

# THE FAILURE OF GOD'S PEOPLE TO LIVE LIKE THE REDEEMED

## ISAIAH 43:22-28

### ***Introduction***

People can be kidnapped to be sold as slaves, for sexual pleasure, for building up a workforce, for revenge or for a host of other reasons. When a ransom is demanded for the release of the kidnapped person, the cost is usually huge.

The enormous price God paid to ransom His people is the subject of the present Scripture. In the previous chapter, Isaiah said that the people of his day were continuing in their sin and refusing to turn back to the LORD. As a result, God's anger burned against them (42:23-25). Now we would expect God's hand of judgment to immediately fall upon the Israelites. We would expect Him to abandon and destroy them. But the very opposite is true. God is longsuffering and not willing that any person should perish and be doomed to eternal separation from Him. With a broken heart over the people's failure, the Lord reached out to ransom them from both their sins and their enemies. Remember that Isaiah had predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jewish people. But he had also predicted that the Persians would miraculously free God's people from their Babylonian captivity (41:1-20). Furthermore, the Lord would set them free from all the enslavements and bondages of this life through the coming of God's very special Servant, the Messiah (42:1-25). Now God declares that His people can be set free through the wonderful redemption provided by the Lord. This is, *Set Free Through the Redeemer; the Lord Your God: A Study of Redemption*, 43:1-28.

- I. The source of redemption: the LORD (v. 1).
- II. The promises of the Redeemer (vv. 2-21).
- III. The failure of God's people to live like the redeemed (vv. 22-28).

### ***Isaiah 43:22-28 The Failure of God's People to Live like the Redeemed***

The failure of God's people to live like *the redeemed* is now discussed. Although God promises to save His people, they in no way deserve to be saved. God's salvation will be totally by His grace. He will rescue His people from Babylonian captivity because He loves them.

Isaiah levels a very serious charge against God's people: they are offering up empty prayer and worship. Apparently many of the Jews were praying and worshipping, but they were not approaching God as He had prescribed (vv. 22-24). They were not seeking Him with pure, righteous hearts. When they prayed and worshipped, they approached God with the stain of sin upon their lives, and they did not seek to be cleansed by the blood of the sacrifice.

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They did not even offer the occasional special offerings such as fragrant cane or incense or the fat from sacrifices to the LORD (v. 24). Approaching God for the forgiveness of sins was the furthest thing from their minds. They were not obeying God's commandments but, rather, living immoral and unrighteous lives. They were focused upon the world, and their hearts were full of covetousness and the selfish pursuit of pleasure. As Isaiah charged earlier, they were worshipping the LORD hypocritically (1:11-12). Obviously, the people had no *sense* of sin, no awareness of having committed wickedness. Their hearts and consciences were hardened against God. Note the strong charge God levels against them: they are burdening Him with their sins and wearying Him with their iniquities. They are breaking His holy commandments (v. 24).

As a result of Israel's terrible offenses against the LORD, we would expect the hand of God's judgment to fall upon the people. But instead, His heart reaches out in an appeal to them. He longs to blot out their transgressions and remember their sins no more. Clearly, this is a call for them to repent and seek His forgiveness.

There is no forgiveness apart from repentance. To stress the utter necessity for seeking His forgiveness, the LORD again summons the people to appear at a legal trial (vv. 26-28). He calls upon them to review what they have done and to state the case for their innocence. But before they can speak, the LORD charges them with being just like their father who sinned. This is a reference either to Adam, the father of the human race, or to Abraham, the father of the Jews. Both Adam and Abraham rebelled against the LORD (see notes, Gen. 3:1-13; 12:17-20; 20:8-10).

Due to their continued sin, God's hand of judgment was certain to fall upon the Jews. Because of their false worship and hypocrisy, their religious leaders would be disgraced, the people shamed and their nation destroyed. Keep in mind that God's Word was fulfilled when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, including the temple, and scattered the survivors throughout the Babylonian Empire.

***Thought 1.*** Prayer and worship are synonymous, the very same act. When people pray to the LORD, they are worshipping Him; and when people worship, they are praying through their praise, thanksgiving and requests. Their prayers are also a proclamation of the gospel, of God's working in the hearts of believers. Through prayer, every act of worship is being performed, and through worship, every act of prayer is being demonstrated. Moreover, worship and prayer are both communication and fellowship with God. When people pray or worship, they commune with the LORD through the various acts of praise, thanksgiving and presenting their requests.

