

Isaiah 44:1-5; 21-28 – Who holds the Future

Translation and Sermon by Nate Wilson for Christ the Redeemer Church, Manhattan, KS, 09 Sept. 2007

Translation

1. But now hear,
 Jacob my servant and Israel whom I chose.
2. **Thus says Jehovah,**
 your Maker
 and your Shaper from the womb
 who will help you:
 “Do not fear,
 my servant Jacob, and Jeshurun whom I have chosen,
3. for I will pour water on the thirsty and cataracts upon the dry ground.
I will pour my Spirit upon your seed, and my blessing upon your offspring.
 4. They will spring up in-between grass like the willows along the flowing waters.
 5. This one will say, ‘I belong to Jehovah,’
 and this one will call in the name of Jacob,
 and this one will write with his hand, ‘Belonging to Jehovah,’
 and will name himself by the name ‘Israel.’”
6. **Thus says Jehovah,**
 King of Israel
 and its Redeemer,
 Jehovah of Hosts,
 “I am first and I am after;
 besides me there are no gods.
7. Who will call like me,
 and tell it and organize it for me, from my setting up of a people forever?
 Tell what will happen and what will come to it!
8. Don’t tremble and don’t fear.
Have I not caused you to hear from of old and told?
 And y’all are my witnesses.
Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock either – definitely not; I know.
...
 21. Remember these, Jacob and Israel, for my servant is you:
 I formed you; you are a servant who belongs to me.
 You will not be forgotten of me, Israel.
 22. I have obliterated like the fog your transgressions, and like a cloud your sins.
- Turn to me for I have redeemed you.
 23. Sing out, heavens, for Jehovah has done it.
 Shout, depths of the earth; burst into song, mountains, forest, and every tree in it,
 for Jehovah has redeemed Jacob, and in Israel He will glorify Himself!
24. **Thus says Jehovah** your Redeemer and One who forms you from the womb,
 “I am Jehovah who does [it] all, who stretches out the heavens by myself,
 who spreads out the earth - who was with me?
 25. and He will make fools of diviners, breaking the signs of soothsayers,
 and He will befuddle their knowledge, turning wise men back.
 26. and He will complete the counsel of His messengers, confirming the word of His servant,
 saying to Jerusalem, “She will be inhabited,” and to cities of Judah, “They will be built,”
 and her dry places, I will cause them to stand firm.
 27. The One who says to the deep, “Be dry,” and I will dry up your rivers.
 28. The one who says to Cyrus, “My shepherd!” and he shall complete all my purpose,
 and say to Jerusalem, “She shall be built, and a temple will be founded.”

Opening Illustration: We Can't Predict the Future Very Well

- 1861 - Joseph Ives, Corps of Topographical Engineers, on the Grand Canyon: “[It] is, of course, altogether valueless... Ours has been the first, and will doubtless be the last, party of whites to visit this profitless locality.”
- 1876 - Western Union internal memo: “The telephone... is inherently of no value to us.”
- 1962 - Decca Recording Co. regarding a demo from the Beatles: “We don’t like the sound, and guitar music is on the way out.”
- 1981 - Bill Gates: “640 K ought to be enough for anybody.”

Even experts are badly off in their predictions, but God is never off with His prophecy. He controls the future!

I. God is in control of the future

He demonstrates this in Isa 44 in the following ways:

v. 1-2 He chose Jacob/Israel to be His servant and formed him from the womb:

- a. Themes from ch. 43 (formed 43:1 & 7), (chosen servant 43:10), (Jacob and Israel 43:28)
- b. Jeremiah 1:5 *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."*
- c. Romans 9:10-15 *...when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad--in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call-- 12 she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." 14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."*
- d. Jeshurun: probably a term of endearment, only found elsewhere in Deut. 32&33. Calvin translated “Beloved,” may have to do with being righteous.
- e. God took care of this nation before it even was a nation. “[The fact] that he is the Creator is the guarantee that He will preserve his work [into the future.]” – E.J. Young

v. 3-5 He prophecies a time when the descendants of Israel will choose to associate with God and experience the blessings of the Holy Spirit poured out on them.

