

ISAIAH

Chapter 43

Israel's Only Savior

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. 3 For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. 4 Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. 5 Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you. 6 I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, 7 everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." 8 Bring out the people who are blind, yet have eyes, who are deaf, yet have ears! 9 All the nations gather together, and the peoples assemble. Who among them can declare this, and show us the former things? Let them bring their witnesses to prove them right, and let them hear and say, It is true. 10 "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. 11 I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior. 12 I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and I am God. 13 Also henceforth I am he; there is none who can deliver from my hand; I work, and who can turn it back?" 14 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "For your sake I send to Babylon and bring them all down as fugitives, even the Chaldeans, in the ships in which they rejoice. 15 I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King." 16 Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, 17 who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: 18 "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. 19 Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. 20 The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, 21 the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise. 22 "Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of me, O Israel! 23 You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings, or honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings, or wearied you with frankincense. 24 You have not bought me sweet cane with money, or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities. 25 "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. 26 Put me in remembrance; let us argue together; set forth your case, that you may be proved right. 27 Your first father sinned, and your mediators transgressed against me. 28 Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary, and deliver Jacob to utter destruction and Israel to reviling.

Lutheran Hour Devotion

43:1-2 *Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. Isaiah 43:1b-2*

Linton, North Dakota, has had its share of problems. Yes, I know you and your community have problems too. But Linton has had *problems*.

First, one of the town's largest employers closed. That was rough. Then two tributaries from the Missouri River flooded, washing out bridges and roads, damaging more than 70 homes in a community of 1,500. That was devastating. But now, with the sandbags gone, Linton is coming back.

The fields are plowed and the pastures are green. Businesses have moved from the outskirts of town back to Main Street. For the first time in three decades, all the Main Street buildings are filled and downtown traffic is a reality.

But there's more. The spring floods have filled the community's lake, and boats can once again be launched. Anglers and vacationers are starting to return.

Linton has experienced quite a transformation. The co-publisher of the town's weekly newspaper calls it, "revitalization through devastation." I like that. I like it because it's so theologically sound. Think about it. We Christians, once condemned sinners, have been revitalized through the devastation experienced by Jesus on the cross. We who have seen the Lord's love and commitment through the Savior's dedicated life, His unfair death, and His glorious resurrection have been forgiven, saved, recycled, and restored.

As Isaiah said, by the Savior's sacrifice we have been redeemed. Now, living in God's love, we know rivers cannot devastate us; we believe we cannot be overwhelmed.

In truth, in troubling times, whatever difficulties and destructions that sweep down upon us, we Christians can remain confident: God has called us by name; we are His.

43:1 *but now* – At the end of the exile. (TLSB)

The chapter begins with an unexpected thought. The last verse of the previous chapter announced God's burning wrath upon His people. They did not obey His law; they were blind and deaf to all that God had done for them. Because of their sins, God had sent the violence of war upon them. But they remained blind and deaf. We might have expected that Isaiah would continue with a fierce announcement of judgment. In spite of all God did for His people, they deserved God's judgment. God would have been justified in abandoning such ungrateful and stubborn people to their own sins. The phrase "But now," however, introduces something unexpected. We read tender words of faithful love from the Lord, the God of free and faithful grace. (PBC)

thus says the Lord – All of these words are very intense. "Do not be afraid, you seed of Jacob, because I have created you. You are My creature." This is the antithesis to the enemies who cry that the godly and the apostles are rebels and creatures of Satan. So they shake us as through a sieve and heap curses on us. But here God says, "Don't be afraid. I affirm that I am your Creator." The apostles are creatures made by God and created a new people. Of this creation

He is speaking here. "I am He, I am the same God who created everything." When they hear about a new creation, people must not think of a new God. "I acknowledge you as My creature. Let the enemies say the opposite. It does no harm." (Luther)

created ... formed. God made the nation Israel as surely as he made the first man (see Ge 1:27; see also Isa 43:7, 15, 21; 44:2, 24). (CSB)

IN the last chapter we heard the comfort of the church. This comfort keeps busy the affairs and schemes of the devil, who tries to disturb this consolation and righteousness. Hence this chapter offers similar consolation to raise up the church, as if she were already desperate and fallen. You see that the church is forever about to fall, and therefore there must always be consolations. Although there would scarcely be a remnant, God is the protector of this poor little church. Paul especially used this argument against the Jews, calling himself (Phil. 3:5) "of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin." Paul made use of such and similar boasts to strengthen his church, even though it was always the most wretched in appearance. (Luther)

This smallness of the church is the supreme offense in the world. "Do you think you are the only ones who count?" they say. Here there must be an apostolic faith against this offense. Therefore the prophet consoles the church with these grand words, "Do not be offended." While Christ was hanging on the cross, the church was practically nothing. It began with the malefactor, then came the apostles, etc. This offense hurts not only the simple but also the prophets and apostles, as David says (Ps. 62:9), "Men of low estate are but a breath, men of high estate are a delusion." Don't all the others amount to anything? Thus the whole world cries, "We are greater, we are older, you are recent and few, therefore you cannot possibly be right and we wrong." To this the psalm (Ps. 91:7) replies: "A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand." We, however, stand far apart from each other, like trees in an open field, while the ungodly are close together like a dense forest. We are a bucket, a little handful, yet that weak smallness is made certain by divine promises. Thus in the time of Elijah there remained 7,000. Where 100 got to heaven, 100,000 were lost. This offense, I say, has tormented all the most holy prophets. (Luther)

Fear not. The Lord says "Fear not, sinner. Fear not my people. Instead of punishment and judgment I will give you deliverance. The unexpected announcement to set aside fear comes for three reasons; all three of them trace the comfort back to the Lord Himself. First, the Lord says, "I have redeemed you." Second, God called His people by name. He singled them out from all the nations of the earth and called them. Third, these people were God's own possession. He claimed them: "You are mine." (PBC)

