

SEPTEMBER 23

Isaiah 41:17-43:13

One thing we'll see in these verses is a promise for those who trust God, and a challenge to those who don't. Also, God begins more and more to show us what the purpose of prophecy is. Why does God say in advance what He's going to do? Is it like a magic trick so we'll be impressed? The strange effect of sin in us is that we are not impressed by anything God does. For the unbelieving the fulfillment of prophecy is a testimony to their stubbornness and sin. God has said what needs to be said, in advance. For the believing, prophecy gives hope. We might be awed by God's character and attributes and power, but the purpose is hope. That will be clear in all we are reading from here to the end of Isaiah. Paul also says this in Romans 15:4, *For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

When you see what God is saying to Isaiah, you understand that some of that hope was for those people receiving the prophecies as Isaiah spoke. Some of that hope was for the godly people in Jerusalem as the city was being besieged by the Babylonians, and some of that hope was for those who were taken into exile, for those who returned to a shattered land after the exile. Some of that hope was for the people living in the time Jesus was on the earth. Some of that hope is for Jews now, and then later for the Jews during the Tribulation. There is one message of this prophecy: God will redeem His people. Yet this message is applied to many generations of followers of God.

We should be able to identify with the challenge of living in present circumstances, but knowing, as Paul says in Ephesians 2:6-7, that God has *seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* Even now, working in the harvest, lugging around this body of death, having to cry out to God for mercy and strength as we take up our cross every day to follow, we have a future blessing promised to us to give us hope today. In faith we draw near to God and draw strength. Those who trust in themselves just go, "Yeah, nice verses."

Isaiah 41:17-29

Vs. 17-20 God will answer those who repent and are faithful in calling to Him. Notice that this prophecy is given so they may see and know and understand that this was the hand of the Lord.

Vs. 21-24 This is the challenge to those who pursue other gods or human means.

Vs. 25-27 God declares that He is the one who is foretelling and determining the return of the people to Jerusalem.

One note here: Because of where Jerusalem is, everything came from the north. To the west was the Mediterranean Sea and to the east was the great desert. No one came over the desert. So even though the Babylonians and Persians were east of Jerusalem, they had to travel north along the rivers and then south to Jerusalem. They called this route "the fertile crescent," because of the arc the river takes. Therefore, most of the threat that Jerusalem faced came from the north.

V. 25 This *one* is thought to be Cyrus, the Persian king who sent the people back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

Vs. 28-29 Again, those who follow or worship anything but the Lord are only fooling themselves.

Isaiah 42

There are two servants in view. The one *servant* was the nation that was supposed to give testimony to the world. They failed. So, God sent the other *Servant*, the Messiah, who was

successful. God always knew the first servant would fail their first mission, and Jesus was appointed before the foundation of the world to be the Savior of the world. The Jews will get another chance, and they will fulfill their destiny.

Vs. 1-16 are about the Messiah. Some of this was fulfilled and mentioned in the Gospels and some of this will still be fulfilled in the Tribulation and in the Millennial Kingdom.

There are a lot of things in these verses. Look for structure and commands. *I am* is used to help follow the flow of the passage. Notice how often God bases His promises on the fact He is the creator. It is almost as if He is using creation as a symbol of hope, saying, "Just as I made this, you can be sure of that."

Vs. 1-4 are quoted in Matthew 12:20, and they are great verses. Since this is said of the Lord, we as His followers should see some of this as our mode of operation. You didn't see Jesus yelling on street corners or in angry debate. To those who were leading the people astray, He was hard, but then only at the end of His ministry after He had given them many opportunities to believe Him. Jesus allowed the word the Father had given Him to attract or repel people. He didn't yell or demand.

Vs. 5-9 These words could be from the Father to the Son, His Servant. They might also apply to the nation and their ministry to the nations. Yet, these words remind me of what Jesus quoted when He taught in Nazareth and almost got thrown off the cliff. What He quoted was from Isaiah 61 and from Isaiah 58. But it is close to this too. It was a summation of Jesus' ministry.

Vs. 10-13 In light of the coming of God's Servant, there will be victory and restoration. The believing should rejoice. What follows shows that this peace and redemption will come through victory, and victory means there is a coming conflict and judgment.

Vs. 14-16 The conflict will end with those in darkness receiving light.

Vs. 17-25 This is the failed servant Israel, as opposed to the Messiah. But Israel will not end its service as a failure.

Isaiah 43:1-13

Vs. 1-7 These are powerful words of encouragement to the repentant and faithful among the exiles back then and in the future. Verses 1-2 are great comfort and great verses to memorize.

Vs. 8-13 Yet there will always be people who will worship and trust something or someone other than God.

Notice God's own declaration to His greatness and power and sovereignty.

The height of sin and insanity is to deny God's existence. And for those of us who say there is a God, our insanity is in not trusting Him and following Him. If you read the Upper Room Discourse, John 13-17, note how many times Jesus says the people of Israel did not know Him. They were this blind servant. In the future, they will know Him and serve Him and lead many in every nation to salvation during the Tribulation.

