
Observations from Isaiah

LESSON XXXIV : WITNESSES TO THE UNIQUENESS OF GOD — PART I (43:8-44:22)

General outline (from Oswalt's *Isaiah*):

- I. INTRODUCTION: THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF GOD'S PEOPLE (1-5)
- II. A CALL TO SERVANTHOOD (6)
- III. BASIS FOR SERVANTHOOD: WHOM SHALL WE TRUST? (7-39)
- IV. THE VOCATION OF SERVANTHOOD (40-55)
 - A. MOTIVE FOR SERVANTHOOD: GRACE (40-48)
 - 1. The Servant's Lord (40)
 - 2. The Servant of the Lord (41-44)
 - a. God's Promises to His Servants (41:1-42:9)
 - b. Redeemed to be God's witnesses (42:10-44:22)
 - (1) The certainty of redemption (42:10-43:7)
 - (2) Witnesses for God's uniqueness (43:8-44:20)
 - (a) You are my witnesses (43:8-13)
 - (b) God delivers his witnesses (43:14-44:5)
 - (c) The folly of idolatry (44:6-20)
 - (3) Remember the Lord (44:21,22)

“This segment continues the theme of the Lord’s intention and ability to deliver begun in 42:10. It does so with another lawsuit against the gods (cf. 41:21-29). But an additional feature is added to this one: witnesses. God calls on the idols to present witnesses who can confirm the deity of the gods because of their ability to predict the future (v9). Then, with great daring, God announces that the captive Judeans will be his witnesses. Despite their spiritual blindness, as detailed in 42:18-25, and again in 43:22-28, they will still be the living evidence that God has not only predicted salvation but has also fulfilled that salvation in every particular.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] ***The theme of witnesses is a key to understanding 43:8 - 44:22. The Lord will use His people as a demonstration of His deity by bringing them forth from captivity as prophesied (43:8-13). This deliverance is both from physical captivity in Babylon (43:14-21) and from spiritual captivity in sin (44:1-5). Isaiah continues in next week’s lesson to assert God’s people are and will be His witnesses (44:6-8), then contrasts that evidence with the lack of evidence the idols give (44:9-20). Isaiah then closes with an admonition for Israel to embrace the God who will deliver them (44:21,22).***

Witnesses for God’s uniqueness: You are my witnesses (43:8-13)

Lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf. All the nations gather together and the peoples assemble. Which of you will bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf who have ears. Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled. He brought out a blind people who have eyes, And deaf ones who have ears. All the nations have been gathered together, And the peoples are assembled,

them foretold this and proclaimed to us the former things? Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right, so that others may hear and say, “It is true.” “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. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. 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. Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?” (NIV)

assembled: who among them can declare this, and shew us former things? let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, It is truth. 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. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no savior. 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. Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it? (KJV)

Who among them declareth this, And former things causeth us to hear? They give their witnesses, And they are declared righteous, And they hear and say, ‘Truth.’ Ye [are] My witnesses, an affirmation of Jehovah, And My servant whom I have chosen, So that ye know and give credence to Me, And understand that I [am] He, Before Me there was no God formed, And after Me there is none. I — I [am] Jehovah, And besides Me there is no saviour. I — I declared, and saved, and proclaimed, And there is no stranger with you, And ye [are] My witnesses, an affirmation of Jehovah, And I [am] God. Even from the day I [am] He, And there is no deliverer from My hand, I work, and who doth turn it back? (YLT)

PAST OR FUTURE? (v 8) — commentators note a tense discrepancy in the lead sentence. Per Oswalt, the Targums (the ancient Jewish commentaries) and LXX takes this in the past tense which is followed by Young’s Literal Translation: *‘He brought out a blind people who have eyes’* (YLT). The Masoretic text (our present Hebrew OT) along with the Vulgate takes this as a statement of fact as is seen in the KJV and NIV translations above: *‘Bring forth the blind people that have eyes’* (KJV); *‘Lead out those who have eyes but are blind’* (NIV). If the reference here is to a past event then the Lord is talking about the exodus from Egypt. Most commentators I read disagreed and believe the context better suits either the future deliverance from Babylon or a calling together the witnesses for the ‘trial.’ *“‘Bring out’ does not refer here to bringing out of captivity, as in Ezek 20:34,41; 34:13, since the names by which Israel is called are hardly applicable to this, but rather to bringing to the place appointed for judicial proceedings.”* [K&D, Isaiah]