But the Israelites were not sincere in their approach to the LORD, neither in their prayers nor in their worship. Like most people, the majority of the Jews were not praying or seeking the LORD. And those who were worshipping were uttering empty prayers. Prayerlessness and empty worship were two of the major characteristics of their lives.

1) Listen to what God's Holy Word says about prayerlessness.

**James 4:1-4** *What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*

**Heb 10:25** *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

**Psa 53:4** *Do all these evildoers know nothing? They devour my people as though eating bread; they never call on God.*

**Isa 64:7** *No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins.*

**Jer 10:21** *The shepherds are senseless and do not inquire of the LORD; so they do not prosper and all their flock is scattered.*

**Dan 9:13** *Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come on us, yet we have not sought the favour of the LORD our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth.*

**Hos 7:7** *All of them are hot as an oven; they devoured their rulers. All their kings fall, and none of them call to me.*

**Zep 1:4-6** *“I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will destroy every remnant of Baal worship in this place, the very names of the idolatrous priests – those who bow down on the roofs to worship the starry host, those who bow down and swear by the LORD, and who also swear by Molek, those who turn back from following the Lord; and neither seek the LORD, nor inquire of him.” (esp. v. 6).*

2) Listen to what God's Holy Word says about empty, formal worship.

**Mat 23:23** *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”*

**Gal 4:10-11** *You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.*

**2 Tim 3:5** *Having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.*

**Rev. 14:17** *And another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle.*

**1 Sam 15:22** *But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams."*

**Psa 51:16-17** *You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

**Eccl 5:1** *Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.*

**Isa 1:13** *Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations — I cannot bear your worthless assemblies.*

**Isa 29:13-15** *The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men."*

**Hosea 6:6** *For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings. ■*

# GOD'S PEOPLE ARE SET FREE BY HIS PROMISE: HE WILL HELP ISRAEL (REDEEMED BELIEVERS)

ISAIAH 44:01–08

## *Introduction*

Freedom is one of the most prized possessions of the human race. People who live in a free nation are usually able to move around without restraints, exercise their initiatives, pursue their ambitions, choose their work, marry the person of their choice, and worship freely. But people who are not free are severely restricted, sometimes even persecuted or enslaved. In a restrictive, oppressive society, people often have to deal with prejudice, discrimination, and favouritism. They are seldom allowed to travel freely, worship, or choose the work they want to do. Personal ambition, goals, and initiative are usually repressed, and people have to work at jobs determined by government officials, which includes forced labour.

Freedom is the subject of the present Scripture. The LORD clearly shows that He has a vital interest in people being set free from the bondages and enslavements of this life. Remember that Isaiah is predicting the Babylonian captivity of the Jews. But he also predicts that God will use human events in order to set His people free from their captivity. By His own power God will liberate and restore His people to the promised land. But more important, true liberty — an inner peace and freedom — can come only through the LORD, the only living and true God. He and He alone has the power to set people free from the enslavements of this life, including the terrifying bondages of sin and death. This is the subject of the present Scripture: *Set Free by the LORD, the Only Living and True God*, 44:1-28.

- I. God's people are set free by His promise: He will *help* Israel (redeemed believers) (vv. 1-8).
- II. God's people are set free by knowing the folly of idolatry (vv. 9-20).
- III. God's people are set free by returning to the LORD and by renewing their great hope in the promised land (vv. 21-28).

## ***Isaiah 44:01–08 God's People are Set Free by His Promise: He will Help Israel (Redeemed Believers)***

God's people are set free by His wonderful promise to *help* them as they walk through life. Note verse 2, where the Lord claims to be the only true God. the only One who can truly help people and deliver them from fear (v. 2; also see v. 8). The striking opening words, "now hear" (or "now listen"), set this Scripture off sharply from what has just been said. At the close of chapter 43. the Lord pronounced judgment upon the Israelites (vv. 26-28). But now the Lord gives an astounding promise: the destruction and shame of

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His people will not be total. He will not allow them to be completely destroyed, for they are His *servant*, whom He has chosen to be His righteous people. They are His witnesses to unbelievers who rebel against Him.

Note in God's address to the people that the names "Jacob" and "Israel" are both used to refer to the entire nation. In God's mind, there is no Northern or Southern Kingdom. His people are one nation, one people before Him. Hereafter, the division of the nation will be a thing of the past. His people are not to be divided but rather united in serving Him.