When we read these words thousands of years later, we too find comfort in them. The Lord has redeemed us too but from that greater bondage. By our sins, we were slaves of sin and in bondage to death and punishment. The Lord redeemed us from sin, death and hell. He bought us with the price of the blood of Christ on Calvary. God called us by name when He washed us in the water of Baptism. All believers belong to the Lord; they are His possession. (PBC)

redeemed you. "I am your Redeemer." These are burning words. "I have created you in opposition to the people who are not in the church. I have formed and fashioned you by the Holy Spirit. Beyond that, I have redeemed you from tyrants, from the Law, from sin and death. All these I have overcome, they are all under My feet and cannot harm you." This requires a strong faith. If we only believed this and put down our idol. (Luther)

The principle of redemption has been applied to more than just Judah's release from Babylon. Redemption has come to be a familiar term to all Christians. We regularly confess that God has

redeemed us. He paid the ransom necessary to secure our release from our spiritual bondage to sin, death, and judgment. The redemption did not come cheaply. God paid a dear price when He offered His Son, Jesus Christ, in exchange for sinful humanity. The apostle Peter wrote, “You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:18, 19). Luther paraphrased Peter in his explanation of the Second Article in the Small Catechism, “ Jesus Christ... has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with His holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.” (PBC)

called you by name. God chose Israel to serve him in a special way. See 45:3–4 (Cyrus). In Ex 31:2; 35:30 the Hebrew underlying this expression is translated “chosen.” (CSB)

In biblical times a name often expressed something about the person named (Gn. 17:20; Is. 40:26). Naming someone expressed ownership or relationship. A name equaled one’s reputation. (Lutheran Bible Companion Volume 2)

John 10:3: “He calls His own sheep by name.” He wants to distinguish and separate the church from the synagogue, for a name distinguishes one from another. “You now have a name that has been written in the heavens.” *I have called*, namely, through the Word. (Luther)

The Lord reminds His people that He has not forgotten His covenant promises to them. Cf Gen 32:26-29. (TLSB)

you are mine – There you see that we are called to be His possession. Whatever, therefore, you do, you should do well, for these [works] are His. “All of your works are Mine.” Note these words, “I have created, I have formed, I have redeemed, you are Mine.” “When you baptize, teach, train, etc., whatever you do and experience, believe that I have done and experienced it.” So you see that all the activities and experiences of the church are those of God. “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?” (Acts 9:4). (Luther)

Certainly our God is the God who brought all things into being by His powerful word, who upholds and sustains all creatures great and small. Yet in this Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 43 God uses 2nd person word forms 25 times. Over and over we hear “you, you you...!” “You are precious in my eyes.” (Herb Schumm – 2/25/15 ///Reed Lessing)

43:2 *waters ... rivers.* Probably an allusion to crossing the Red Sea (Ex 14:21–22) and the Jordan River (Jos 3:14–17). Cf. Ps 66:6, 12. (CSB)

walk through the fire. Fulfilled literally in the experience of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Da 3:25–27). Contrast 42:25. (CSB)

A pure piling up of words, as is the Hebrew custom. Waters, rivers, fire, flame shall not harm you, as if to say, “Before you cry and speak, I know what you need. Even though you might be in extreme trouble, nothing shall harm you, and you shall be inwardly safe. Do not become frightened. It is the form of the church to be in water, in rivers, in the fire. But I will be with you, so that nothing will harm you.” (Luther)

In the Sacred Scriptures water and fire denote trials. They went “through fire and water” (Ps. 66:12) and many other places. All of these things signify the trial and trouble of the godly. It is as if He were saying: “There is no one who is not after you. Thus you are in water and fire, etc. But do not be afraid, you are My creature, and for that reason, on My account, the world does not put up with you. Yet nothing can harm you.” This is the church of God, built on a solid rock, the rock of God’s promise. No tyrant can uproot it. Because the godly are in the church, therefore they will remain, even though the tyrants are raging. With their plans and schemes they try hard enough. They want to burn them, choke them, put them under, and banish them, but this passage and promise controls their planning and attempt. Thus God protects His own in the midst of ungodly men and preserves His church. We shall have the same experience. We have been called and chosen into the church by God, but we shall pass through waters and fires. There will be offense, but we shall be preserved. These are the promises given to the church. None of these trials shall do you harm. (Luther)

Armed with God’s promises, God’s ancient people faced the trouble of life. The Lord does not promise that His own faithful believers would escape all difficulty and pass through life without trouble. They would “pass through the waters” and “walk through the fire.” When the people of Israel left Egypt, they did indeed pass through the waters. By God’s power, Moses made a way through the Red Sea. That deliverance stood in the background of these promises. Just as the Lord provided such deliverance in the past, He would provide an even greater deliverance in the future. God assures His people that even their great trials will somehow work out for the best (Romans 8:28). (PBC)

43:3 *I am the Lord your God* – “For that reason you will be preserved, not because you are strong and righteous. No, but rather because I am the Lord.” (Luther)

Holy One of Israel. He, I say, God, whom you ignorantly worship, is the head of the church. So Peter in Acts preached in an outstanding way concerning Christ as the head of the church. If we keep this pure, nothing will harm you, if we can say that the Holy One of Israel is the head of the church against all claims to the contrary. (Luther)

Savior. Who delivers from the oppression of Egypt or Babylon and from the spiritual oppression of sin. The name “Isaiah” means “The LORD saves.” (CSB)

ransom.† The Persians conquered Egypt, Cush and Seba, described by the Lord of nations as a reward or ransom for liberating Israel. (CSB)