THE TRIAL OPENS (v 9) — “Here the emphasis seems to be strictly on God’s ability to predict the future and then to fulfill that prediction when the time comes. One should bear in mind that the trial scene described here is imaginary and that its purpose is to convince the Judeans that since the Lord is the only God, it is foolish to depend on or fear the gods of the nations. Thus the appeal is continually to ask whether those gods can do what God has undoubtedly done, with the understood answer being, ‘Of course not.’” [Oswalt, Isaiah]

THE LORD CHALLENGES THE IDOLS (v 9) — *“A new level of disputation is reached when the prophet challenges the idols to bring evidence in the form of witnesses. Can they bring forward persons who can testify that the gods’ claim to divinity are right? Can they cause those*

who hear the evidence to say that the claims are true? Again, the obvious answer is no. Seen from one perspective, this entire line of argumentation could be dangerous. Suppose the gods could produce such a witness? With this all-or-nothing approach, God's case, and the prophet's, would be lost. But the very boldness of the approach is a testimony to the serene assurance of Isaiah that the God whom he represents is of an entirely different order of being than the gods. Unless the prophet was profoundly certain beforehand that his case could not be lost, he would never have dared to present it." [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

GOD CALLS HIS WITNESSES: ISRAEL (v 10) — rather than mere observers to the entire trial, Israel itself is called upon to be the Lord's witness in the trial. The fact the Lord would deliver them into captivity then bring them forth from that captivity according to prophecy would be a witness to the world of God's capabilities. *"It is interesting that Jesus spoke similar words to his disciples at his ascension (Acts 1:8). Like it or not, they were witnesses of who this man was in his life, death, and resurrection. Not until they were filled with the Holy Spirit did they embrace this identity, but embrace it they did, as is evidenced especially in the prologue of 1 John (1:1-4), where the incontrovertible language of firsthand experience recurs again and again."* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

FIRST THE MESSENGER, THEN THE MESSAGE (v 10) — note the Lord states He chose Israel so that they might know Him and have a personal relationship with Him. "It is interesting that it is not said here that they were chosen so that others might know he is God. To do so would get ahead of the process. *Others are to know, but only after the people of God themselves have come to know him.* The knowledge of God is never merely a set of intellectual theorems (like the distance from the earth to the sun) that can be transmitted without teacher or learner ever having proved them by experience." [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY (v 10, 11) — some of what is stated is impossible to explain outside of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Lord speaking directly states *'Before Me there was no God formed, And after Me there is none. I — I [am] Jehovah, And besides Me there is no saviour.'* (YLT) If that statement is true (which of course it is) then where does that place Jesus? Is He 'a god', the first being created by Jehovah? This is the teaching called historically Arianism and is taught today by Jehovah Witnesses and The Way International. But here Jehovah Himself declares that He is the only God and Saviour, while the NT attributes both those qualities to Jesus. The only plausible explanation is found in the teaching of the trinity: *there is but one divine essence, one eternal God but within the Godhead there are three co-eternal, co-equal Persons: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.* The Hebrew word in v11 for 'savior' is *yāsha'* meaning "to save, implying in the largest sense, deliverance, help, and victory; it comprehends either the removal of evil and misery, or the restoration of good and former happiness. It is most commonly used of God, sometimes of men, and also of the Messiah; hence it has reference to that deliverance, spiritually, which he was to effect, having paid the price of our redemption." [William Wilson, *OT Word Studies*] "God's ability to give salvation provides the basis for man to worship him; i.e. *only a god who can save is worthy of worship.* Therefore a frequent polemic against idolatry is to challenge the other gods to bring deliverance to their oppressed followers (Isa 46:7; Judg 6:31). Their failure to respond demonstrates that those gods are vain and leads to the confession that besides Yahweh there is no savior (Isa 43:11; Hos 13:4). To ensure that the deeds of salvation are not viewed as a mere accident of history, Yahweh reveals what he is going to do before he does it (Isa 43:12). Then he is faithful to his word by performing it." [R. Laird Harris, editor, *Theological Wordbook of the OT*] "The proper name 'Jehovah' is used here (v. 13) as a name indicating