- a. Psalm 143:6 *I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.*
Figure of speech for spiritual need.
- b. This was promised in v.3 to “seed/offspring/descendants” – a future generation following the Babylonian captivity.
- c. Fulfilled over 700 years later in Acts 2:17-21 *...I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; 18 even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy... 21 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. 22 Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know-- 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men... 32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.*
- c. including Gentiles – the wording in v.5 “*this one and that one and this one*” come from Psalm 87 where it is talking of people from various nations worshipping God.

d. This still happens today when people realize that they are dry and need God's living water. (People wanted the water we handed out for free at Purple Power Play, but were not spiritually thirsty)
But God can bring revival and cause His church to grow at the right time.

v.6-8 This prophecy is substantiated by a reminder of God's control over the future:

- a. Yes, the future looked scary to Isaiah and the Jews of his time, but had not God told them that He would make it all turn out well in the end – that He would re-gather them after they had been exiled?
- b. You don't have to worry if you know how things will turn out.
ILLUSTRATION: When we were watching a movie together as a family last Friday night, my little children got concerned when the main characters got shot at. Would they die? Was this going to be a sad movie? I wasn't anxious at all, because I had read the book, so I knew how everything would turn out.
- c. To the very first man and woman, Adam and Eve, God prophesied the coming of the "seed of the woman" who would crush the serpent's head. God had the ability to make that prophecy come true thousands of years later in Jesus Christ.
- d. God set up Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the beginning of a people called Israel and made promises to them that through them all the families of the earth would be blessed, and God has the ability to control the future so that it comes true.
- e. God sent prophet after prophet – Moses, Eli, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, not to mention all the men who got books named after them in the prophet section of the Bible – to tell the future and God made each prediction come to pass as a testimony of His sovereign control of history.
- f. Nothing else compares. For example:
 1. The country of Babylon where the Jews would go into exile was famous for its astrology and wisdom, but it couldn't hold a candle to God's wisdom and prophecy demonstrated in Babylon through Daniel. Nobody else could interpret the King's dreams!
 2. Charles Russell, founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, predicted that the world would be destroyed in 1914, then when it didn't happen, he changed it to 1915. His successor, Joseph Rutherford took over and changed the date to 1918 and 1920. When those dates came and went, he predicted that the O.T. patriarchs would come back to life in 1925. Needless to say, they didn't. They couldn't predict and ensure the future, but God can relate not only near future events that are about to come, but far future events and the large shape of history!
 3. Nostradamus, although he is credited by certain people to have predicted the future, was certainly not able to lay the future out clearly, like God did in the Bible. Nostradamus' poetry written in the 16th century is fairly unintelligible, and scholars think that if it means anything, it's probably about events that were contemporary to him, but that hasn't stopped 20th Century readers from reinterpreting his poetry and claiming that it predicted the rise of Hitler and the bombing of the New York City Trade Towers, things they never thought of doing before the fact. (<http://skepdic.com/nostrada.html>) By contrast, God enables His people to hear and understand His word as He tells it to us plainly in the Bible
 4. Some people put a lot of stock in Horoscopes, others in fortune cookies, but these things are usually worded so vaguely that just about anything could be a fulfillment of them. "A friend will say something important to you today." Well, we're all likely to talk at some point in the day with a friend, so this isn't a real prophecy. God warned His people to have nothing to do with that kind of sham prophecy:
Deuteronomy 18:10-15 *There shall not be found among you ... anyone who*

practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer ... for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD... You shall be blameless before the LORD your God, 14 for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do this. 15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers--it is to Him you shall listen.” [speaking of Jesus - Acts 3:22]

- g. Don't even look at horoscopes; we don't have to look any further than our Bible. In His word, God has laid out His plan for world history, and if we have any concerns for the future, listen to these words of encouragement from John Calvin: “After having experienced the kindness of God [in the past], we should likewise expect it in the future.”

v.9-20 Describe the worthlessness of idols – we covered this last Sunday

vs. 21-the end of the chapter are a repeat of the content of vs. 1-7. About a dozen participles starting in v.24 describe God's control of history:

