

Isaiah Chapter 40

The prophecies of (chapters 1-39), addressed Judah in her situation during Isaiah's ministry (739 until 686 B.C.).

The prophecies of (chapters 40-66), address Judah as though the prophesied Babylonian captivity (39:5-7), were already a present reality, though that captivity did not begin (until 605-586 B.C.).

The words "There is no peace for the wicked" (48:22; 57:21), signal the divisions of this section into three parts: (chapters 40-48; 49-57; and 58-66).

Verses 1-8

Looking beyond Judah's imminent captivity, the prophet sees a day of salvation coming in the future.

This section of Isaiah's prophecy (40:1 – 48:22), is often called the Book of Consolation.

"Comfort ye" (nachamu), means both "repent" and "console," and implies that true repentance must precede divine consolation.

This section looks at the hope and comfort of a blessed future subsequent to God's judgment in the forthcoming Babylonian captivity.

Isaiah 40:1 "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God."

"Comfort ... comfort":

The prophecy addressed God's prophets, instructing them to emphasize the theme of comfort to a captive people in a foreign land many miles from their home city of Jerusalem.

God has good plans for great blessing to Israel in the future because they are His covenant people, who are never to be permanently cast away (Romans 11:2).

"My people" (ami): refers to the people of God who are in a covenant relationship with Him.

This designation appears 12 times (in chapters 1-39 and 15 times in chapters 40-66).

We know that the only true comfort that any of us have, is through the Spirit of God.

Jesus promised to send us a Comforter, which is the Spirit of God.

Notice, that God has not abandoned them.

He calls them “my people”.

He, also, is saying to them that He is their God.

He will not let them down.

Have you already noticed the hope that springs up in this chapter (like grace)?

Isaiah 40:2 "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins."

“Iniquity is pardoned ... double for all her sins”:

Cruel slaughter and captivity at the hands of the Babylonians were sufficient payment for past sins; so someday after worldwide dispersion, Israel will return to her land in peace and in the glory of Messiah’s kingdom.

Isaiah is looking beyond the Babylonian captivity here.

He says that Jerusalem has received forgiveness, or even better, total pardon.

God had allowed them the terrible warfare to bring them closer to the knowledge of the fact they needed Him.

"For she hath received of the LORD’S hand double for all her sins".

The payment of double was all the trouble they had suffered at the hands of the Babylonians.

Notice, that Isaiah is speaking as if this has already happened, because of the certainty of the prophecy.

I always like to take note of where their trouble had really come from.

It was from the LORD, to cause them to repent.

Praise God, there is a Light at the end of the tunnel for these people!

They are not forsaken of God, they are forgiven.

Verses 3-5

A prophetic exhortation told Israel to prepare for the revelation of the LORD’s glory at the arrival of Messiah.

Scripture sees John the Baptist in this role (Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23).

It likewise sees the future forerunner who is to be like Elijah preparing for Christ's second coming (Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6).

Verses 3-4

“prepare ye the way”:

The remnant of Israel could remove obstacles from the coming Messiah's path through repentance for their sins.

John the Baptist reminded his listeners of this necessity (Matt. 3:2), as did Jesus (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15).

These verses reflect the custom of some eastern monarchs to send heralds before them to clear away obstacles, make causeways, straighten crooked roads, and level hills and valleys (45:1-2).

Isaiah 40:3 "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

Isaiah is suddenly looking a few hundred years ahead, and seeing John the Baptist.

He is the voice crying in the wilderness proclaiming the coming of Christ, their Messiah.

This was the very message that John had brought.

There is a way that leads to God.

It is like a highway.

A highway will be there, a roadway: And it will be called the Highway of Holiness.

The unclean will not travel on it, But it will be for the one who walks that way, And fools will not wander on it; (Isaiah 35:8).

Even though it would be a few hundred years until Messiah would come, it was not too early for these people of God to prepare the way.

I believe it is time to cry out again.

Repent and prepare for the coming of the LORD.

It may not be next year when Christ comes back, but it is time to prepare.

He is coming back as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Isaiah 40:4 "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:"

These valleys and mountains probably represent people.