This is a dark text. I would prefer to construe it to be a repetition of the preceding. This is what the prophets usually do when they want to say that God is powerful, so as to support the power of this God from what had gone before. This is the meaning: “I am the God who of old protected you against all your enemies, first the Egyptians, then the Ethiopians, then Seba, whose people are also Ethiopians. I have put them all down.” It is as if He were saying: “Don’t you remember how I protected you and put them in your place? Where you should have perished, I caused others to perish in your place. You indeed deserved to perish, as in Egypt when you murmured against Me. Thus you were set free, and others were killed. Thus the Midianites, Ammonites, and others wanted to fight against you, but they perished. You were as a sheep for the slaughter before them. They prepared an atonement and victims for you and thought they were doing God a service by killing you. This plan and work those who plotted it had to experience themselves, while you were preserved.” (Luther)

God restructured the whole ancient world for the sake of a small people apparently sinking into oblivion in a foreign land. Israel's liberation is described as if God paid the Persians for giving the exiles freedom by giving the Persians Egypt. (TLSB)

Seba. A land near Cush (cf. 45:14) or Sheba (Ps 72:10). It was probably either in south Arabia or across the Red Sea in Africa. (CSB)

Cush and Seba are poetic, expansive expressions for Egypt. (TLSB)

43:4 *because you are precious* – Who says that? “The world does not say this. No, to the contrary, even in your own eyes you seem cast off. But in My eyes you are a noble jewel and emerald. Although in supreme trials you seem nothing in your own eyes and are condemned as one cast off by the world, in My eyes you are glorious. Therefore you may be vile in your own eyes, in the eyes of the world, and even in those of your brothers. Fear not. In My eyes I regard you as a precious jewel.” This consolation applies to those already despairing and almost completely oppressed, so that they may lift themselves up by means of it. “Therefore you are also glorified, namely, because in My eyes you are precious. For that reason you should be glorified, even though you may be the reproach and dung of men. Let the cross go before, glory will triumph in the end. As I have done in the past, so I am still doing now.” It is our glory, therefore, to be worthless in our own eyes and in the view of the world. We must indeed be nothing in our eyes and in those of the whole world. *You are precious in My eyes*. “Because you are nothing to yourself, you are glorious to Me.” (Luther)

I love you – The opposite seems to be true, “I do not love you.” When conscience hears God threaten, it says, “You are God's foe and enemy.” So the whole world gives expression to the opposite view. Yes, the enemies themselves are the objects of God's love, not we. Under this cross the flesh cannot believe that it is loved by God. The flesh says, “Love someone else also.” But here the prophet says, “Do not judge yourself according to your feeling but according to the Word, because I love you by hating you.” So you will be protected in supreme dangers. (Luther)

give men in return for you – This, too, seems like the opposite. Our side seems to be going under, while the enemies are on top. We are dying daily as sheep for the slaughter. All of these words are spoken as in darkness, and they are like words “in a dark place” (cf. 2 Peter 1:19), when I see the enemies victorious and myself imprisoned. “As for you, have confidence, when all men boast that they are the church of God, the sons of God, but you are condemned as a heretic, in that case cling to Me, because you are clear to Me and splendid in My eyes. It is necessary for Me to speak to you because you are in difficulties, but they are most glorious.” For that reason the promises must be spoken to those who are not glorious. (Luther)

In the exodus, Israel was redeemed at the expense of Egypt. Cf Pr. 21:18. (TLSB)

43:5 *fear not*. Why does He say *Fear not*? Because there are fears within and terrors without, the church is a tumult and a frightened people, beset by fear, despair, and sins. For that reason it has the Word, which is the breath of its life, so that it may be consoled by the Word. “Why are you afraid? Don't be afraid. I am with you.” The opposite appears to be the case: “I am far away from you.” Since the conscience feels that God is very far away from us, it is necessary for Him to say *I am with you*. These are hidden words. It seems that God is against us and with our opponents, because everything is going well for them. However, their end will be a most wretched one, even though their beginning was most favorable. (Luther)

east. Especially Assyria and Babylonia. (CSB)

Now comes the consolation. “You appear worthless, a widow, barren, but you will be fruitful, and, on the contrary, those who are fertile in the eyes of the world will become barren.” So it will happen to us. It is not evident who will afterwards say the words to us, and no womb bears them, but they will come nevertheless. “I know of still other wombs which are full of children, in the east and in the west. If Italy and Germany are unwilling, there will be other areas to bring them forth, because I will bring your offspring from the east and from the west. If the people in Judea are not² willing to do it, Rome and Europe must do it. Therefore, if it is the Word of God, it will be upheld, even if we are unwilling. (Luther)

west. For example, the “islands” of 11:11 (see also 24:14–15; 49:12). (CSB)

43:6 *north.* For example, Hamath. (CSB)

south. Egypt. (CSB)

end of the earth. God’s people will come not only from Babylon but from wherever they have been dispersed throughout the world. On the day of Pentecost, we note such a gathering of Jews from all over the Mediterranean world came to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 2). That day they heard the gospel, and God gathered them into His NT church. But a greater gathering is yet to be. It will occur on the Last day, when God will bring all His people into the heaven He has prepared for them, no matter where they have been scattered. (PBC)

t signifies that this group will be spoken against everywhere. It is as if He were saying: “You are barren, but you will be the most pregnant for Me, because I will order all, even the devil, to send you on your way in peace, whether they like it or not.” It is as if He were saying: “Just calm yourselves, you will not succeed, because I will forbid you.” Thus seeing how the church is despised in its own eyes and in those of the world, this dust, as it were, must press down the mountains and rocks. (Luther)

