

### Denouncing Idolatry and a Promise of Israel's Deliverance

#### Isaiah 44

Isaiah 44:1-8 - *"Yet hear now, O Jacob My servant, and Israel whom I have chosen.*

*<sup>2</sup> Thus says the Lord who made you and formed you from the womb, who will help you: 'Fear not, O Jacob My servant; and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. <sup>3</sup> For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring. <sup>4</sup> They will spring up among the grass like willows by the watercourses.' <sup>5</sup> One will say, 'I am the Lord's'; another will call himself by the name of Jacob; another will write with his hand, 'The Lord's,' and name himself by the name of Israel.*

*<sup>6</sup> "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God. <sup>7</sup> And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, let them show these to them.*

*<sup>8</sup> Do not fear, nor be afraid. Have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one."*

#### Background Notes

In Isaiah 43 God used the preservation of the nation of Israel as evidence in His cosmic "courtroom" to prove that He was supreme over all the foreign gods. The fact that Israel was redeemed out of Egypt and forged into a powerful nation, apart from any worship of strange gods, proved that God alone controlled all events - past, present, and future.

In Isaiah 44, the Lord showed the futility and stupidity of trusting in idols made by human hands. But in spite of the fact that the nation of Israel continued to worship foreign gods, God in His grace once again promised them both physical and spiritual deliverance. That deliverance would come in both the near future and the far future - even though the nation would have to undergo the discipline of captivity in Babylon for her sins of idolatry and disobedience.

Notice the endearing terminology that the Lord used for His people: *"O Jacob My servant,"* and *"Israel whom I have chosen,"* (v1). I *"formed you and... will help you"* and *"Fear not, O Jacob My servant,"* and *"And you, Jeshurun"* (v2). Jeshurun means "upright one." Israel was not upright in Isaiah's day - but they will be in the future when the Lord will pour out His Spirit on Jacob's descendants, the Jewish people: *"I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring"* (v3).

At that time, when Israel will turn back to the Lord even the Land will be blessed. They will be blessed in numbers. They will call themselves descendants of Jacob, or Jewish, and they will not be ashamed to openly identify that they belong to the Lord (v4-5).

In verses 6-8 the Lord reassured His people that they did not have to fear. The Lord will bless them in the future, based on three things:

- a. - Who He is – the First and the Last, the supreme and sovereign God (v6)
- b. - His creation of Israel in the past (v7)
- c. - His sovereign promises concerning Israel's future (v8)

The big question is: Have all these promises and prophecies made to Israel been fulfilled yet? The answer is yes - but only *partially* fulfilled, when the Lord brought the Jewish people back home from their captivity in Babylon under the edict of Cyrus (as we'll see at the end of the chapter). There was a measure of blessing on the nation then, with the rebuilt Temple and the revival under Ezra. And there was a partial fulfillment of these prophecies at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon Jewish believers.

But these prophecies of blessing on the Jewish people await *complete* fulfillment in the future, when the Lord returns. Then a spiritual restoration of the secular state of Israel will take place. We don't believe that these promised blessings on the descendants of Jacob should be spiritualized away from Israel to the Church, and claimed as "spiritual blessings of Christians in the Church" today. No! It's clear that these promises of blessing were made to the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – and that's **the Jewish people**. These promises await their complete fulfillment in the future.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Those who design idols are stupid.

People who design idols are stupid. They are fools for thinking that these man-made images can somehow bring them peace and prosperity! Verses 9-20 are a scathing denunciation of idolatry, showing its futility and stupidity.

Isaiah 44:9-20 - *"Those who make an image, all of them are useless, and their precious things shall not profit; they are their own witnesses; they neither see nor know, that they may be ashamed. <sup>10</sup> Who would form a god or mold an image that profits him nothing?*

*<sup>11</sup> Surely all his companions would be ashamed; and the workmen, they are mere men. Let them all be gathered together; let them stand up. Yet they shall fear. They shall be ashamed together.*

*<sup>12</sup> The blacksmith with the tongs works one in the coals, fashions it with hammers, and works it with the strength of his arms. Even so, he is hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. <sup>13</sup> The craftsman stretches out his rule. He marks one out with chalk; he fashions it with a plane, he marks it out with the compass, and makes it like the figure of a man according to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house.*