The lofty will be brought down, and the humble exalted.

There will be no obstacle too great to overcome when God comes.

It is strange that I feel the Lord is speaking here, that the obstacles the Law made before us will be removed by the beautiful gift of grace through Jesus Christ.

There was a mountain of obligations in the Old Testament for God's people to keep.

Grace clears the way.

The Light of Jesus shows us the way.

Isaiah 40:5 "And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see [it] together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken [it]."

“Glory of the LORD ... revealed”:

Jerusalem's misery is to end and the Lord's glory to replace it.

So comfort will come to the city (verse 2), and every person will see God's glorious salvation (52:10), in Messiah's future kingdom (Hab. 2:14; Rev. 21:23; 11:9).

When God speaks, there is no doubt.

God is not a man.

Numbers 23:19 "God [is] not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do [it]? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"

In the person of Jesus Christ, God revealed Himself to man.

Colossians 2:9 "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

Hebrews 1:3 "Who being the brightness of [his] glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;"

The glory of the Lord is revealed to mankind in the appearance of Jesus Christ.

Verses 6-8

“All flesh ... flower fadeth”:

Isaiah elaborated on how transitory humanity is; here today, gone tomorrow.

People pass away like plants under the hot breath of the withering East wind.

James used this illustration to teach the folly of trusting in material wealth (James 1:10-11).

Peter used it to illustrate the passing nature of everything related to humanity (1 Peter 1:24-25).

Isaiah 40:6-7

"The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh [is] grass, and all the goodness thereof [is] as the flower of the field:"

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people [is] grass."

"The voice said, cry":

God speaks unto his ministers.

“He”:

The prophet.

“All flesh”:

The prophet having foretold glorious things, confirms the certainty of them, by representing the vast difference between the nature, and word, and work of men and of God.

All that men are or have, yea, their highest accomplishments, are but like the grass of the field, weak and vanishing, soon wilt and are brought to nothing.

But God's word is like Himself, immutable and irresistible: and therefore, as the mouth of the LORD, and not of man, hath spoken these things, so doubt not but they shall be fulfilled.

Not the same voice (as in Isaiah 40:3), nor the voice of an angel, but a voice from the LORD, it is the LORD's voice to the prophet or rather to any and every Gospel minister, giving them an order to prophesy and preach.

Without which they cannot preach regularly and lawfully.

It is the same as, "go, teach all nations" and preach the Gospel to every creature (Matthew 28:19).

Isaiah 40:8 "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

"The word of our God shall stand for ever":

The permanence of God's word guarantees against any deviation from the divine plan (55:11).

He has promised Jerusalem's deliverance (verse 2), through His coming (verses 3-5), so it must happen that way (Matt. 5:18; Luke 16:17).

The following Scripture shows the eternity of the Word of God.

Luke 21:33 "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away."

All of God's creation may wither and die, but His Word is eternal.

The steadfastness of God's Word is a comfort to all who believe.

Verses 9-17

"O Zion ... O Jerusalem" calls our attention to the city of David which is to proclaim "good tidings", to the other "elites of Judah."

Certainly, it was in this city that the "good news" of the gospel was first proclaimed to all the world.

"Behold your God!" refers to the coming of God incarnate in Jesus Christ "Like a shepherd" gathering his sheep (see John chapter 10).

The questions that follow are reminiscent of those (in Job 38-41), and each implies the answer: "None but God!"

Isaiah 40:9 "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift [it] up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!"

"Zion ... good tidings ... Jerusalem ... good tidings":

Like a messenger on a mountain to be seen and heard by all, the prophet called on the city to proclaim loudly to the rest of Judah's cities the good news of God's presence there.

“Behold your God”:

The restoration of Israel to the Land is to include the resumption of God’s presence in Jerusalem after many centuries.

"Zion" is symbolic of the church, and is many times speaking of Jerusalem, as well.

The good news of the gospel does come through the church and from Jerusalem.

The presentation of the Messiah, or Jesus Christ, was from Jerusalem.

This is a proclamation to all who will believe.

Jesus was "Emmanuel" (God with us).