essence: ‘I and no other am the absolutely existing and living One,’ i.e., He who proves His existence by His acts, and indeed by His saving acts. *Yāsha* ‘and Jehovah are kindred epithets here; just as *in the New Testament the name Jehovah sets, as it were, but only to rise again in the name Jesus, in which it is historically fulfilled.* Jehovah’s previous self-manifestation in history furnished a pledge of the coming redemption.” [K&D, *Isaiah*] “*Given that experience [of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection] and its rootage by Jesus in the sweeping claims of Isaiah 43, it is not surprising that the first Christian creed came to be ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and that he should be understood to be the only Savior. Jesus himself taught the disciples to see that what was implicit in those words of Isaiah could find its fullest meaning only in him and his work.*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

Witnesses for God’s uniqueness: God delivers his witnesses (43:14-44:5)
God’s Power — Then and Now (43:14-21)

This is what the LORD says — your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians, in the ships in which they took pride. I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel’s Creator, your King. This is what the LORD says — he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick: Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise. (NIV)

Thus saith the LORD, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships. I am the LORD, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King. Thus saith the LORD, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters; Which bringeth forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power; they shall lie down together, they shall not rise: they are extinct, they are quenched as tow. Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honor me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen. This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise. (KJV)

Thus said Jehovah, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: ‘For your sake I have sent to Babylon, And caused bars to descend — all of them, And the Chaldeans, whose song [is] in the ships. I [am] Jehovah, your Holy One, Creator of Israel, your King.’ Thus said Jehovah, Who is giving in the sea a way, And in the strong waters a path. Who is bringing forth chariot and horse, A force, even a strong one: ‘Together they lie down — they rise not, They have been extinguished, As flax they have been quenched.’ Remember not former things, And ancient things consider not. Lo, I am doing a new thing, now it springeth up, Do ye not know it? Yea, I put in a wilderness a way, In a desolate place — floods. Honour me doth the beast of the field, Dragons and daughters of an ostrich, For I have given in a wilderness waters, Floods in a desolate place, To give drink to My people — My chosen. This people I have formed for Myself, My praise they recount. (YLT)

NOT MERELY PAST DELIVERANCE BUT FUTURE DELIVERANCE AS WELL — “The section 43:14-44:5 details God’s promises to demonstrate to the world by means of Israel that he is the only Savior. The section divides into three segments.

- The first, 43:14-21, emphasizes that *God’s claims are based not merely on the past*; he will demonstrate his lordship by doing new works of deliverance.
- The second segment, 43:22-28, makes plain again that *God’s exercise of his power on behalf of Israel is not because of any righteous behavior of theirs*.
- But the third segment, 44:1-5, promises that *God will do something about that sinful tendency by giving his Spirit to the people* with the result that they will be glad to identify themselves as the people of God.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

Taking 43:8-13 by itself one might get the idea that the Lord’s deliverance was all in the past. Isaiah hastens to add therefore the coming deliverance from Babylon as proof of God’s majesty and uniqueness. But is Babylon all the prophet had in mind? Most conservative commentators see the heavily image-laden language of 43:19-21 and consider the description so overwhelming that more than Babylon must be intended here. What exactly is intended depends upon one’s eschatological view. If the passage is spiritualized as the amillennialists believe, then surely the church age is intended. If the passage is to be taken more literal as the pre-millennialists believe, then there is still yet to come an age in which Israel will be delivered in these descriptive terms. Regardless of one’s end-times doctrine however, surely Isaiah is seeing more than Babylon here and perhaps the entire realm of salvation from Babylon and ultimately perhaps the millenium.

RETURN FROM BABYLON (v 14, 15) — Cyrus is almost certainly implied as the one ‘sent’ (v14) to bring Israel back from Babylon. As the Babylonians had taken captive Israel, so the Lord would turn their captivity and the Babylonians would then be the fugitives (v14). The reason for this is again not because of Israel but because of the character of the Lord (v15).