1. Redeeming
 - a. This word is first used in Gen. 48 to describe the deliverance Jacob experienced from his jealous relatives Esau & Laban.
 - b. It is used throughout the Bible to refer to the Exodus where the children of Israel escaped from Egypt at the cost of the firstborn sons of the Egyptians
 - c. It is also used to describe redemption from slavery in Leviticus
 - d. David used the term to describe salvation from death by his enemies
 - e. The prophets referred to the return from Babylonian exile as a redemption.
 - f. All of these redemptions are a picture of the ultimate redemption that God does for us through Jesus in forgiving our sin and glorifying us.
2. Forming you from the womb – God is imminent, active in your everyday life
3. Doing it all – no one but God created the universe, and no one but God saves an individual; He does all the work.
4. Stretching out the heavens by myself
5. Spreading out the earth
6. (v.25) Breaking/frustrating the signs of praters/babblers/liars/witchdoctors
7. Turning wise men back – He will befuddle their knowledge
ILLUSTRATION: LWW – Aslan made a fool of the witch by letting her kill him, when, as the creator, he knew deeper magic than she could have known, that if an innocent party were to die to redeem the witch's claim on Edmond, death would start working backwards and he would come back to life! Aslan made a fool of the white witch because he knew so much more than she.
8. (v.26) Confirming the word of His servant – He will make His prophecies come true. God communicates through His word! He speaks in propositional truth, not just omens like other religions. He speaks to 3 parties:
9. Speaking to Jerusalem – His people – a word of hope “I will raise up her ruins”
10. Speaking to His enemies – symbolized by the word “the deep” - (v.27) promising their overthrow.
11. (v.28) Speaking to Cyrus.
 - a. Remarkable - delivered over 100 years before Cyrus was even born!
 - b. This is not some word reinterpreted as “Cyrus” after the fact. Cyrus' name is inscribed upon his sarcophagus for all to see how it was spelled, and this is really how a Cyrus' name would be spelled using Hebrew letters!
 - c. The decree of building Jerusalem and its temple is very much like the decree of Cyrus recorded in Ezra 1.

- d. The ancient Roman historian Josephus reported that Cyrus was actually influenced by reading this prophecy from Isaiah! Whether or not that was the case,
- e. God lays down this prophecy of the name of Cyrus to clinch the argument that He is in control of history. He even can call the name of the man who will release the Jews from their captivity in Babylon!

II. Our Duty toward a God who is in control of the future – 5 Imperatives

- a. (v.1) LISTEN to what He has to say – that includes reading the Bible.
- b. (v.2) DON'T BE AFRAID of the future
 - 1. How am I going to send my kids through college? How am I going to raise my kids through their teenage years? What if I get cancer and die? What if...?
 - 2. Luke 12:25-32 *And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 26 If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? 27 Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 28 But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! 29 And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. 30 For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. 32 Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*
 - 3. My God is in control of the future. His goodness and mercy have been shown up to this point, so I can say with David, “surely goodness and mercy will continue to follow me all the days of my life!” (Psalm 23)
- c. (v. 21) REMEMBER that:
 - 1. (preceding v.21) Idols are worthless compared to God
 - 2. (3 things after the command too) He formed you to be His servant
 - 3. He blotted out your sins
 - a. The blotting action is like that of a cloud obscuring the view in fog so that the sins can't be seen anymore
 - b. or possibly the blotting out of clouds is the action in view – your sins are wiped away just like the sun rises and evaporates the fog
 - c. When Jesus redeemed the paralytic lowered down to him through the roof, He dealt with the paralytic's sins first, “Your sins are forgiven,” then Jesus brought the physical healing, “Take up your mat and walk.”
 - 4. He redeemed you
- d. (RE)TURN to me
 - 1. Spoken to those who are already God's people.
 - 2. Calvin – “...whenever God deals severely with us, we ought not merely to wish relief from uneasiness and pain, but we ought to begin with pardon, that God may no longer impute sins to us.”
 - 3. Turning to Him is a daily discipline.
 - 4. Have you ever hated something wrong that you did and hoped you'd never do it again, but then you fell into the same pattern of sin and got really frustrated? Have you found God to be forgiving in the past? Then turn to Him again and He will forgive you again and continue to redeem you and shape you even as He has from your mother's womb.
- e. SING (v.23)
 - 1. This is actually directed toward all of creation.

2. Even the ground and the trees are affected by our redemption:
Romans 8:19-24 *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved...*
3. We can sing too, for Isaiah has commanded the people of God to sing in Ch. 12&24
4. Don't sing about your girlfriend or your pickup truck; sing about your Redeemer!
5. Singing may not be your specialty, but look at how the people of God express their adoration of God in v. 5: "*This one will say, 'I belong to Jehovah,' and this one will call in the name of Jacob, and this one will write with his hand, 'Belonging to Jehovah,' and will name himself by the name 'Israel.'*"
 - a. Speech
 - b. Prayer (calling – "Jacob" is ellipsis for the "God of Jacob")
 - c. Writing
 - d. Naming

II. What Happens when we acknowledge God to be in control of the future?

- a. God is glorified!
- b. What's the last phrase? The temple will be founded
The worship of God will be restored; that is God's bottom line!
- c. v.23 also mentions God's bottom line: He will glorify Himself by being a redeemer to Israel.

The following was narrated by an evangelist of Friends Missionary Prayer Band:

Samuel began his work for the day not knowing that God was going to do something beyond the imagination of a common person. He was waiting in the bus stand near his house, but it was a longer wait than usual. His eyes fell on the folks who met regularly in a canteen across the street, the children with their pretty uniforms – the scene that he was very familiar with.