43:7 *called by my name.* People belonging to God. (CSB)

They are the ones. “You shall not take them from Me or deprive Me of them, though the opposite may seem to be the case. The ones who are the glorious and honorable sons of God, they are the ones who were called by My name.” A Christian man is called by the name of Christ, just as the people of Israel were spoken of as the people of God and were called Israel, because their God is the God of Israel. Thus Christ is our Lord, and we are called by His name. Here every form of one’s own righteousness is rooted out. John, Peter, Augustinian, Franciscan will count for nothing. These are proper nouns. But “Christian” is a common noun which belongs to all believers. “As many as believed and gloried in My name, these are the sons of God. And although they appear to be few, they will nevertheless be numerous from the south and the north. There are fishermen enough to catch them.” (Luther)

created ... formed. A Christian is already one with Christ and already has participation in Him. He is member of the member, and flesh of the flesh, just as a wife shares in the name and property of her husband. So the Christian in his entire being becomes a participant with God. Before, he was a most degraded creature, but now he is altogether glorious, not indeed by virtue of his own works and designs but because Christ has called him by name. So we are altogether Christ’s, since Christ has called us, and all our works are not our own but Christ’s. Therefore we are said to have been created for the glow of Christ. (Luther)

All of these things are said about godly people, who are called and who appear to be heretics before the world. On the contrary, it is said here that they have been created and formed. To create means to make something out of nothing. To form means to fashion a shape. Having been made a Christian, then, he is one who should serve his Creator. Outside of these resources of ours there is nothing. We have not created, formed, and made ourselves, but we have everything from God. (Luther)

43:8 *bring out the people* – When the worshipers of idols can produce no witnesses to vindicate their gods, the Lord calls to the stand His witnesses, His servant Israel, to testify that He saved His people. (TLSB)

In these verses God calls two groups to present their case as though they were in a court. One side are the nations, and on the other side, His people Israel. The nations cannot respond any more that they could in chapter 41. They have no witnesses to prove their case. (PBC)

blind ... deaf.† Israel, now chastened and redeemed, will live on to carry forward God’s plan for “all the nations” (v. 9). (CSB)

So John’s Gospel says, “You have eyes, but you do not see; you have ears, but you do not hear” (cf. John 12:40). They have eyes and ears aplenty, but they neither see nor hear. They see and hear where they should not hear, and vice versa. (Luther)

43:9–13 A court scene; see also 41:21–22. (CSB)

43:9–10 Trial imagery emphasizes that the Lord is the only true God. (TLSB)

43:9 *nations gather together.* Not only the Jews but also the Gentiles who want to be wise. Let them all step forward. (Luther)

former things. Evidence (TLSB)

witnesses. To verify the accuracy of earlier predictions by idols or their worshipers (see 41:26). (CSB)

The Lord calls on the nations to bring out their witnesses and testify what their gods have done. (TLSB)

They are challenged if they have any witnesses anywhere who can produce proof that the future was forecast; they are given free rein to produce their proof now. (Leupold)

it is true – They testify under oath. (TLSB)

43:10 *You are my witnesses.* See also v. 12; 44:8. God’s work in behalf of Israel is proof of his saving power. (CSB)

Though the people of Israel became spiritually blind and deaf (42:18–25), they can attest to their experiences. The Lord calls us to testify what we learn of Him. Ironically, this verse was adapted by the disciples of Charles Taze Russell and “Judge” Joseph F. Rutherford to form the name “Jehovah’s Witnesses,” a group that has deceived many with false predictions about the end of the world and other false testimony. They teach that Jesus is only a “Mighty God” alongside the Almighty God, though the Lord, speaking through Isaiah, clearly rejects this doctrine. (TLSB)

no god. The only true God—the Holy Trinity—is uncreated and eternal. Hilary of Poitiers: “He is God from God ... God is His own best interpreter, but His chosen Servant joins with Him to assure us that there is no God before Him, nor shall be after Him. His own witness concerning Himself is, indeed, sufficient, but He has added the witness of the Servant Whom He has chosen” (NPNF 2 9:82). (TLSB)

43:11 The main thrust is repeated in 44:6, 8; 45:5–6, 18, 21–22; 46:9 (see also Dt 32:39). (CSB)

Similar to the First Commandment (Ex 20:3) and other parts of Is (45:5, 18, 22; 46:9). (TLSB)

I, I am – Emphatic confession. God declares His absolute sovereignty, denying all hope of salvation based on our own works because salvation is the work of God alone. (TLSB)

savior. Verdict of the court is given in v 13, verifying Him as the true God (cf Jn 8:58). (TLSB)

43:12 *declared ... saved ... proclaimed.* God works salvation through His Word. (TLSB)

when. At the time of the exodus. (TLSB)

no strange god. Cf. Dt 32:12, 16. Israel repeatedly worshiped other gods (see Jdg 2:12–13). (CSB)

witnesses. Once God accomplished His plan, He caused news of it to be heard – He proclaimed it. Such was God’s pattern in the long history of Israel and Judah. His pattern has not changed. (PBC)

43:13 *None who can deliver ... hand.* Quoted verbatim from Dt 32:39. (CSB)

Jesus said (John 10:28; cf. John 6:39): “There is no one who ‘shall snatch them out of My hand,’ namely, you, My faithful witnesses. I will guard you so that you will not slip. You shall not be snatched away from Me.” (Luther)

As in the past, so also in the future, God’s plans will be unstoppable. (TLSB)

43:14 *Babylon.* The Lord is the Redeemer because if His rescue of Judah from the Babylonians, who will be defeated. (TLSB)

fugitives ... in the ships.† The Babylonians used the Persian Gulf, as well as the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, for trading purposes. (CSB)