THEOLOGY OF THE OT IN MICROCOSM (v 15) — Oswalt makes an interesting observation concerning this verse. *“The four epithets contained in this verse are an OT theology in miniature. If their content were fully plumbed, there would be little more to say. He is the Lord who revealed himself preeminently at Sinai, binding himself to the Hebrews in covenant; he is your Holy One, he who had shown them how to live in the presence of his holiness without being destroyed and who had called them to share that holiness in the way they lived; he is the Creator of Israel, the one who had called them into existence from nothing; he is your King, the one to whom they owe absolute allegiance, who has called them into a whole new kind of kingdom, and who cannot give them up without having his own hegemony diminished.”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] [*hegemony* = leadership, predominance]

INTRODUCTION TO THE LORD’S AMAZING COMMAND (v 16, 17) — these two verses form what Oswalt says is an unusually long introduction to the quotation and command of v18-21. The reason for this long introduction is to establish the context prior to making the command. The reference is obviously to the exodus and the destruction of the Egyptian armies in the Red Sea. *Even here however is the total sovereignty of God manifest: ‘he ... who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together’ is military terminology descriptive of a general’s activity. The sense is it was the Lord, not Pharaoh who was the leader of the Egyptian army!*

THE LORD'S AMAZING COMMAND (v 18-21) — considering the introduction which centered upon Israel's past, what follows is probably the last thing anyone would imagine: *'Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past!'* "What does he mean? Surely Isaiah, one of the prophets who most stresses Israel's past, could not mean that God's redemptive acts and all the revelation connected with them should be forgotten (cf. 46:9). When we look again at the introduction we can see the point he is driving at. *We humans are inveterate idolaters. We turn everything into a fetish if we are allowed to. So for Israel, the glorious, saving events of the past with all their details had become a straightjacket into which every other act of God was forced (cf. Mark 9:5,6). As a result the Israelites were frequently unable to recognize God's new actions when they came (John 1:11). To all of that Isaiah says, 'Remember God, that he is the sort who can do all those kinds of things, but forget the ways in which he did them!'* Why? *Because he is the Creator; he does not need to do things the same way twice.* He is not an idol, doomed to perform the same activities over and over again as nature does. Of course he is consistent, which is the point of vv. 16,17, but his methods can always be new, and if we make an idol of the methods, we damn the very thing we should be blessing." [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] *The Lord would again deliver Israel, this time not by a pillar of fire and smoke and the crossing of the Red Sea but by a Persian king giving a decree of freedom to return home. "The fundamental principles of the divine activity are changeless, but the outward shape of that activity alters with the changing needs of God's people. We are meant to reflect on the past with gratitude and stimulated faith but not to allow it to stereotype our expectations from God. Here God affirms — in detail and with emphasis on the deadly efficiency of his deeds — that he was the God of the Exodus (vv. 16-17), but he also asserts the wonderful freshness of his new act in prospect (vv. 18-19). He had made a way through the waters; now he would make a new way — through the desert! Water, formerly a barrier, would now be a blessing, with God as its source."* [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

Witnesses for God's uniqueness: God delivers his witnesses (43:14-44:5)

Salvation by Grace, Not by Performance (43:22-28)

<i>Yet you have not called upon me, O Jacob, you have not wearied yourselves for me, O Israel. You have not brought me sheep for burnt offerings, nor honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with grain offerings nor wearied you with demands for incense. You have not bought any fragrant calamus for me, or lavished on me the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses. I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and</i>	<i>But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel. Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt offerings; neither hast thou honored me with thy sacrifices. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense. Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will</i>	<i>And Me thou hast not called, O Jacob, For thou hast been wearied of me, O Israel, Thou hast not brought in to Me, The lamb of thy burnt-offerings, And [with] thy sacrifices thou hast not honoured Me, I have not caused thee to serve with a present, Nor wearied thee with frankincense. Thou hast not bought for Me with money sweet cane, And [with] the fat of thy sacrifices hast not filled Me, Only — thou hast caused Me to serve with thy sins, Thou hast wearied Me with thine iniquities. I — I [am] He who is blotting out Thy transgressions for Mine own</i>
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<i>remembers your sins no more. Review the past for me, let us argue the matter together; state the case for your innocence. Your first father sinned; your spokesmen rebelled against me. So I will disgrace the dignitaries of your temple, and I will consign Jacob to destruction and Israel to scorn.</i> (NIV)	<i>not remember thy sins. Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified. Thy first father hath sinned, and thy teachers have transgressed against me. Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary, and have given Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches.</i> (KJV)	<i>sake, And thy sins I do not remember. Cause me to remember — we are judged together, Declare thou that thou mayest be justified. Thy first father sinned, And thine interpreters transgressed against me, And I pollute princes of the sanctuary, And I give Jacob to destruction, and Israel to revilings!</i> (YLT)
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The Lord (speaking through Isaiah) had just finished stating to Israel that His intention was to deliver them as a demonstration of His Lordship and as a fulfillment of His original purpose in choosing them. Here the Lord further clarifies His position to those still clinging to human righteousness: *the deliverance to come is not a debt of obligation because of Israel's righteous acts. If Israel was to be delivered, it would be founded upon the principle of grace not works.* Note within this segment the use of 'Jacob / Israel' at the beginning and end, emphasizing the personal nature of the Lord's appeal. Another characteristic of this segment is the repeated use of certain key words: 'to become weary' (v22-24), 'to enslave' (v23,24), 'transgression' and 'sin' (v25,27). *Especially interesting is the use of these key words are alternatively used of both the Lord and the people.*

