

SESSION 2

ONE GREAT PURPOSE

▶ **The Point**

We were created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

▶ **The Passage**

Isaiah 43:1-7

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

What is the meaning of life? Countless people have discussed that question through the ages. And they've all come up with different answers. Take, for example, the conclusion of one celebrity who endured cancer and 17 months of chemotherapy and radiation. She said: "What I learned is very simple: that your life belongs to you. And it really doesn't matter what you do with it, but it should be what you want to do with it. Not what your mother or father or friends or society want. It should be 'I-directed.' And that's the only purpose for being here."²

Sadly, I also lived for a long time with a worldly misunderstanding of purpose. I was a very selfish person. My life was "I-directed," and I sought fulfillment in materialism, relationships, and money. These resulted in momentary satisfaction, but the emptiness always returned. I was living my life without real purpose. Thankfully, I discovered the purpose of my life—of our lives—in time. That purpose is made clear in the pages of Scripture.

▶ **The Setting**

God inspired the prophet Isaiah to address many situations in Judah, the Southern Kingdom of God's people. Several passages in Isaiah's later chapters deal with the "servant" of the Lord, who is sometimes identified with the nation Israel (see 41:8). Occasionally, however, these texts point ahead to the suffering and death of Jesus (see 52:13–53:12; 1 Pet. 2:21-25). In Isaiah 43, the servant was Israel, who had been disobedient to God (see 42:18-20) and had received God's judgment (see vv. 22-25).

What does the Bible say?

Jacob (v. 1)—Jacob was the twin brother of Esau (see Gen. 25:26). His name was changed to “Israel” by God. Both names also referred symbolically to the Hebrew people.

Isaiah 43:1-7

¹ Now this is what the LORD says—the One who created you, Jacob, and the One who formed you, Israel—

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine.

² I will be with you when you pass through the waters,

and when you pass through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you.

You will not be scorched when you walk through the fire, and the flame will not burn you.

³ For I Yahweh your God, the Holy One of Israel, and your Savior,

give Egypt as a ransom for you, Cush and Seba in your place.

⁴ Because you are precious in My sight and honored, and I love you,

I will give people in exchange for you and nations instead of your life.

⁵ Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west.

⁶ I will say to the north: Give them up!

and to the south: Do not hold them back!

Bring My sons from far away, and My daughters from the ends of the earth—

⁷ everyone called by My name and created for My glory.

I have formed him; indeed, I have made him.”

Isaiah 43:1-2 Commentary

[Verse 1] God reminded His audience who He is. **LORD** refers to God's special covenant name, revealed to Moses at the burning bush (see Ex. 3:15). God identified Himself with many names or nicknames, such as "God Almighty" (Gen. 17:1). But "LORD" reminded His audience of their special covenant relationship with Him. God had called Abraham to be the father of a great nation, the Hebrews, who would eventually bless all nations (see Gen. 12:1-3). **Formed** is the same Hebrew word used in Genesis 2:7 for the creation of Adam. It could also be used for a potter shaping an object out of clay.

God used two names in verse 1 for His people. **Jacob** was one of the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah (see Gen. 25:24-26). Later, after Jacob had spent a night wrestling with God, God gave him the new name, **Israel**, meaning "he struggled with God" (Gen. 32:28). Both these names were used later in the Old Testament to refer to the Hebrew nation. Jacob's twelve sons were the ancestors of the tribes of Israel (see Gen. 35:22b-26).

Having identified Himself as the God of the Israelites, God announced they should **not fear**. God offered two reasons His people should not be overcome with fear. First, He had **redeemed** them. Isaiah frequently mentioned God's role as redeemer (see Isa. 35:10). The basic word picture here is of someone liberated from slavery or rescued from a threatening situation. God was their "Redeemer" (43:14). The notion of redemption has several shades of meaning, including a family member helping another family member (see Ruth 4:1-17). When Job suffered, he expressed a deep desire for the intervention of the living Redeemer (see Job 19:25). Second, God had called His people by their **name**. The Israelites had a special covenant relation with God, and He said **you are Mine**. Being special to God, however, included the fact God held them accountable for their covenant responsibilities. The prophets, including Isaiah, often announced God's judgment on disobedient people.

[Verse 2] God added a third reason His people should not be afraid in the face of danger. God assured them He would **be with you**. God's assurance of His continuing presence through our lives is a regular theme in the Bible (see Ex. 3:12; Josh. 1:9; John 14:18; Matt. 28:20).