Instead of Israel, the mighty nations became exiles. The ships would become prison vessel, transporting the conquered. (TLSB)

43:15 *Creator.* The Lord rules both Israel’s ancient beginning and their present state. (TLSB)

King. God was called “king over Jeshurun” (Israel) in Dt 33:5 (contrast 1Sa 8:7). (CSB)

43:16–17 A reference to crossing the Red Sea (see v. 2 and note). Pharaoh's chariots and horsemen were destroyed as Israel's God fought against them (see 51:10; Ex 14:28; 15:4). – This was the first great redemptive act of God. (CSB)

43:16 *way in the sea* – The Lord prefaces His claim with a reminder of the exodus and the destruction of Pharaoh's armies. (TLSB)

Yahweh's "way (s)" and "path (s)" serve as metaphors for the cruciform life of faith (2:3). Repeatedly, though, Israel consistently followed its own ways, which led to the exile of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC and of the Southern Kingdom in 587 BC. Isaiah notes Israel's unwillingness to walk in Yahweh's ways in 30:11; 42:24; 53:6; 56:11; 57:10, 17; 59:8; 65:2; 66:3 (cf 58:13; 63:17). The prophet himself warned "not to walk in the way of this people" (8:11). In fact, the motif of Yahweh's ways runs throughout Isaiah. To quote Quinn-Miscal: (CC p. 315)

[It] is at one and the same all of these: the moral and religious way of life, the dry path through the sea, the journey through the wilderness on the way back for Egypt (exodus) or from Assyria and Babylon (exile and dispersion), and the spiritual journey back to life in the Lord's house, life on the holy mountain. (CC p. 315)

Unfortunately, for Israel this way became the road less traveled (cf. Mt. 7:13-14). It follows, then that if the nation is going to find the way, Yahweh must lead them. He made a way through the water in the first exodus (Ex 14:21-22), and he will repeat the miracle to guide the exiles back from Babylon. Together 43:16 ad 43:19 have in view the exodus, the wilderness wanderings, and the land conquest. Since the overthrow of one conqueror could merely spell the advent of another, leading to more secure bondage, it is explained that the fall of Babylon is an Egypt-exodus event, followed by the homeward journey fur of divine provision. Ultimately, God will regather his scattered people in Christ to their permanent homeland (Mt 24:31; Gal 4:26; Heb 12:22-24). (CC pp. 315-316)

mighty waters – The area around the Red Sea were comparatively shallow, yet with a sudden change of the wind they may become the equivalent of a mad tide. (Leupold)

43:17 *drew out* – In a stunning turn of phrase, Yahweh maintains that he not only led Israel's hosts through the Red Sea, but he was also the commander of Egypt's forces! As their military strategist, Yahweh permitted them to pursue their mad course to their own death. He orchestrated the empire's defeat by hardening Pharaoh's heart (e.g., Ex 7:3; 9:7). This king believed that defeating Israel would be an easy victory (Ex 15:9), but he was dead wrong, literally. At the Red Sea, Israel did nothing to gain the victory (Ex 14:13-14; cf Zech 4:6). Yahweh did it all, literally. (CC p. 316)

Yahweh is also the Commander in chief over the evil Gog of Magog (Ezek 38:1-4), Satan (Rev 20:1-3, 7-10), and Gog and Magog (Rev 20:8). He is sovereign over every evil event, and in the end, he employs anti-God empires for the good of his people and the glory of his holy name (Is. 45:7; cf. Rom 8:28-29). (CC p. 316)

In this rehearsal of the first exodus, Yahweh does not mention Egypt or Pharaoh because he wants the focus to be upon his renewed act of salvation when he defeats Babylon and its last king, Naonidus. The first exodus was great. But Yahweh is about to renew it in a mightier manner! (CC p. 316)

All this is merely a drastic way of saying that even the most hostile forces that rage against the Lord and against his anointed are still only doing the behest of the One True God. That does not mean that Pharaoh, in sending forth his chariots, was not a free agent. But it does mean that the incomprehensible God, who controls all things, was manifesting his mysterious control even when the Egyptians went out with hostile intention. (Leupold p. 88)

quenched like a wick. Contrast 42:3. (CSB)

When men of their own free will chose to stand up to God and try to harm his people God can make very short work of putting them in their place. They really don't stand a chance.

The terms "chariot," "horse," and "army" frequently appear in Exodus 14-15. Egyptian military might is no match for Yahweh's east wind (Ex 14:21; 15:8, 10). The Song of the Sea celebrates that the enemy sunk down (Ex 15:5, 10), never to rise again. This is now Babylon's fate. (CC p. 316)

43:18 *remember not* – Does not mean God's people should forget the former things by which He revealed Himself (46:9). The Lord instructs them to set aside reflection on the exodus so they can consider a still more glorious future. (TLSB)

So much of our sense of identity is based on our recollection of events in the past. One's reputation is the lingering recollection of events related to that person. Someone without a memory is someone without an identity. The church is called to refresh and keep alive the memory of God's past actions as a basis for his promises to act in the present and in the future. "Do this in remembrance of me." The steadfastness of God is the foundation of typology. "As God was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be." – The statement must be meant in the sense of letting the memory linger on the events of the past, dwelling nostalgically on what happened in the good old days. So the thought is this: Let the grand past be over-topped by the more glorious future. Cultivate hope, not remembrance.

Here "Yahweh," is "I will be who I will be" means that God has a future, and Israel's future is dependent on this God. Therefore Israel must not dwell on the past. God's future actions provide his people with strength and hope in facing the sorrows of the present day. "Do not remember" is a call not to forget the past but to shift attention to what God has to say about the future.