ISRAEL HAD NOT TRULY WORSHIPED THE LORD (v 22) — this opening verse sets the stage for what follows: Israel had not 'called upon the Lord,' they had not 'proclaimed' the Lord's character nor depended upon Him for their very life and being. *"[T]his verse declares that although the people were formed for the purpose of praising God, they had not done it. Why not? Were they wearied by God's excessive demands? How could they have been since they did not conform to what God really wanted? This seems to be the sense of the opening charge, and it sets the stage for what follows."* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

OUTWARD CONFORMITY IS NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR INWARD OBEDIENCE (v 23, 24) — the Lord gives the proof that Israel had not really worshiped Him. What is given is surprising because at no time did Israel not do these things. This had led some commentators to believe the Lord was speaking about the time when Israel was in Babylon and had not the freedom nor means by which they could worship the Lord as proscribed within the Mosaic law. I disagree with that analysis; rather I agree with the commentators who see this as a charge of outward legalistic conformity without the heart being in the act. *"God is saying that although they may have thought they were giving him acceptable worship, they were not, and that this is the reason they find their worship so wearying (1:11-14; 66:3; Jer 7:5-10; Hos 6:6; Amos 4:4-6; Mic 6:3-8).... Using typical terms for the sacrificial system, the author proceeds to say that it was not really these things that the people of Israel had brought to God, but their moral and ethical iniquities. If they are weary of the pointless rituals, how much more is God."* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]
"The Lord's past acts of grace should have evoked gratitude from his people, but they have offered him sins instead of sacrifices. Both ritualistic excess of sacrifices (vv. 23-24; cf. 1:2-17) and shameful neglect of them testify to a deep spiritual malaise in the nation.... There is much in vv. 22-25 to remind us — either by comparison or by contrast — of chapter 1; and the double use of the word 'burdened' certainly recalls this theme in the earlier chapter." [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

THE SYMBOLIC NATURE OF THE OT SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM — “What this all speaks to is the symbolic nature of ritual in the OT. Without question God had commanded all these rituals, and had commanded them in some detail, with specific punishments for the failure to perform them. *But the rituals themselves were not what God wanted, and thus he could say here and elsewhere that he had not commanded them (Amos 5:25,26; Jer 7:22). What he really wanted was a people with whom he could have fellowship because their characters reflected his own. The rituals were useful representations of lives surrendered to him, and likewise they could represent the nature of what God had done and would do through his Son to make such fellowship possible, but the symbols themselves had no effectual force.* There is no indication that the other peoples of the ancient Near East ever made such a distinction. This is not to say that they could not, but rather that they did not. Of what use was ritual that did not, in and of itself, produce the desired result? The very purpose of ritual in the history of religion has been to appease the gods and satisfy any claims they may have on us so that we may use the power of the gods to pursue our own goals. *To suggest that there is a hard-and-fast boundary between the symbol and that which it represents is to place God beyond the realm of our manipulation, and this is a profoundly distasteful result for a proud human heart bent on achieving security independent of all else.*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

