

The Millennium Forecast

The Book of Isaiah

Text

Isaiah 44:21-28

Topic

The LORD promises to always reinstate His redeemed servant(s).

Title

***“Just When You Thought Israel Was Out,
God Pulls Them Back In!”***

***“Just when I thought I was out,
they pull me back in...”***

... is one of the iconic lines spoken by Michael Corleone. It seems an appropriate caption for the nation of Israel.

Israel split after King David's death:

- The 10 northern tribes were called Israel with Samaria for their capital.
- The 2 southern tribes were called Judah with Jerusalem for their capital.

Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in 722BC. It was so devastating that you still hear people reference 'the ten lost tribes.' BTW - in the Revelation we see all twelve tribes. The ten are not so lost after all.

Ahead in prophecy was the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonian Empire ruled by King Nebuchadnezzar. Jerusalem fell in 586BC. The Babylonians systematically destroyed the city and Solomon's Temple. Many of Judah's inhabitants were exiled to Babylon.

Who could survive such destruction and dispersion? Yet here was the LORD talking to them about being reinstated as His servant once the Babylonian captivity ended.

It is a potent example of human *faithlessness* met by divine *faithfulness*.

God's promises to Israel cannot fail. I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 The Way Back To The Lord Is Paved With Grace,** and **#2 The Way Forward With The Lord Is Paced By Grace.**

#1 - The Way Back To The Lord Is Paved With Grace (v21-23)

Are you faithless?

The apostle Paul told Pastor Timothy, "If **we** are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (Second Timothy 2:13). I take "we" to mean believers. "If" could be "when" or "since." "Faithless" can be "unfaithful," or "disobedient." So yes, every believer has experience with being faithless in the sense of being unfaithful and disobedient.

Realizing our own frailties will help us rejoice in God's gracious compassion for His chosen nation.

Isa 44:21 "Remember these, O Jacob, And Israel, for you *are* My servant; I have formed you, you *are* My servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me!

"Jacob" is the grandson of Abraham. His name would be changed by God to "Israel." His boys were the twelve tribes. Previously in chapter forty-four they had been shown the folly of idolatry. Instead of forming idols of metal and wood they ought to "remember" God had "formed" them to be His "servant" among the Gentiles nations.

You could almost count on Israel backsliding. God however, called them His "servant." His calling of Israel was irrevocable.

Could God make it any clearer that the physical nation of Israel cannot be abandoned by Him?

Isa 44:22 I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, And like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you."

Dr. Henry Thiessen discussing what it means to be “redeemed” said, “*The term ‘redemption’ alludes sometimes (1) to the payment of a debt and sometimes (2) to the liberation of a captive.*”

To oversimplify, the human race owes a debt of sin that we cannot pay, and are therefore captive slaves to sin and Satan. In the Garden of Eden, immediately after our first parents sinned, the Lord said He would come as our Redeemer to pay the debt and set us free.

Sins are “blotted out.” Commentators say this is an accounting term. It refers to eliminating debt in a ledger. Another simple way of looking at redemption is that the Lord purchased your debt and replaced it with His righteousness.

“Clouds” are mentioned twice in the NKJV. It describes fog and the mist that precedes the fog.

Your sins hovered over and surrounded you like a thick Tule fog.

No more foggy days for those who have been redeemed.

Isa 44:23 Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done *it!* Shout, you lower parts of the earth; Break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, And glorified Himself in Israel.

- From the stellar “heavens” **we journey to the center of the earth.**
- From atop the highest mountain we can **see the forest for the trees.**

Everything we normally call ‘nature’ is personified as worshiping God’s redemption of mankind. Let’s call it what it is: Creation. The apostle Paul writes, “For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:19-21).

We have the tendency to assume that a material universe is somehow evil. It isn’t. The future universe will be very much material, only without the curse brought upon God’s original creation when mankind sinned. Dr. Michael Vlach writes, “God has designed that our eternal home involves a real place for people with resurrected, physical bodies. We will reside on a restored planet earth where we will fellowship with other

saved saints and enjoy the beauties of the new creation, including all of its beauty and cultural delights.”