Why does Yahweh abruptly say, "Do not remember the former things"? Israel's earlier texts play a foundational role in Isaiah 40-55. This is why Yahweh commands, "Remember this and stand firm. ...Remember the first things from of old" (46:8-9). The Pentateuch repeatedly exhorts Israel not to forget (e.g., Deut 6:12; 8:1-20), while the Passover was instituted lest they forget Yahweh's mighty acts of judgment against Egypt (e.g., Ex 12:14). Yahweh charges the fathers to teach the exodus narrative to their children (e.g., Ex 12:26-27; Deut 6:20-21), and Israel is even commanded to make fringes on their clothes lest they forget Yahweh's Word (Num 15:37-41). So why does Yahweh command, "Do not remember the former things?" (CC p. 316)

Israel's faith had eroded into nostalgia. The captives were so transfixed upon the past that they were in danger of missing Yahweh's current deliverance, first through Cyrus and then through the Suffering Servant. Earlier acts of salvation acted as a blindfold to Yahweh's "new thing" (43:19). The Judeans enshrined the past to the point that it limited what they thought Yahweh could do in the future. (CC pp. 316-317)

The former days can instruct, but they can also enslave. If faith becomes ossified, it does little good. Remembering can serve hope, but it [also] can replace it. The goal is for Israel not merely to confess, “As surely as Yahweh lives, who brought us out of Egypt” but also, “As surely as Yahweh lives, who brought the descendants of Israel up out of the land of the north [i.e., Babylon]” (cf. Jer 23:7-8). Rather than looking back on the glory days of the exodus and living with retrospective angst, Yahweh wants his people to see him as their present-exodus God who is leading them into a glorious future. (CC p. 317)

And so the command “do not remember the former things” (48:18 is not absolute because, for instance, in 43:26 Yahweh invites the exiles to review the past (cf. 44:21; 46:9). The long-ago events needs remembering because such remembering has the capacity to increase the conviction that God can so act, but needs forgetting because people must not think that Yahweh is only a God who acted way back then but cannot be expected so to act now. (CC p. 317)

No other deity is able to renew anything. Locked into the cycles of the season, nature gods can at most only do what they have always done. But Yahweh is the overlord of both creation and history! He employs participles in this section in order to highlight his salvific events for the present moment, “the one making,” 43:16, “the one bringing forth,” 43:17, “[I am] about to do,” 43:19. These participles indicate that it is Yahweh’s ongoing work to save his people. Is. 43:19-21 contains imperfect verbs that make the same point and extend into the future. When Yahweh delivered Israel from Egypt, he did not exhaust all of his resources. Israel’s God is present, now, to liberate for eternity. All this draws attention to that original act of deliverance and victory that encourages people to believe in the possibility of another such act. (CC p. 317)

nor consider the things of old – Things predicted and fulfilled (cf 41:22; 42:9; 43:9; 46:9; 48:3). (TLSB)

This statement must be meant in the sense of letting the memory linger on the events of the past, of dwelling nostalgically on what happened in the good old days. They are to cultivate hope, not remembrance. (Leupold p. 89)

That does not mean that they were to forget all about it; it simply means that they were not to dwell on this past deliverance. (PBC)

43:19-21 Israel could expect something new—a miracle so marvelous as to eclipse the former things. Cf Col 2:17. (TLSB)

43:19 *new thing*. Rather than looking back on the glory days of the past exodus, the Lord wants His people to see Him as their present provider of exodus (cf Jer 23:7–8), their deliverer from Babylon. He demonstrates this by bringing life-giving water to His people living in the wilderness and desert (cf Ps 42:1; 63:1; Jn 4:14; Rv 7:16).

The laments in 40:27 and 49:14 indicate that the Israelites believed Yahweh either couldn’t or wouldn’t act in their favor. Little did they realize that he is willing and able to create a future out of the wreckage of their past. Unlike the Babylonian gods, who are images of nature caught in a recurring system and unable to do anything new, Yahweh is holy (40:25), outside of creation and above it. He is also able to step into history and direct its outcomes. And this he will do! (CC p. 417)

At one point in the first exodus, it appeared as though Yahweh had deserted his people (Ex 14:10-12). Soon after that, though, he delivered on his promises. After God’s apparent absence in

Babylon (Is. 54:7-8), he will again save captive Israel. The experience of abandonment that leads to salvation occurs climatically in the events on Good Friday and Easter. (CC p. 317)

Making a way for his people against huge obstacles is not new for Yahweh. What is new is that he has never specially squared off against Babylon. The use of the participle “doing” indicates that Yahweh is already acting, albeit behind the scenes, to bring about the future rise of Cyrus and his defeat of Babylon, as well as the Servant’s suffering, death and resurrection. The similarity-but-difference becomes a means of articulating the idea that what is new is not really new at all, but was implicit all along, for those who, in the text’s terms, can perceive it. There is, then, both continuity and discontinuity with Yahweh’s new event. The new, always under suspicion in the ancient Near East, is validated by the old. Israel cannot afford entirely to disregard the old. But the nation cannot stay there either. Yahweh’s day of salvation is now (49:8). To oppose his new thing is to stand with apostate Israel or the idolatrous nations (cf. Mt. 9:17; Lk 22:20; Rom 7:6; 1 Cor. 5:7). (CC p. 318)

Once it was through the waters; now it is a way through seemingly impassable dry, desert land. Then he removed the water; now he will furnish it. (Leupold p. 89)

The deliverance from Babylon becomes greater because it is a key event in God’s plan of salvation. More than the deliverance from Egypt, the release from Babylon paves the way for the fulfilling of all God’s promises of a spiritual deliverance. (PBC pp. 86-87)

When delivering Israel from Egypt he had made a path through the water. Now in delivering them from Babylon he set up a straight road through what seemed like an impassible desert. This deliverance was greater because it was leading to the fulfilling of God’s promises yet to come which would provide spiritual deliverance to Israel and the whole world.