But as seen in the previous chapter, as well as throughout the book of Isaiah, the vast majority of the Israelites failed to serve God. Consequently, the hand of God's judgment fell upon them. Even in the present Scripture, Isaiah predicts the future destruction of the nation and the exile of the survivors, as well as their return from captivity (vv. 8, 24-28). And yet again God makes a remarkable the most wonderful promise: in the midst of this terrifying trial, He will *assist* His people by helping them in six specific ways:

1. God will help His people by assuring them that they belong to Him (v. 2). They are His people, His possession. This is a wonderful truth that should give every believer great reassurance. When believers know that they belong to God, they know that the Lord loves and cares for them and will provide whatever security, protection, and provision they need. Note that God gives believers three assurances to prove that they belong to Him:
  - => God created them, formed them from the womb. This has a twofold application with Israel. Not only was each Israelite created by God, but also the nation as a whole. As a nation Israel was created when God delivered the people from Egyptian bondage and based their society upon His laws at Mount Sinai. As individuals and as a nation, they were the Lord's, and they belonged to Him because He was their Creator.
  - => God chose the Israelites to be His servants, His very special witnesses to the world. Therefore, they could expect to have a very distinctive relationship with the Lord, a relationship that assured them of His presence and care.
  - => God helps His people as they walk through life day by day. Hence, they need not fear when they face enemies and the hardships of life (vv. 2, 8).

***Eph 1:3-5** Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.*

***1 Pet 2:9-10** But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

**Deu 7:6** *For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.*

**Psa 4:3** *Know that the LORD has set apart his faithful servant for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.*

- b. God will help His people by blessing them both physically and spiritually (vv. 3-5). Physically they will prosper because the LORD will send rain to water their fields and produce rich crops. Spiritually they will prosper because the LORD will pour out His Spirit on believers and their descendants. The same power that created physical life will create spiritual life. And by the power of God's Spirit, the believer becomes a *new creation*, a *new person* (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:15; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:10). Centuries earlier, the Lord had predicted the coming of His Spirit through Moses and the prophets (Num. 11:29; Isa. 32:15; 59:21; Eze. 36:24-28; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:25-29; Zec. 12:10). This prophecy was fulfilled by the coming of Christ to save and empower His people (Acts 1:1-8; 2:1-4, 14-36). He empowers them through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is God's Spirit that causes believers to spring up and multiply in number as rapidly as grass and trees near streams of water (v. 4). Through the power of God's Spirit, unbelievers will turn to the LORD and unashamedly identify with Him and His people (v. 5). True believers will profess that they belong to the Lord, and they will call themselves true Israelites (true Christians). With boldness they will honour the LORD by confessing His Name.

**Thought 1.** The work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers cannot be overemphasized. His work is stressed time and again throughout Scripture. Here are several of the Spirit's major functions:

- 1) The Holy Spirit comforts believers, just as Christ comforted His followers when He was on earth.

**John 14:16** *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.*

**Rom 8:16-17** *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit, that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

**Gal 4:6** *Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."*

**1 John 4:13** *We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.*

- 2) The Holy Spirit teaches believers.

**John 14:26** *“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*

**John 16:13** *“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”*

**1 Cor 2:13** *This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.*

**1 John 2:27** *As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit just as it has taught you, remain in him.*

3) The Holy Spirit bears strong witness to the work of Christ and salvation.

**Jn. 15:26** *“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father — the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father — he will testify about me.”*

**John 16:14-15** *“He [the Holy Spirit] will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.”*

**1 John 5:6** *This is the one who came by water and blood — Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.*

4) The Holy Spirit convicts believers of their sin, their lack of righteousness, and the coming judgment.

**John 16:7-11** *“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: In regard to sin because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”*

5) The Holy Spirit leads and guides believers.

**John 16:13** *“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”*

**Rom 8:14** *Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

6) The Holy Spirit quickens, or gives life to, believers.

**John 6:63** *The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.*



**Rom 8:11** *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.*

**1 Pet 3:18-20** *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.*

7) The Holy Spirit dwells within believers, making them the very temples of God Himself.