The bus eventually arrived and he along with 5 other passengers boarded the bus. The next stop was at a village called Sunganahalli and two or three people boarded the bus from there. One of those men was a soothsayer by profession. As soon as he got into the bus, he promptly began to predict the future of the passengers sitting in the bus. The passengers too made their way to him wanting to know what was in store for them. Each one gave quite generously to the soothsayer as he unfolded their mysteries.

Samuel was quite uninterested and totally engrossed with his plan for the day. After a few minutes, the soothsayer made his way toward Samuel and told him that he could tell him everything he wanted to know and was questioning why he was not interested to know about it. Samuel turned away without answering the soothsayer. The soothsayer was not willing to leave him alone and began telling Samuel all about his present and future.

The account was true to some extent but was filled with lies for the most part. At this stage, Samuel was only reminded about the slave girl with a spirit of divination who was following Paul and Silas. Samuel, not happy with what the soothsayer was doing to him, prayed in his heart that God would shut the mouth of the soothsayer. Immediately the soothsayer's mouth was shut and though he tried, he could not utter a word. Panic struck the people in the bus as they regarded the soothsayer very highly.

The passengers were blaming Samuel for what had happened and began to form a mob to attack him. There was only one passenger who spoke on behalf of Samuel and he was badly outnumbered in the argument. When things were beginning to go out of control, Samuel intervened and told the mob that he was a follower of Jesus and that if they all would pray to Him, the soothsayer would be delivered.

The passengers willingly accepted and repeated the prayer after Samuel. He also told the soothsayer that only Jesus could heal him and asked him to believe in Him. Samuel requested for some water, prayed over it and gave the same to the soothsayer. He drank it, within a few seconds, to the amazement of the onlookers. God then released the soothsayer's tongue and he became normal.

This opened the door for Samuel to share the gospel with those passengers and the soothsayer. They all listened intently and showed much interest. The soothsayer opened his heart to Christ and vowed to follow Him.

Samuel had no inkling of what God was going to use him in a special way that day. With joy and a deep sense of gratitude to our Lord, Samuel continued his missionary journey.

Source: http://www.sermonillustrator.org/illustrator/sermon4/mouth_of_a_soothsayer_shut_by_go.htm With permission from Job Anbalagan gloryofhiscross@yahoo.co.in

- *Listen to what God has to say and don't be afraid of the future! Remember your salvation, Keep turning to God, and sing/speak/pray/write in such a way that God is glorified!*

APPENDIX: Parallel themes of the beginning and end of Isaiah 44

1. But now hear,
Jacob my servant
and Israel whom I chose.

2. Thus says Jehovah, your Maker
and your Shaper from the womb
who will help you:
“Do not fear, my servant Jacob,
and Jeshurun whom I have chosen,

3. for I will pour water on the thirsty
and cataracts upon the dry ground.
I will pour my Spirit upon your seed,
and my blessing upon your offspring.

4. They will spring up in-between grass like the
willows along the flowing waters.

5. This one will say, I belong to Jehovah,”
and this one will call in the name of Jacob,
and this one will write with his hand,
‘Belonging to Jehovah,’
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6. Thus says Jehovah,
King of Israel and its Redeemer,
Jehovah of Hosts,
“I am first and I am after;

besides me there are no gods.
7. Who will call like me,
and tell it and organize it for me,

from my setting up of a people forever?
Tell what will happen and what will come to it!

21. Remember these,
Jacob and Israel,
for my servant is you:
I formed you;
you are a servant who belongs to me.
You will not be forgotten of me, Israel.

22. I have obliterated like the fog your
transgressions, and like a cloud your sins.

Turn to me for I have redeemed you.

23. Sing out, heavens, for Jehovah has done it.

Shout, depths of the earth; burst into song,
mountains, forest, and every tree in it,
for Jehovah has redeemed Jacob,
and in Israel He will glorify Himself!

24. Thus says Jehovah

your Redeemer

and One who forms you from the womb,

“I am Jehovah who does it all,

who stretches out the heavens by myself,

who spreads out the earth - who else was with me?

25. and He will make fools of diviners,

breaking the signs of soothsayers,

and He will befuddle their knowledge,

turning wise men back.

26. He will complete the counsel of His messengers,

confirming the word of His servant,

saying to Jerusalem, “She will be inhabited,”

and to cities of Judah, “They will be built,”

and her dry places, I will cause to stand.

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and I will dry up your rivers.

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