Isaiah 40:10 "Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong [hand], and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward [is] with him, and his work before him."

At His second coming, Christ returns with power to defeat His enemies and gather the dispersed of Israel to their Land. (Matt. 24:31; Rev. 19:11-21).

"The Lord's arm", Right Hand etc., all are speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The work that was before Him is the work of the 6 hours on the cross, when He purchased our salvation for us.

His reward is for anyone who will dare to believe.

Isaiah 40:11 "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry [them] in his bosom, [and] shall gently lead those that are with young."

“His arm”:

A picture of God’s omnipotence.

The same arm that powerfully scatters the Jews all over the earth in judgment is to overcome Israel’s oppressors (verse 10), and to tenderly feed and lead His flock.

Again, Jesus is the great Shepherd.

Notice in the following Scripture, that Jesus is the great Shepherd and the believers are His sheep.

Matthew 25:32 "And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth [his] sheep from the goats:"

In the following Scripture, Jesus calls Himself the good Shepherd.

John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

Notice in the following Scripture, how the good Shepherd keeps His sheep from straying.

1 Peter 2:25 "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

You can easily see from all this that Jesus is the Shepherd.

Verses 12-14

By a series of questions, to which the implied answer is "no one," the prophet emphasized the omnipotence and omniscience of God, the God whose coming is to bring comfort to Israel according to (verses 1-11).

Isaiah 40:12 "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?"

"Who hath measured ... in a balance":

God alone has power to create the physical universe and the earth in perfect balance, weighing mountains and seas perfectly, so that the earth moves perfectly in space.

This matter of the amazing balance of our planet is called the science of isostasy.

Equilibrium in the earth's crust such that the forces tending to elevate landmasses balance the forces tending to depress landmasses.

The Creator God is spoken of here.

We know from John that the Word of God created all things.

The Word of God is the One we know as Jesus.

He is so great that His perfect measurements keep the entire universe in perfect order.

He created the water, and placed it where He wanted it.

All of His calculations are perfect.

Though He is big enough to create the universe and all that is in it, He is small enough to live within my heart.

Verses 13-14

“Directed the Spirit of the Lord”:

Isaiah pointed to the incomparable wisdom of God.

Paul alluded to this verse in connection with God’s wisdom in dealing with Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 11:34), and with God’s impartation of wisdom to the spiritual believer (1 Cor. 2:16).

Isaiah 40:13 "Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or [being] his counsellor hath taught him?"

God is the only Being in the universe that possesses independence from the Creation.

The only limits to God’s freedom are in His own nature and attributes.

He is unlimited in His existence.

Because His existence relates to His nature rather than His will, God will exist and must continue to exist forever.

So, the answer is “no man”, God has done it all.

Isaiah Chapter 40 Questions

1. What is the only true comfort that any of us have?
2. Who is the Comforter?
3. What statement in verse 1, lets us know that God has not abandoned them?
4. The hope that springs up in this chapter is like _____.
5. Jerusalem's iniquity has been _____.
6. What is better than forgiveness?
7. Why had God allowed the terrible warfare?
8. Why does Isaiah speak of this, as if it had already happened?

9. They are not forsaken of God, but _____.
10. In verse 3, who is Isaiah looking ahead and seeing?
11. He was a voice crying in the _____.
12. What is this highway?
13. What does the author believe about our time?
14. The valleys and mountains in verse 4, are what?
15. The _____ will be brought down, and the _____ exalted.
16. There was a _____ of obligations to be kept in the Old Testament.
17. _____ clears the way.
18. Who does verse 5 say the Lord will be revealed to?
19. In the person of _____, God revealed Himself to man.
20. What is all flesh called in verse 6?
21. Why does the flower fade in verse 7?
22. What was the voice crying in verse 6 and 7?
23. What is "Zion" symbolic of?
24. What does "Emmanuel" mean?
25. What is the "Lord's Arm" speaking of?
26. His reward is for all who would _____.
27. Who is the great Shepherd?
28. You can easily see Jesus is the _____, from these Scriptures.
29. Who is verse 12 speaking of?
30. Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD.