referring to the people God brings into our lives and the decision and the endeavor to relate Jesus' love for and to them.

What should not be lost in our thoughts and our words is that only God can save and therefore, truly protect us. There are those whose job it is to care for us and others whose job is to protect us, but they all have their limitations. Isaiah makes this truth clear by God's own statement: "I, even I, am the LORD: and beside me there is no saviour" (Isa. 43:11, KJV).

Each of us has a special and unique story. It may not be as dramatic as the story of others, but our story is still precious to our Lord and should be to us. Describing the things God does for us may not seem newsworthy, but helping us see the beauty around us, relieving our fears, and calming our angers are just a few of the blessings that the Lord bestows upon us, and those blessings can be what touches other people's hearts and reaches their souls.

10. *Is it difficult for you to talk about Jesus to others? Explain your answer.*

11. *Why do you think it's important to Jesus that we tell our "story" to others?*

12. *In what ways does telling our "story" to others draw us even closer to God?*

A Vow to Testify

The statements of the Lord God conveyed through Isaiah to His people regarding His abiding and transformative love for them speaks just as powerfully to us today. As His children, God's love for us restores and protects us as well as inspires us to share His love with those who are in need of His love, which is everyone whom He places into our lives.

► *Take a few minutes to write a prayer letter to God, asking Him to place on your heart someone you know who is in need of His love. Pledge to share your story of how Jesus has restored your relationship with your heavenly Father and how His Spirit has protected you. And confess to God that it is not you who is saving that person, but it is Jesus who is the Savior.*

KEY VERSE

But now 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, KJV

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. —Isaiah 43:1, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Week of January 9 through January 15

(See *The Quiet Hour* for devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Psalm 23—The Lord Is My Shepherd.

Tues. Psalm 119:81-96—Guided by God's Word.

Wed. Proverbs 3:1-15—Trust in the Lord.

Thurs. 1 Peter 1:3-12—Tested Faith.

Fri. 1 Peter 1:13-25—Chosen for Holiness.

Sat. Isaiah 48:1-11—God Guides and Refines.

Sun. Isaiah 48:12-22—God Leads and Directs.