The things described as “new” are not totally new but are magnifications of typological precursors. The three major typological images interrelate to the exodus, the wilderness wanderings, and the restoration of creation. – The “new thing” that is to be eagerly anticipated is the impending exodus from Babylon. Indications of it coming must already have been discernible.

way in the wilderness. In the first exodus, Yahweh created dry land in the midst of water (e.g., Ex 14:22-29). In this new exodus, he will create water in the midst of dry land, because now Israel needs to cross a desert rather than a body of water. This motif of Yahweh’s care in the desert is taken up again in 48:20-21. The desert/wilderness in Isaiah 40-55 is without water (41:19-20; 48:21), barren (41:19; 51:13), and trackless (43:19). So Yahweh will make a way and build a highway in it (cf. 40:3) (CC p. 318)

rivers in the desert. As God described this new thing, it might have reminded God’s OT people of the journey through the wilderness under Moses. Then God fed His people in the wilderness; He provided water for them, sometimes miraculously. The same things are mentioned here. (PBC)

43:20 jackals and the ostriches – Even the wild beasts have an interest and a share in what happens to God’s people. It will make them glad to behold what God does for them, so glad that they, in their own way “will honor” him, even “jackals” creatures notoriously shy and unfriendly.

Yahweh’s renewed exodus is not just confined to Israel, but it also has cosmic dimensions. Both the arid landscapes and their animals will be transformed by Yahweh’s salvific power. This

recalls promises were creation itself is restored (e.g., 35:5-7; 41:17-20), even as it anticipates the renewal of the entire universe (65:17-25). (CC p. 318)

jackals ... owls. Creatures of the desert (see 13:21–22; 34:13–15; 35:7). (CSB)

Even the wild beasts have an interest and a share in what happens to God’s people. It will make them glad to behold what God does for them, so glad that they, in their own way “will honor” him, even “jackals” creatures notoriously shy and unfriendly. (Leupold p. 89)

In the first exodus, animals suffered (e.g., Ex. 8:13; 9:6; 15:1). In this new exodus, the animals are pictured as praising Yahweh. In 34:13 “jackals” and “ostriches” live in once-inhabited deserted places and therefore symbolize destruction. Now these creatures of chaos are restored to their rightful place, and with the rest of creation, they are praising Yahweh. These texts harmonize with the reference to the Noahic covenant in 55:4:9, which includes Yahweh’s concern for “every living thing” (Gen 9:12). The eschatological objective is for everything that has breath to praise Yahweh (cf. Ps. 150:6) (CC p. 318)

rivers – Streams may never, in the course of this exodus have sprung up miraculously; but Israel never lacked for what was necessary for their subsistence during the return from Exile.

The threatening waters and rivers (Is. 43:2) will also be transformed. The same movement appears in Exodus 14-17. Initially the Red Sea was an insurmountable obstacle. Yet, after the exodus through them, the waters transitioned into signs of Yahweh’ providential care (Ex 15:22-27; 17:1-7). Is 43:20-21 continues this theme. Whereas the old exodus conquered the water by making a way through the sea, this new exodus will make a way in the desert by Yahweh’s creative redemption will be marshaled to bring life-giving water to his people who sojourn in the wilderness and desert (cf. Ps 42:2; 63:1; John 4:13-14; Rev. 7:15-16). (CC pp. 318-319)

my chosen – Like v 7, this section (vv 16–21) ends with a reminder of the people’s purpose—to give praise to the Lord and spread His name among the nations (cf Gn 12:1–3). (TLSB)

43:21 *formed...declare my praise* – God had formed and reformed Israel to “proclaim my praise” to the universe. Israel is God’s witness to the world.

In Isaiah 40-55, the creation terms “to create,” and “to form,” are not employed for God creating any other nation other than Israel (43:1, 7, 15, 21; 44:2, 21, 24; 49:9). Israel owes the totality of its existence to Yahweh. Echoing 43:20-21, Peter writes: “But you are chosen race (Is 43:20), a royal priesthood, a holy nation,, a people for his possession (43:21), so that you may proclaim the excellencies (Is 43:21) of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). (CC p. 319)

For this greater deliverance, the people were to proclaim the praise of God. He had formed them for the purpose of praise. God would refresh his people; they would praise him. (PBC p. 87)

Jesus came declaring, “Everyone who commits sins is a slave to sin” (Jn 8:34). Since the fall of Adam and Eve, humanity has been enslaved to sin, held captive by death, and thus barred from the tree of life (Gen 3:24). Yet through the righteous act of one man, Jesus Christ, who is “the way and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6), we are led out of death and sin into justification and live (Rom 5:12-19). Through the Word and the saving Sacrament of Baptism, we are linked to this great exodus by means of Christ’s resurrection (e.g., Acts 2:38-39; Rom 6:1-4; 1 Peter 3:18-22).

On the Last Day, upon our Savior's return, Isaiah's new exodus motif will find its consummation in the new earth (e.g., Rev. 15:1-4; 21:1-22:21). (CC p. 319)

43:22–24 The Israelites may have brought sacrifices (see 1:11–15 and note), but their hearts were not right with God. (CSB)

The people rejected God's invitation to call on Him; they have only burdened Him with their sins without sacrifice or apology. (TLSB)

43:22 *not called ... been weary*. Apparently their prayers were halfhearted (contrast Ps 69:3). (CSB)

call upon Me. Israel failed to cry to God and so needs rescue. (TLSB)

weary of Me. Astonishing that the weak have tired of the One who is strong, but Israel has tired of receiving the Lord's strength. Cf 40:28–31. (TLSB)

It is a repudiation of the type of soulless worship that prevailed in those days. The first count on which Israel is indicted is worthless prayer; for prayer may rightly be regarded as the soul of all true worship. Prayers were no doubt made publicly and privately; but they did not amount to a calling upon the Lord. They must have had something of the spirit of the Pharisee who went up into the temple to pray, according to Luke 18. The performance of the rite of prayer proved a boring thing.