**John 14:17** *“The Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”*

**Rom 8:9** *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

**1 Cor 3:16** *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?*

**1 Cor 6:19-20** *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.*

**2 Tim 1:14** *Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you — guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.*

**1 John 2:27** *As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit just as it has taught you, remain in him.*

**1 John 3:24** *Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.*

c. God will help His people by declaring who He is, the majestic nature of his being (v. 6). The four titles claimed by God should give great assurance to believers.

- 1) The LORD is the *King* and *Redeemer* of His people. As their King, He rules over them, governing and taking care of them, making sure their most basic needs are met. As Redeemer, He saves His people from all the bondages and enslavements of this life.
- 2) The LORD is *the LORD of hosts*, or *the LORD Almighty*. The LORD possesses supreme power in the universe and controls all the hosts of beings, both in heaven and on earth. Thus the believer can rest assured of God's help when needs arise. No matter the severity of hardship or trial, the LORD Almighty will help His people. He is able to help them because He has the power to control all the beings in the universe.

- 3) The LORD is the *First* and *Last*, the *Eternal Being*, who exists above the universe and oversees its entire operation. He was first, existing before the universe was created; and He will be last, existing when the history of the present universe ends. The LORD has always been on the scene, and He will be on the scene when it disappears in flames with a loud roar (2 Pet. 3:10-13). The Lord is the *First* and *Last*, the *Beginning* and *Ending*.
- 4) The LORD alone is God. Apart from Him, there is no *God*. All other gods claimed by people are false. Therefore, believers who truly follow the LORD can rest assured that they have the LORD's help. As the only living and true God, the LORD obviously loves His creation and possesses the power to help all who truly believe and follow Him.
- d. God will help His people by proving that no one — no person and no so-called god — is like Him (v. 7). If any people think that they or their gods are equal to the LORD, let them stand up and defend their claim. Here, Isaiah is painting a picture of a legal trial. God puts these people and their gods on *trial*. They must appear before God and show that the prophecies they have proclaimed have actually come true. As far as the LORD is concerned, He can prove His case. By calling Abraham. He chose and established Israel to be His people (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-21). Then He not only foretold the building of a nation from this one man, but He also predicted event after event throughout the nation's history. And now He is predicting their future captivity by Babylon and their release by the Persians (vv. 8, 21-28). No one is like the LORD, for He alone is omniscient. He alone knows all things and as such He alone is able to foretell the future. Believers can be assured of God's help and care in the future, for *nothing takes Him by surprise*.

**Mark 12:32** "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him."

**Exo 15:11** "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you - majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?"

**2 Sam 7:22** "How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears."

**1 Kng 8:23** And said, "LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below — you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way."

**Psa 89:6** For who in the skies above can compare with the LORD? Who is like the LORD among the heavenly beings?

**Isa 40:18** With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken him?

- e. God will help His people by delivering them — the redeemed — from fear and captivity (v. 8). This promise of help will be a great encouragement to God's people, especially to those who will be taken captive by Babylon. Note that Isaiah is foretelling the

Babylonian captivity years before it will take place. If God foresees the captivity and it actually takes place, the people can rest in His promise of their release and return to the promised land. Restoration is a certainty. Note why: because they are God's witnesses, a people very special to Him. They are His people, His servants. There is no chance He will forget His people or forsake His servants.

**Mat 10:30-31** *And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*

**Heb 2:14-15** *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

**Isa 41:10** *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

**Isa 43:1-2** *But now, this is what the LORD says he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.*

- f. God will help His people by assuring them that He is the Rock, the very foundation of life. No other person or so-called god can claim to be the Rock of life. No one can build a foundation solid enough for people to build their lives and faith upon, not eternally. Only the Lord is the Rock, the foundation that can provide eternal stability and security for people. As the Rock, the Lord is the believer's foundation, strength, refuge, and security, both in this life and the next.

**Mat 7:24-27** *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."*

**1 Pet 2:6** *For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."*

**Deu 32:4** *He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.*

**Deu 32:31** *For their rock is not like our Rock, even our enemies concede.*

**1 Sam 2:2** *"There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God."*

***Psa 18:2** The LORD is my rock, and my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, and my stronghold.*

***Psa. 18:31** For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God? It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure.*

***Psa. 28:1** To you, LORD, I call; you are my Rock, do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who go down to the pit.*

***Psa 62:1-2** Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.*

***Psa 94:22** But the LORD has become my fortress, and my God the rock in whom I take refuge. ■*