God identified two kinds of adversity His people would face: **waters** and **fire**. These two terms can be literal or figurative, depending on one's situation. The Israelites, for instance, had to pass through two bodies of water at key points in their history. In both cases, God miraculously intervened to allow them to pass through the Red Sea and the Jordan River on dry land (see Ex. 14:21-22; Josh. 3:15-17). Daniel's three friends were put into a fiery furnace, but they were not harmed (see Dan. 3:23-28). King David used the imagery of water for a personal crisis (see Ps. 69:1-2).

Isaiah 43:3-4 Commentary

[Verse 3] God continued to reassure His people. He identified Himself in three distinctive ways in this verse. First, He used His covenant name, Yahweh, often translated as LORD. The Israelites lived in a world where most other countries had multiple gods and goddesses. God regularly reminded them that He alone was the true God (see Isa. 44:6). Second, God is **the Holy One of Israel**. This name for God appeared often in Isaiah's messages (see 41:14,16,20). It highlights both God's special relation to Israel and His holiness. Third, God is our **Savior**. David described God as the "God of salvation" (Ps. 68:20) because He delivers us. The apostle Paul noted that Jesus' death for our sins is a demonstration of God's love for us (see Rom. 5:8). Isaiah often used "Savior" as a title for God's relation to His people or noted God's role in salvation (see Isa. 43:11; 45:15,17,20,22; 46:7).

Besides using these distinctive titles or names, God mentioned that He had provided a **ransom**. The word picture of paying a ransom to get someone out of slavery or captivity is a common one in the Bible (see Ex. 21:30; Mark 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:5-6). God assured His people they would be liberated through His ransom for them.

Isaiah's reference to **Egypt ... Cush and Seba** puzzles many readers. We do not know enough about the exact historical context for this text to be sure about how these three countries in Africa were involved. God had liberated the Israelites from Egypt under the leadership of Moses, and Egypt was a military threat against the Israelites later on. The main point is clear, however: God is Savior. He paid the ransom that allowed His people to be free again.

[Verse 4] God continued to highlight aspects of His special relationship with His people. We are **precious** in God's sight. For some readers, the most surprising part of verse 4 may be God's declaration **I love you**. Some Christians have the impression God's love is a New Testament theme only. But the Old Testament acknowledges God loved His people. God did not choose Israel as His covenant partners because they had any inherent merit, but because God loved them (see Deut. 7:6-7). God's choice of His people was an act of sheer grace, not a reward for being the best, brightest, or biggest of the nations of the world. Throughout their history, God loved His people.

God so loved His people that He would give others **in exchange for you**. Again, Bible scholars debate the exact historical context for this exchange. The main point is to demonstrate how far God would go to guarantee His people were delivered from adversity.

Isaiah 43:5-7 Commentary

[Verses 5-6] Again, God reminded His people **Do not fear**. He would be with them in any situation they faced. Bible scholars struggle to identify the precise historical situation for these verses. Some think Isaiah was looking ahead to the end of the Babylonian captivity or exile. God announced He would bring their descendants from all four directions: east, west, north, and south. Babylon was basically east of Judah, but some Israelites might have fled in all these directions. Or, Isaiah might have had a more general dispersion of God's people in mind, not the Babylonian period in particular.

The point is the same either way: no matter where God's people were, He could gather them together.

[Verse 7] God's special relation to His people is again reflected in calling them by His name. They knew Him, and they were **created for [His] glory**. *Glory* usually refers to a visible manifestation or expression of God, such as a bright light or radiance. To glorify God means to acknowledge His status as our Lord and God. Public worship is a time when we honor God, acknowledging His worth, holiness, and love for us. Our praise of God in our worship is an appropriate response to God's greatness and goodness.

A famous theological statement from centuries ago, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, declares that "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." This is a good summary of verse 7. God created and formed humans to have a vital, personal relationship with Him. God sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross in order to save us from our sins. Our primary purpose is to glorify God. Besides public worship, we can bring glory to God in other ways. We can honor God by obeying His instructions for our daily living. Jesus summarized the great commandment as loving God with our total beings and loving our neighbors (see Matt. 22:34-40). The Bible includes many ethical instructions about everyday activities. When we obey God's instructions, we show our honor for Him. Sometimes God calls us to specific tasks or assignments. For example, Isaiah gladly accepted God's call to serve Him as a prophet (see Isa. 6:1-8). Other biblical characters, such as Jeremiah, Moses, and Jonah, were at first more reluctant to obey God's call.

When we accept God's offer of salvation and commit our lives to bringing glory to God, we don't need to fear the challenges of life (see 43:1,5). We can know that God is always with us, and that He is both encouraging and empowering us. Without the salvation available through Jesus, however, we would have something to fear. Isaiah's primary emphasis was that we are created to glorify God. If we are already part of God's people, we can boldly share the good news about your Savior with others who need that same salvation.

