

God Promises to Restore

Lauren picked up the ring slowly and brought it close to her face. The beautiful silver ring held an amethyst stone for her birthday month. With everything that had happened, she had forgotten about it.

This New Year had brought on a sense of literally “out with the old and in with the new.” Part of that included her sorting through the several drawers full of jewelry she possessed.

She sat back in the oversized chair and reflected. Damien had given her the “promise” ring after six months of dating. After 13 months, they were married. Then after six years of marriage, Damien had moved out and moved in with another woman he said he would marry.

That was two years ago, and it had been a horrendous ordeal. But God had stood with Lauren. Looking back now, Lauren didn’t know how she had kept her sanity.

Lauren had run to the Lord and questioned her value as a woman. One answer came back over and over. Sometimes the answer seemed to shout from the pages of Scripture. Other times it was soft in the middle of the night. But Lauren never tired of hearing it—the Lord loved her!

“What is all this?” asked Elaine.

Lauren smiled as the ladies in the women’s Bible study group swarmed around her jewelry display on three tables.

“Free jewelry!”

“What? Why?” beamed Elaine.

“Because,” smiled Lauren. “God loves you!”

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?*

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.”

God's chosen people were notoriously likely to look anywhere but to Him for strength and protection. Isaiah 43—45 stress that God 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” (Israel) into

existence. Also, 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).

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” (the territory south of Egypt), or “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.

In verse 4, God made the threefold declaration that His people were “precious,” “honored,” 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). After all, He pledged to be with them every step they took to journey back to Judah. 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 cho-
sen: 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 wit-
nesses, 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 through the Persian king, Cyrus (Isa. 45:1-13), would be 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 an imaginary courtroom scene, the Lord

urged Israel and the nations to consider His claim to be the only true God. As a nation, the Israelites 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 can claim to be the Lord, and no other could assert to be the rescuer of Israel. Only God can declare what He will do and then successfully bring 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 other people's gods and goddesses. And yet none of the idols the other nations venerated had ever foretold and executed the deliverance of His people such as God had done.

When the promised act of deliverance occurred, the people of God were to recognize it as such. When the prophesied moment arrived, the Lord would give the exiles a free and clear route back to the promised land. It would be as if God created a pathway for His people to travel and a river for them to refresh themselves along the journey (vs. 19).

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*, Christian 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 Christians not to give up sharing the Gospel no matter how futile it may seem and not to drown in anger, disappointment, and insecurity. Instead, she urges Christians to embrace their unique story in Christ and allow God to empower them with His grace and His wisdom.

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 forgotten is that only God can save and therefore, truly protect us. 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 others' 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

As God's children, His 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 FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of January 9 through January 15

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* 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.