

N U R T U R E
F A I T H
with
Dr. W. Douglas Hood, Jr.

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In the Crater of Calamity

**The following is a Meditation written by Doug Hood's son,
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READ: Isaiah 43:1-7 (Common English Bible)

“But now, says the LORD — the one who created you, Jacob, the one who formed you, Israel: Don't fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; when through the rivers, they won't sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you won't be scorched and flame won't burn you. I am the Lord your God, the holy one of Israel, your savior. I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place. Because you are precious in my eyes, you are honored, and I love you. I give people in your place, and nations in exchange for your life. Don't fear, I am with you. From the east I'll bring your children; from the west I'll gather you. I'll say to the north, ‘Give them back!’ and to the south, ‘Don't detain them.’ Bring my sons from far away, and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name and whom I created for my glory, whom I have formed and made.”

MEDITATE:

The fall of Jerusalem in the sixth century BCE was the literal end of the world for the Jewish people. This is no turn of phrase—for the ancient Judeans it was an eschatological cataclysm. They were the Chosen People of the one true God, the God who led them out of bondage in Egypt to the Promised Land. This God was no abstract, metaphorical force, but a God physically present with them in their wanderings through the wilderness, physically present in his direct communications with his prophets and kings, and physically present within their sacred temple, a temple built to his specific measurements and design. Yet despite his presence, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had laid waste to the city, looted their temple, and dragged the survivors into slavery. Even their kings, descendants of the divinely appointed line of David and Solomon, were humiliated and destroyed: Jehoiakim died during Jerusalem's besiegement, Jeconiah was driven into exile, and Zedekiah was blinded, taken to Babylon, and imprisoned until his death.

The world had ended. And yet God had not abandoned them. It is here in the Book of Isaiah that we encounter this passage, one of the purest messages of hope and love in the entire Old Testament. You have been broken, God says, but I have created you. You have sinned and been punished, but I shall redeem you. You have been enslaved, yet you are mine. You have been cursed and spat upon, beaten and destroyed, yet you are precious in my eyes. You have been scattered to the winds, but I shall bring you home.

It is important to remember that the Book of Isaiah was not written all at once by the same authors. Scholars believe that only the first half—roughly chapters 1-39—can be directly attributed to the ancient prophet, a man who'd predicted the fall of Jerusalem about a hundred years earlier. Scholars believe that this passage of hope and restoration was added by an anonymous author written during the Jewish captivity in Babylon. For this author, the disbelieving horror of Jerusalem's destruction was still fresh and powerful. We cannot imagine