*14 He cuts down cedars for himself, and takes the cypress and the oak. He secures it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes it. 15 Then it shall be for a man to burn, for he will take some of it and warm himself; yes, he kindles it and bakes bread. And indeed he makes a god and worships it. He makes it a carved image, and falls down to it. 16 He burns half of it in the fire; with this half he eats meat. He roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He even warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire." 17 And the rest of it he makes into a god, his carved image. He falls down before it and worships it, prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!" 18 They do not know nor understand; for He has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand.*

*19 And no one considers in his heart, nor is there knowledge nor understanding to say, "I have burned half of it in the fire. Yes, I have also baked bread on its coals; I have roasted meat and eaten it. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?"*

*20 He feeds on ashes. A deceived heart has turned him aside, and he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"*

An appropriate comment after reading these verses would be: "How stupid can you be?" That's exactly what the Lord wanted the people of Israel to realize –that this message from Isaiah applied to **them!** God asked them to think: What could be more foolish than to cut down a tree, and with half of the wood you build a fire and cook food - and with the other half you carve a wooden image?! And then you actually bow down to the image and say, "Deliver me, for you are my God!" How could they be so foolish? This is not only futile - it's stupid!

Is it possible that some of God's people today are just as stupid? What about Christians who take what God has given them, and with half of it they meet their needs (as God intended), but with the other half they design and build and buy idols for themselves – bigger bank accounts, bigger boats, bigger vacation homes - in the very words of our Lord about the fool in Luke 12 - "**bigger barns**"! Let's hear the word of the Lord in Isaiah 44. Those who design idols are foolish. They're stupid.

## **2. Those who dismiss Israel are short-sighted.**

Isaiah 44:21-28 - *"Remember these, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are My servant; I have formed you, you are My servant. O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me!*

*22 I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you."*

*23 Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it! Shout, you lower parts of the earth! Break forth into singing, you mountains; O forest, and every tree in it, for the Lord has redeemed Jacob and glorified Himself in Israel. 24 Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, and He who formed you from the womb. "I am the Lord, who makes all things: who stretches out the heavens all alone, who spreads abroad the earth by Myself; 25 who frustrates the signs of the babblers, and drives diviners mad; who turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolishness; 26 who confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers; who says to Jerusalem, 'You shall be inhabited,' to the cities of Judah, 'You*

*shall be built,' and I will raise up her waste places; <sup>27</sup> who says to the deep, 'Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers' <sup>28</sup> who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."*

In verse 28 Isaiah made a remarkable prediction about Cyrus - even giving his name - more than 150 years before this Persian emperor arrived on the scene. The prophecy was about Cyrus, the Persian king, who issued the decree in 539 BC that permitted the Jewish people to return to their homeland and rebuild the second Temple. At that time Jerusalem and the ruined cities of Judah were built again (v26).

Here again we believe that the promises made to Israel in these verses have not yet been completely fulfilled. The Lord promised Israel that He will not forget them, and that He will take away their sin when they return to Him (v21-22). Verse 23 promised that there will be universal joy because of this spiritual restoration of Israel, to the glory of God! These promises have not been fulfilled yet - but they will be!

Again, notice that these promises were made to the descendants of Jacob - to **the Jewish people**. Christians are **not** descendants of Jacob, and the Church is **not** the new Israel! So we believe the complete fulfillment of these prophecies is yet in the future, when the Jewish people return to the Lord and they recognize the Lord Jesus as their Messiah.

In case anyone doubted that God can perform the miracle of restoring Israel to the Lord and to the Land, verses 24-27 emphasized the sovereignty of God. After all, He created the heavens and the earth (v24). He makes fools out of the false prophets (v25). He confirms the word of His true prophets (v26). To accomplish His promises, He can dry up seas and rivers if need be (v27) - as He did in the past at the Exodus and the Conquest. The miracle of Israel continues to this day, and it will continue as a godly remnant is redeemed out of the future Tribulation period. Those who dismiss Israel are short-sighted!

## Practical Application

### Listen to the Rock!

What do we mean by that? Rocks don't talk, do they?

Well, the Rock of Israel spoke in verse 8: *"You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one."*

The Lord was speaking here. **He is the Rock!** In fact, He says He is **the only Rock**. He is the only eternal and secure Foundation. Are you searching for a solid and secure Foundation for life - and forever?

Listen to the Rock!