

# For the Journey

Feb. 12/26 - Rev. Dave Crawford.



*“Thus says the Lord,  
your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:  
For your sake I will send to Babylon  
and break down all the bars,  
and the shouting of the Chaldeans will be turned to lamentation.  
I am the Lord, your Holy One,  
the Creator of Israel, your King.  
Thus says the Lord,  
who makes a way in the sea,  
a path in the mighty waters,  
who brings out chariot and horse,  
army and warrior;  
they lie down; they cannot rise;  
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:  
Do not remember the former things  
or consider the things of old.  
I am about to do 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.  
The wild animals 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,  
the people whom I formed for myself  
so that they might declare my praise.”*

### **- Isaiah 43:14-21**

It is often challenging working out a personal connection to the proclamations of an ancient Jewish prophet. I believe it requires a bit of effort, grasping the original context, reflecting on the text, then discerning how God may be speaking to us through the Word and with the Holy Spirit's guidance in our time.

Let's take a look at Isaiah 43:14-21.

The Jews of antiquity believed the events of history were divinely inspired. Over the lengthy span of years covered in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah: pre-Babylonian exile, exile, post-exile (roughly 597-521 B.C.) there was an enduring perception that the nation's decline, suffering, and restoration were, in part, a manifestation of Yahweh's response to Israel's (and Judah's) breaking of the sacred covenantal bond established centuries prior. Judgement. Repercussions. Restoration. God at work in the world, with a particular orientation toward Israel. Par for the course in the Jewish mindset.

Things are changing, however, political dynamics in the region readjusting when Isaiah 43 is composed. The Jewish nation and temple have laid in ruins for some 40 years, the people dispersed across Babylon (modern-day Iraq). But now the Babylonians are in a period of decline themselves and the Persians rising in power and influence. The year is about 540 B.C. and King Cyrus of Persia is nearing the outskirts of Babylon City itself, with a formidable army in tow. The writing's on the wall for the Babylonians but their misfortune will turn out to be a liberating gift for exiled Jews.

In roughly twenty years a kinder overseer, the Persians, will grant release. All of it, though, including the international workings of regional powers, is directed by the providential hand of Yahweh, for the benefit of Israel, the Jews believe. In order to amplify the divine promise of restoration, the Lord speaks directly through the prophet at the high point of the Psalm, vs. 18/19: *“Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?”* There is hope, even the hope of the kingdom’s rise again. God, often referred to in Old Testament scripture as Emmanuel, is with the people.

There is mention in Isaiah 43 of the “former things”, which could refer to the great Exodus salvation of Moses’ era, and vs. 19b-21 seems to suggest it. Or the phrase might be a reference to events immediately preceding the destruction of Jerusalem and the beginning of the Exile. Whatever the origins, Yahweh is asserting the arrival of a new reality, a new start with God. Exile will come to an end. Revival is just around the corner. A bright future previously unimagined will come to pass.

On its own Isaiah 43 is inspiring, yet we Christians make the leap from Isaiah to our own lives as we remember the Spirit’s promised guidance in our reading of scripture, and as we allow God’s new covenantal relationship with humanity revealed in Jesus Christ to inform our understanding of the prophet’s words.

Among us are those who enjoy nostalgia and those who don’t, for whatever reasons. If we enjoy looking back, the former things could comprise our triumphs and successes, once described in the old Bruce Springsteen song “Glory Days”. In that case God may be stating something to the effect of *“if you thought that was good, then just wait to see what’s coming!”* The opposite may also be true. If looking back to the former things of our lives is the cause of great pain or anguish, God’s promise is that something better lies ahead. And of course both could very well be true, for some of us, for most of us?

Our God is not a God whose best work is behind him, a God now getting a bit over the hill, losing a step or two. God was not more active in ancient times than He/She is today. Life is lived mostly, most healthfully, in the present, and our gracious, loving God revealed in Christ is the Living God of the present.

Whatever may have restrained us in the past, God is about to do a new thing! Whatever glorious triumphs we may have known in our youth, God is about to do a new thing! Whatever twists of fate have confined us, God is about to do a new thing! Whatever hopes and dreams are uppermost in our hearts, God is about to do a new thing!  
Do you not perceive it?

Thanks and praise be to God! Amen.

Rev. Dave