

"Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me!'" (Isaiah 44:6)

In our previous lesson on Isaiah 43, God, through His prophet Isaiah, assured His people Israel that they need not fear "when they passed through the waters... and walked through the fire" because He, "their Creator God, the Holy One of Israel, their Savior and Lord, who formed them for His glory, and "redeemed" them, and "called them by name," would be with them! They were His--and He said they would (one day!) "declare His praise"!

Also that He would do "something new"--including by delivering them from captivity in Babylon, making a "way through the wilderness," and providing water along the way--just like He had done in delivering them from captivity in Egypt! He "formed" them for Himself! They were His, and (one day!) they would declare His praise!

And even though they had "not called upon Him" during Isaiah's time...and had actually burdened Him with their sin, and wearied Him with their iniquities," He would not cast them aside! He's the one (He assured them!) "who wipes away their transgressions for His own name sake, and does not remember their sins"! (Speaking of sin which dated back to their "first forefather," which brought, and continues to bring, destruction and "revilement" to the nation!)

We closed our lesson on Isaiah 43 by citing a song (sung by the Hillsong choir, and available on YouTube) which captures the spirit and essence of this chapter and which we encouraged everyone to tune in and sing it! (I can personally testify to the comfort and encouragement message of this song gave me during my recent recovery from a stroke at Fairfax Hospital! Including the time when a volunteer caretaker, named Nancy, just happened to bring her lab retriever by my room as I was playing the song on my i-phone; with the dog flopping down by my bedside and laying there contentedly, and not wanting to get up and move on when it was time for them to go! I wondered if he somehow sensed the presence of the Lord? Or just enjoyed the Isaiah 43 tune! (Which I've been playing too as I write!)

Well, as you may have discovered, Isaiah 44 begins with a similar message of hope and comfort from the Lord for Israel (and for us too!) as Isaiah 43! Telling His people, who He had chosen, again "not to fear"--and promising to "pour out His Spirit, and His blessing, on their descendants"! A "gift" (Constable notes) "that would have the same effect for the nation, as pouring water on dry ground would have for the landscape...bringing (as Constable noted) "refreshment and new life, indeed, a whole new spiritual attitude"!

He is King of Israel and their Redeemer, the Lord of hosts, and He declared Himself (in verse 6) to be "the first and the last, with no God besides Him"! An exclusive claim He had made to deity earlier (in Isaiah 43:10-13), "so that they (His servant, Israel) might know and believe Me, and understand that I am the Lord, and that before Him there was no God formed, and there would be none after Him, and no Savior besides Him! "Even from eternity I am He," He claimed! Setting the scene for another challenge to all false gods--and calling upon His people to be "witnesses" to His deity!

Isaiah, in verses 9-20, notes "the folly" of idolatry--and the absurdity of those who fashion idols or graven images! Note the "sarcasm" in his how he describes it!

- He (the idol maker) "fashions iron into a cutting tool, wearying himself while working over the coals"!

- He "shapes it with hammers and cuts wood into the form of a man that it might sit in a house"! Lifeless!
- The wood he uses also becomes something for him to burn to warm himself and to use in baking bread--with the leftover used to make his god"!
- He makes a god for himself, and then worships it!
- He makes a graven image and falls down before it, and prays to it!
- The gods "do not understand anything, for their eyes have been smeared over so they cannot see, and their hearts likewise, so they cannot comprehend"!
- They "fall down before a block of wood" (would you believe?)
- And it's a total "abomination"!

Motyer notes that this passage is "not a mere taunt but, rather, a penetrating analysis of the human need for the divine and an exposure of every man-made device to make his life secure"!

Is there anything that angers God more than the worship of false gods (or of anything placed before Him)?

God commanded Israel from the beginning (up close and personal) that "they should not (actually "shall not"! ) have any other gods before Him or make for themselves an idol, or any king of likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath...You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, is a jealous God"! (Exodus 20:6)

Psalm 115:8 says, "Those who make them will become like them!"

Interestingly, the apostle John ends his epistle (in I John 5:21) with the admonition: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols"!

Motyer notes that the idol "has no power to change the human heart but leaves the idolater in the spiritual darkness and deception with which he started"!

Archer writes that "this extended expose was doubtless intended to strengthen the Jews against the allurements of paganism during the long captivity in Babylon"!

"Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are My servant; I have formed you; you are My servant (repeated for emphasis!), O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me! I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud and your sins like a heavy mist. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you!" Wow! What an encouraging statement! (Motyer notes that "the fashioning work of the Lord guarantees that Israel will not be forgotten," and that "a total dealing with sin issues a call to return"!)

Constable notes that what Israel needed (and needs today!), above all else was (and is!) forgiveness and cleansing for her sins--and that the Lord has taken the initiative to provide this for His people (and for everyone in the world)!

"Shout for joy, O heavens, for the Lord has done it! Shout joyfully, you lower parts of the earth; break forth into a shout of joy, you mountains; O forest, and every tree in it; for the Lord has redeemed Jacob and in Israel He shows forth His glory!" (Wow! Interesting that the redemption of Israel (presumably at the second coming of Christ) will entail also the redemption of all nature! Romans 8:19 says, "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God!")

Isaiah 44 ends with the promise of the Lord, Israel's Redeemer, and "the maker of all things" that Jerusalem has a "big future"! And that a man named "Cyrus" would be the one God would use to as His "shepherd" to allow Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, to be rebuilt, the foundation of the temple laid, for exiles to be returned, and the nation restored--and "to perform all of His desires"!

There's a great day coming bye and bye!

Worship and praise our God! There's no other God besides Him!

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