In Roman’s 11:29 we are told, “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” It is a promise made to Israel Israel.

No matter Israel’s faithlessness, God remains faithful.

“No matter” doesn’t mean it doesn’t matter. The Assyrian conquest and dispersion... The Babylonian conquest and captivity... The Roman destruction and dispersion... The wandering of Jews for some 2000yrs, hated and persecuted by every nation they fled to... Wars and rumors of war... Throughout history Israel suffered the consequences of her faithlessness.

The worst for Israel is yet to come. What we commonly call the Great Tribulation is better named the Time of Jacob’s trouble. That future seven years described so graphically in the Book of the Revelation affects everyone on the earth, but it’s focus is the nation of Israel. It is God’s plan for “all Israel” to be “saved.”

#2 - The Way Forward With The Lord Is Paced By Grace (v24-28)

Is our emphasizing the grace of God’s faithfulness in our faithlessness too easy?

You may have heard the term ‘easy-believism.’ It is a derogatory comment that assumes if you preach grace you don’t encourage real discipleship.

In response to the accusation of easy-believism Dr. Charles Ryrie said, “It’s *not* easy to believe.” Our understanding of discipleship is summed-up by Dietrich Bonhoeffer who said, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.”

I’ve concluded that if you are not being accused of preaching too much grace *then you’re not preaching it enough*. The apostle Paul understood this when he said, “But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more... What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!” (Romans 5:21 & 6:1-2). He anticipated the objection that he was giving believers a license to sin.

Twice the LORD calls Israel is His redeemed “servant.” The remaining verses tell us what makes a servant faithful in what is a single sentence in Hebrew, one of the longest in the OT.

Dr. Abraham Maslow took a radical approach in his theory of human psychology. Instead of studying dysfunction, he studied 'healthy' people in order to recommend their self-actualizing to those struggling. Great approach - IF there were any healthy, self-actualized people; i.e., people with no sin nature.

In this next sentence we are encouraged to look at the one Person who did live a perfect, sinless life. The emphasis is not on us at all. We are not told how to serve, only to look at Jesus as servant.

Isa 44:24 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, And He who formed you from the womb: "I *am* the LORD, who makes all *things*, Who stretches out the heavens all alone, Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself;

"Your Redeemer." You are helpless to help yourself. The Lord has done everything necessary. You've heard it said, *Jesus paid a debt He did not owe because we owed a debt we could not pay.* That's the idea.

"Formed you from the womb" applies here to the nation as a whole. God called Abram to follow Him and give "birth" to a new nation.

Next we see God as Creator. The apostle Paul wrote, "For by [Jesus] all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist" (Colossians 1:16-17).

Creation is the first, great witness to Almighty God. It's majesty ought to overwhelm. In context, however, we are to understand Jesus' creating the universe *as part of His service to the Father*. If the Godhead were going to create a being in their image we would need a universe, a galaxy, a solar system, and a planet with atmosphere on which to interact.

Isa 44:25 Who frustrates the signs of the babblers, And drives diviners mad; Who turns wise men backward, And makes their knowledge foolishness;

There is a lot of opposition to biblical Christianity. Some is supernatural; some seems more natural, but still is inspired by demonic forces. Men give themselves titles to promote their opposition. Whether they are babblers [those who are familiar with secret powers], diviners, or wise men, their analyses and proposed solutions are foolishness. Their philosophies, psychologies, and politics, can never admit that salvation must be all of grace, without works, so that no one can boast. The fact

everything but the Bible is man-centered dooms all the efforts of men to make sense of the universe.

Isa 44:26 Who confirms the word of His servant, And performs the counsel of His messengers;

When God sent out His OT servants, and they spoke for him, He confirmed it. Take Elijah and Elisha as our example.