Ephesians 2

Just like yesterday, go slowly through these first 10 verses. There are some thoughts in these verses that are capable of changing a life.

Vs. 1-7 In the Greek, these verses are one big, happy sentence without punctuation. If you are a former grammar teacher, you might want to hunt down the main verbs and the subject and then graph all the subordinate clauses. This explains why some translations begin with the phrase, which isn't there but is referred to later, "And you He made alive when." This introductory phrase is implicit in what Paul is saying. Putting that phrase first puts the opening words in context quickly. Grammar is fun.

V. 4 God is the subject of this sentence.

V. 5 *By grace you have been saved* is a parenthetical, emotional outburst on Paul's part. Can you see from the sentence why this is? We, as described by the past four verses, were made *alive together with Christ*? The dirty and the dead are linked to the divine? Paul is saying, "Whoa, dude! By grace we have been saved."

V. 6 is positional. We are physically not yet there; but in reality, in God's sight, our future is secure.

V. 7 This thought is pretty unbelievable, and really, more than the mind can grasp.

Vs. 8-10 The *this* in v. 8 is the entire process of redemption. It is not a question of grace or faith, per se, saving us. God did it all. Some people think to have faith is a work. That is no more a work than putting a pill in your mouth. You didn't make the pill or build the manufacturing plant or engineer the formula. God did it all. Faith is mere trust in what God has accomplished and is offering. This opportunity and the offer are not necessary on God's part. It is amazing grace. Obviously then, *good works* are not how we are saved. They are what God gives us to do as "keys" that open doors in the harvest. When we get to Titus, we'll see good deeds are mentioned quite a bit. Conspicuous by its absence in Titus is any mention of sharing the gospel. I think good works to the person next door is what God has given us to open the door next door for the gospel. It's loving our neighbor.

Vs. 11-17 This isn't just an explanation of how God united Jew and Gentile. It is an explanation of how God brought all people together in Christ to make a people for Himself during this time. There is no contradiction between Judaism and Christianity. Christ fulfilled the law in His sinless life and became the payment for all humanity (for *all* had violated the law). He became a curse for them, thereby satisfying the justice of God. Now, as said in Galatians, there is just one man in Christ. Paul is actually beginning to describe the creation of the church...a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Notice that in those last verses the pronouns are plural. *You* means *all of you*.

These verses may contain a hint of a problem where some might have said, as in Galatians, that being a Jew was better. Paul is not only laying that to rest, but he is also about to talk about the mystery of the gospel; that is, that God would create a people for this "dispensation" (administration of time) who would carry the message forth until it is time for the Jews to fulfill their calling.

Vs. 18-22 This is another way of saying the wild olive tree was grafted into the cultivated olive tree. (Rom. 11:24) The entire focus is on Jesus. He is the Cornerstone and He is the one we are built into as a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Just so you don't get lost "in the Spirit," if you read John 16 or Acts 1:8 you'll see that it is the Spirit who gives us our pizzazz in the harvest. He is all about the harvest and if you want to see the Spirit do His stuff, you have to be in the harvest following Jesus, reaching out and making disciples, who make disciples.

Psalm 67

Vs. 1-3 This psalm begins with the blessing which God gave to Aaron to bless the people of Israel in Numbers 6:24. What is interesting, then, is that the writer goes on and expresses God's purpose in blessing Israel, to make Israel a witness to the world that all people might be saved. Notice that all the nations and peoples are to praise God.

V. 4 This expresses relationship. While praising God could be an obligation, having gladness and singing and expressing joy means the nations know the Lord.

Vs. 5-7 This is a great song about the fulfillment of the promise to Adam and Eve, to Abraham and to Israel. It is what the Millennium will look like as Jesus reigns.

This is now the mission of the church, to bear testimony in the harvest. The day will come when Israel will turn to their Messiah and bear the light of His Word in the world's darkest hour. There will be joy in every nation and gladness among all people, and they will praise the Lord, that He reigns.

Proverbs 23:29-35

There are few things on earth that lend themselves to greater misuse than "drink." It is obvious from Scripture that God made wine, and wine is spoken of as a sign of His blessing; but in a fallen world it has become a danger. Here, without God, we seek the relaxation it gives as an escape and we get lost in being lost in our escapes.

As disciples we need to look to our own hearts on this one. Is this something God has given us liberty to enjoy? Can we control it? Jesus drank wine, but Jesus controlled it. Paul probably drank wine and was against those who forbade it on legalistic grounds, but Paul was against drinking wine around the weak, flaunting personal freedoms. Paul told Timothy to drink a little wine to deal with the stressful effects that ministry was having on his stomach.

It might also be true that many people don't drink wine, but the warning of excess is still here. Everything that is good can be twisted: games, TV, following a favorite sports team, shopping, computers, sex, everything. We each need to see what we can control, what we might need help controlling, and what we might just need to eliminate.