GOD HAD NOT BURDENED HIS PEOPLE, RATHER THEY HAD BURDENED HIM (v 23, 24) — each of these two verses begin with a negative clause stating what the people had not done. But the second part of each verse is identical with the exception of the subject and the objects are exactly reversed. *“The point is this: God had not enslaved and wearied his people with arduous ritual. But they have enslaved and wearied God with their sins and iniquities. Anyone who blurred the distinction between symbol and reality would have difficulty with this statement. If the ritual had been done correctly, then no sins and iniquities remained. But Isaiah’s point is that the carefully performed rituals had been as though not done at all, because they had not reflected genuine submission and real changes of heart. Thus the rituals themselves were sinful and iniquitous. Far from being a reason why God would owe special favors to his people, their attempts to use cultic ritual to manipulate God were only one more manifestation of their deeply ingrained inability to surrender themselves, their needs, and their destinies to him.”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] How much of this speaks to our modern-day services. Does the Lord want us to go to church and serve Him by the many religious activities? Of course He does. But anything done for the Lord without our hearts being right with Him and without our hearts being in the service is empty and ritualistic. *Many who go to church are no different than Israel of old!*

ISRAEL’S ONLY HOPE: THE CHARACTER OF GOD (v 25) — but if all the preceding is true, then what hope does Israel have for deliverance from the coming captivity? Isaiah again points to the only confidence Israel might have: the character of their God. *“In this instance what he does is to erase from the record every trace of the transgression and sin of his people, not once but continually and forever so that he cannot remember it. He does this as an expression of his own nature, ‘for my own sake’ (lit. ‘on account of me’).* Nothing Israel has done or can do can qualify them for forgiveness like this. If God did not wish to do it, no court could require him to do so, and no power could compel him. It is purely an expression of the gracious character of him who is at the center of all things, encompasses all things, and is beyond all things.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “We have adopted the rendering ‘*I alone*’ because the threefold repetition of the subject, ‘*I, I, He* is blotting out thy transgressions,’ is intended to affirm that this blotting out of sin is so far from being in any way merited by Israel, that it is a sovereign act of His absolute freedom; and the

expression ‘for my own sake,’ that *it has its foundation only in God, namely, in His absolute free grace, that movement of His love by which wrath is subdued. For the debt stands written in God’s own book. Justice has entered it, and love alone blots it out; but, as we know from the actual fulfilment, not without paying with blood, and giving the quittance with blood.*” [K&D, Isaiah]

IF ISRAEL DID NOT DESIRE GRACE, ‘THEN PLEASE REMIND ME WHAT I HAVE FORGOTTEN’ (v 26-28) — the tone is heavily ironic here. If Israel was too proud to accept the unmerited favor of God, then he is willing to be reminded of anything in their favor they think He might have forgotten. *“We humans do not like grace; we like to feel that we deserve everything we get. We want to be able to say that our good behavior has earned favorable treatment for us before the bar of God.... [I]nstead of recounting the praise of God, the people are recounting all their good deeds, and by extension, the mistreatment they have suffered at the hands of God (v. 28). This is always the way: until we recognize our need for grace, all our energies, energies designed for the praise of God, will be spent in fruitless self-justification.”* [Oswalt, Isaiah] “Verse 26 also evokes memories of 1:18, where the divine urge to forgive is expressed in the language of the courtroom, with a call for settlement of the issue. Here God speaks to establish the guilt of his people, for without a recognition of this they would never come for forgiveness. The first father (v. 27) could be Adam, Abraham, or Jacob; but most commentators favor the last. Little depends on it, for the basic meaning of the verse is that *from its beginning and throughout its history the nation has been characterized by sin, even on the part of its spiritual elite.*” [Grogan, Isaiah]

Witnesses for God’s uniqueness: God delivers his witnesses (43:14-44:5)

The Promised Spirit (44:1-5)

But now listen, O Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen. This is what the LORD says — he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you: Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams. One will say, “I belong to the LORD”; another will call himself by the name of Jacob; still another will write on his hand, “The LORD’s,” and will take the name Israel. (NIV)

Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the LORD’s; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the LORD, and surname himself by the name of Israel. (KJV)

And now, hear, O Jacob, My servant, And Israel, whom I have fixed on: Thus said Jehovah, thy Maker, and thy Former, From the womb He doth help thee; Fear not, my servant Jacob, And Jeshurun, whom I have fixed on. For I pour waters on a thirsty one, And floods on a dry land, I pour My Spirit on thy seed, And My blessing on thine offspring. And they have sprung up as among grass, As willows by streams of water. This [one] saith, For Jehovah I [am], And this calleth [himself] by the name of Jacob, And this [one] writeth [with] his hand, ‘For Jehovah,’ and by the name of Israel surnameth himself. (YLT)