Elijah performed 14 notable miracles. They included:

- Causing the rain to cease for 3½ years (First Kings 17:1).
- The resurrection of the widow's son (First Kings 17:22)
- The parting of the Jordan River (Second Kings 2:8).

Elisha was told he would have a double portion of the Spirit upon his life. We take that to mean at the very least that he would do twice as many miracles. And he did; he performed 28. They included:

- The floating of the axe head (Second Kings 6:6).
- The healing of Naaman (Second Kings 5:14).
- Smiting the Syrian army with blindness (Second Kings 6:18).

The NT apostles were promised that signs & wonders would accompany their Gospel preaching. There are some notable miracles in the Book of Acts.

This continues in the Church Age in which we live. However, the New Testament teaches us that our greatest testimony in this dispensation is to show His strength in our weakness, and to suffer for Jesus Christ. We are fools who confound the wise.

Isa 44:26 ... Who says to Jerusalem, 'You shall be inhabited,' To the cities of Judah, 'You shall be built,' And I will raise up her waste places;

Isaiah prophesied the rebuilding of Judah *before the city was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar*. He was prophesying about 150 years before these events.

What happens next is truly astonishing.

Isa 44:27 Who says to the deep, 'Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers';

Isa 44:28 Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," And to the temple, ""Your foundation shall be laid."'

Let's get right to it: Isaiah announced Cyrus by name at least a century before he was born.

King Cyrus of Media & Persia, the Medo-Persian empire. He would conquer Babylon. Isaiah even prophesied how it would happen: "Who says to the deep, 'Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers.' The great Euphrates River flowed into Babylon under its massive wall. God suggested to Cyrus that he divert the flow and enter the city secretly along the path of the river. And that is the way historians wrote it.

Cyrus would say, "The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all His people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up" (Second Chronicles 36:21).

Once again the emphasis is on the LORD. He overrules pagan kings if it is necessary to serve His people.

God's Master Class for servants teaches one simple lesson: "Look at Me, at what I've done for you, and do likewise enabled by God the Holy Spirit."

Jesus washed the feet of His disciples on the night before His crucifixion. He said, "If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:14-17).

Over & over & over again God is faithful towards faithless Israel and reinstates her to serve Him. How can He not do the same with us, believing Gentiles? He does. When we are faithless, He remains faithful.

It is beyond wonderful to be reinstated to our service. It is also a dangerous moment. We have a human tendency to want to rush forward in our flesh, making new rules for ourselves. The apostle Paul strongly reminds us, "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now going to be made complete by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3).

Get back on the path and let your pace be set by the grace of God.

In the very good *Bible Knowledge Commentary* we read this concerning Paul's teaching to Timothy. "Jesus will not deny even unprofitable members of His own body. True children of God cannot become something other than children, even when disobedient and weak. Christ's faithfulness to Christians is not contingent on their faithfulness to Him."

The author unequivocally states that once you are a child of God *you cannot become something else.*

Once you are saved are you always saved?

I have reduced the entire debate to one person: **Lot**. We read in Second Peter that God "delivered **righteous Lot**, *who was* oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that **righteous** man, dwelling among them, tormented *his* **righteous** soul from day to day by seeing and hearing *their* lawless deeds) - then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment" (2:7-9).

Unless Peter had written what he did you would in no way imagine Lot was saved. He was quarrelsome, selfish, opportunistic, materialistic, and compromising. He got drunk not once but on successive nights and committed incest with his two daughters.

When you believe God you are declared righteous. Not because of anything you have done but on account of everything the LORD has done to redeem you. A commentator from the Reformed camp put it this way: "Lot was simultaneously righteous and sinful."

- I am simultaneously righteous and sinful.
- You are simultaneously righteous and sinful.

Thank God for grace. One final quote: "Grace is not simply leniency when we have sinned. Grace is the enabling gift of God not to sin. Grace is *power*, not just *pardon*."