A primitive root; properly to *gasp*; hence to *be exhausted*, to *tire*, to *toil*:— faint, (make to) labor, (be) weary. (QV)

43:23 *not brought me your sheep* – They may have offered sheep, but they did not sincerely bring them to the Lord. The true spirit that should have motivated “burnt offering” was noticeably lacking. What God had appointed, the true worshipper would present, not as a heavy duty but as a meaningful outlet of deep emotion and inner need. So the offering of frankincense could be either a dead chore or a spiritual experience, depending on the attitude of the heart of the worshipper.

Israel's worship became a performance and hypocrisy. God rejected it as an insulting abomination. (TLSB)

not burdened ... or wearied. God did not make excessive demands on his people. (CSB)

43:24 *sweet cane*. Linked with incense (see v. 23) also in SS 4:14; Jer 6:20. (CSB)

“Aromatic cane” or reed used in the preparation of holy anointing oil. (TLSB)

The “sweet cane” referred to was a part of the sacred anointing oil that is described in Ex. 30:23. How it was assigned to some form of use in the cultus otherwise, we do not know. In any case it was a rare article that was used by some cultic practices. It may have constituted a special part of an act of devotion resorted to by some of the Israelites and may have been part of a very special observance. It could be meaningful. Here the prophet rebukes his people for not having ventured to do anything special of this sort for their Lord. (Luther)

money. Lit, “silver.” (TLSB)

fat. Considered a choice part of the sacrificial animal, burned on the altar because it “is the LORD’S” (Lv 3:14–16) (TLSB)

Since the “fat of sacrifices” was regarded as a choice gift specially devoted to the Lord, Israel is here charged with not having ventured to do any such special act in the spirit of deeper devotion.

wearied. See 1:14. (CSB)

What the Lord wanted was not only the sacrifices but a people with whom He could have fellowship, whose character reflected His own. The promises connected to the sacrificial actions were to empower a new heart and life. Because the people failed to offer these appointed sacrifices, their sins were heaped up before the Lord. Jesus echoes this language of being burdened and weary in Mt 11:28–30. (TLSB)

43:25 *I, I am He*. Note two emphatic confessions (cf v 11), which refer to who God is and what God does. The teachings are inseparable, and the Lord elevates their proclamation above everything else. (TLSB)

blots out ... transgressions. In spite of the punishment Israel must suffer (v. 28), God is eager to forgive his people. (CSB)

God forgives sins completely (1:18). (TLSB)

The eternal patience of and love of God always astounds us, even as it comforts us. How glibly we say, “to forgive is divine.” But no human being can forgive the way the Lord forgives. When the Lord forgives, our yesterdays disappear. Before us stretch unlimited tomorrows of blessing. What a way to live?

Will not remember – be mindful, recount, record, remember, make to be remembered, bring (call, come, keep, put) to (in) remembrance, still, think on. (QV)

43:26 *set forth your case – Put Me in remembrance*, that is, “so that I may remember.” It is both rebuttal and provocation. “If I have forgotten anything, let them bring forth something that is better. Remind Me of it, let us enter into judgment.” (Luther)

The Lord calls Israel to focus on what matters most. (TLSB)

case. The Lord takes Israel to court, as he did the nations in 41:21–22.

“You shall have a fair hearing; no evidence shall be suppressed.” In that spirit the words are added, “You declare your case that you may be proved right.” From the sequel it appears that in the face of this challenge Israel never even ventured a word of excuse. Total silence testified to total guiltiness. (Leupold)

43:27 *first father*. † See 51:2. Even Abraham was a sinner (see Ge 12:18; 20:9). The reference could also be to Adam.

Adam was the father of all people; Abraham, of the Israelites (51:2; Jsh 24:3). (TLSB)

Certainly Jacob fits very well because the people are called by his name so frequently. Consider Jacob. He deceived his father in order to gain the birthright, fled in fear from his angry brother, stole away from his uncle Laban with what he had earned while with his uncle, and favored Joseph over his other children. He was not always the model of virtue and faith. Had God given him what he deserved, Jacob would have been cast aside with all the other sinners of the world. Yet God, by grace, chose him. (Leupold)

mediators. Probably the priests and prophets. (CSB)

Those appointed to intercede on behalf of Israel, such as prophets and priests. (TLSB)

Israel often stood in need of mediation. Her “mediators” were almost as fallible as the nation they represented. They almost may be said to have led the way for the nation in disobedience. In the face of such indictments, the people could hardly have an easy conscience about the way they had treated their God. (Leupold)

43:28 *princes of the sanctuary*. Chief priests. (TLSB)

deliver ... to destruction. Any town of Israel that harbored idolatry was to receive this fate (Dt 13:12–15). Jerusalem suffered destruction at the hands of the Babylonians (2Ki 25:8–9) because of idolatry (see Eze 7:15–22). (CSB)

Ch 43 The Lord bears witness in a courtroom setting that He is the only source of salvation. Reject any god, religion, or doctrine that declares that human works or actions contribute in any way to salvation. Instead, give all glory to God alone for the salvation He vows to you through the person and work of Jesus. • O blessed Holy Trinity, one true God, declare me righteous by Your grace alone, and call me by Your name, that I may bear witness to You among the nations. Amen. (TLSB)