CONTINUING THOUGHT — “One can have little doubt of the connection of this segment to the preceding ones. Not only are certain words and concepts repeated, but the opening ‘*But now*’ emphasizes the relation of contrast between what has just been said about Israel’s condition and what God nevertheless promises.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] There are four points of emphasis in this segment:

- God’s continued love for Israel (v 1,2)
- the outpouring of the Spirit (v3)
- abundant offspring (v4)
- the privilege of being counted as an Israelite (v5)

“These promises ... has a more futuristic note than the previous ones (42:14-17; 43:1-7, 14-21), which seem to focus more specifically on the return from the exile. Here the focus is on broader issues: the very fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises. God promises that the nation will survive and multiply, that it will be blessed and be a blessing, and that God’s life will be theirs through the Holy Spirit. None need fear that God cannot or will not keep his ancient covenant promises — he is faithful (2 Pet 3:9).” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE UNDESERVED ARE BLESSED (v 1, 2) — Isaiah in the last verse (43:28) spoke of Jacob / Israel as under a curse and given to reviling. He now calls upon the same Jacob / Israel to listen to the what the Lord would have for them: servant! chosen! “God has not given up on them; he still intends to use them for the purpose for which they were created (43:21). Indeed, precisely because of the tragedy of the exile, they will be in a better position to give the world the evidence that their God is the only God (43:10; 44:8).” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] God’s word to undeserving Israel is ‘*do not fear!*’

GOD HOLDS ISRAEL IN HIS HEART (v 2) — ‘*Jeshurun*’ – what Isaiah exactly meant by using this term is uncertain. It is used only 3x in scripture, all in Deuteronomy (32:15; 33:5, 26). “The usages in Deuteronomy seem to indicate *an intimate personal name* for the people. The root may be *yšr*, which has to do with straightness or uprightness. If so, *the sense may be ‘the upright one,’ which would have dramatic impact in the present setting. God calls these people, sinners from the beginning, ‘the upright one.’ In any case, the impression gained is of informal affection; the formal relationship is still intact, but, better than that, God holds them in his heart.*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

WAS ABRAHAM TO BE CHILDLESS? (v 3) — “What about the multiplied descendants promised to Abraham? God was giving them up to the ban, to utter destruction (43:28). Was the promise abrogated? Would Abraham’s family line as expressed in the nation to come to a dead end? Here, in a thought similar to that of Ezekiel (37:7-10), *God promises that his own Spirit, the energy and vitality that made the world (Gen 1:1), will pour out on the nation so that what the world would have said was dead and dry, even burned over (Isa 6:12,13), will bloom with all the abundance of spring.*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

WATER, DRY LAND AND PENTECOST (v 3) — God was to do the impossible for His people and turn death into life. “[T]he prophet senses that without an infusion of the Holy Spirit into the life of the people, only death and corruption will reign, as it had in the past. He recognizes that apart from this kind of divine intervention, the same spiritual deficiency that precipitated the destruction of the nation will do so again.... Unquestionably, Jesus taught his disciples to believe that the prophets were foretelling a specific act of God in their speaking of the

outpouring of the Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:16,28).... [The] sequence is ‘you are my witnesses,’ 43:8-13; deliverance from Babylon, 43:14-21; deliverance not deserved because of persistent sin, 43:22-28; outpouring of Spirit results in fulfillment of Abrahamic promises, 44:1-5. This sequence shows that with this pronouncement Isaiah had in mind the event, if not the details, of Pentecost.” [Oswalt, Isaiah]

THE GENTILES WILL WANT WHAT ISRAEL HAS (v 5) — “Isaiah is almost Pauline at this point, for the Gentile converts of v. 5 seem like an (adopted?) extension of the children of Israel to whom v. 4 refers. The statement I will pour out my spirit (v. 3) reminds us of Joel 2:29, with its fulfillment at Pentecost and the Gentile evangelization that followed it. North (*Isaiah 40-55*, in loc.) says, *‘The passage is remarkable as being perhaps the earliest in which what we call the church is conceived of as a community transcending the boundaries of race.’*” [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions,
for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”

— Isaiah 43:25 NIV