



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The LORD Almighty--The Giver of Hope (Isaiah 40:1-11)

JANUARY 24, 2012

Paul Meinsen / PO Box 891, Jefferson City, MO 65102 / paul.meinsen@capitolcom.org

Weekly Bible Study Schedule

- **Tuesday, January 24, 7 AM in HHR #5**
-Breakfast Provided
- **Tuesday, January 24, 8:30 PM in Room #301**
(Speaker Pro-Tem's office)

Hope!! Leaders want to instill hope in those who follow—whether it is an officer commanding his troops, a coach leading his team, a pastor giving help to those in the congregation who are facing life's trials, or a statesman talking about the future of the country. People are looking for hope and want to have something to hold on to when live turns upside down.

Unfortunately, the words of men sometimes do not provide much hope. A military officer or a coach's word may seem futile because defeat is inevitable. A pastor's word may seem empty in view of the circumstances. A statesman's word may sound hollow because he is untrustworthy or because everyone knows it just can't be accomplished, regardless of the man's good intentions.

The prophet Isaiah's words could ring hollow, if they were solely based upon his own thoughts and authority. But his words are not his own. Isaiah 40 is a chapter in which God speaks through the prophet. And because it is the eternal, holy God who speaks, the words give great comfort, peace and hope to an afflicted people. They still give hope to an afflicted person today.

INTRODUCTION

There is an abrupt change in the white space between Isaiah 39 and Isaiah 40. So much of a change that a number of scholars believe it was written much later by someone other than Isaiah and is actually a different book which has been attached to the first part. But this conclusion is both untenable and unnecessary. In chapter 39, Isaiah describes the captivity that will be coming upon the nation. In chapter 40, Isaiah prophesied, before the captivity, about the future release and glory for the nation of Israel.

To properly interpret any passage of Scripture, one needs an understanding of the context, historical and textual, in which the passage sits.

In Isaiah 6:1, Isaiah has his glorious vision of the Lord "in the year of King Uzziah's death" (dated typically at 739 BC). In Isaiah 39, King Hezekiah gets deathly sick but God miraculously heals and promises 15 more years to him (Isaiah 38); dated at 701 BC.

But Hezekiah acts foolishly by showing off his treasures to the Babylonians before he dies in 686 BC and Isaiah prophecies a future destruction and captivity that will befall the kingdom (Isaiah 39). His son, Manasseh, sealed Judah's fate by living as the most wicked king of the southern kingdom.

In the years before this destruction by the Babylonians, the prophet *Jeremiah* desperately preaches repentance to the people but his words fall on deaf ears. And *Ezekiel*, in a vision, sees the glory of Yahweh departing the temple (Ezek 10) in a fashion similar to the day in which the glory entered after Solomon finished and dedicated it (1 Kings 8).

Finally, in 586 BC, Jerusalem, the capitol city of Judah, fell to King Nebuchadnezzar. Ten thousand Jews were carried off into captivity including the well-known Ezekiel, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel 1). Jeremiah is allowed to stay due to the providence of God. He sees his beloved city fall and writes the O'T book of "Lamentations."

YAHWEH IS A GOD OF GRACIOUS COMPASSION, JUSTICE, FORGIVENESS, ROYALTY, GLORY, AND ETERNITY WHO DWELLS WITH HIS PEOPLE.

But as Isaiah prophetically declared in chapter 40, a restoration will come after a time of punishment. In 538 BC, Zerubbabel brings back the first wave of Jews to Palestine and Ezra the scribe brings a second group in 458 BC; with a third coming with Nehemiah in 445 BC.

Isaiah stands in the late 7th-century BC declaring the upcoming 6th-century BC destruction of Judah in chapter 39; and then prophecies the 5th/6th century restoration in chapter 40. Before the captivity and devastation, he proclaims hope. He reminds the people who God is and that He has not abandoned them and that He will yet bring a great comfort.

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS & STAFF: TUESDAYS @ 7AM, HEARING ROOM #5

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS @ 8:30PM, ROOM #301

TRUMAN BUILDING: THURSDAYS @ 7AM, 4THFLOOR CAFETERIA

PROCLAIMING THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF GOD IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL

Missouri

The LORD Almighty--The Giver of Hope (Isaiah 40:1-11)

PROPHETIC WORDS OF COMFORT

Isaiah 40:1-11 "Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God.

²"Speak kindly to Jerusalem; And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, That her iniquity has been removed, That she has received of the LORD'S hand Double for all her sins." ³A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴"Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley; ⁵Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, And all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." ⁶A voice says, "Call out." Then he answered, "What shall I call out?" All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. ⁷The grass withers, the flower fades, When the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people are grass. ⁸The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever. ⁹Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; Lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" ¹⁰Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him And His recompense before Him. ¹¹Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.

For a people held captive in a land filled with numerous 'gods,' Isaiah declares a message of comfort that will come from their God and not from any of the idols or gods of the people of Babylon.

Isaiah is told to literally "speak to the heart" ("speak kindly"—NASB) in verse two because the iniquities of God's people have been removed. The punishment they received was something that had been promised if they rebelled (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). It was something warned about by God's many prophets. Alas, the people did not pay heed and the promised punishment is being inflicted upon them.

But now God declared that the chastisement and discipline is enough. The siege, the warfare, and the exile were deemed enough punishment upon the nation and He now comes to bring comfort to His disciplined people.

This comfort comes by their sins being removed. True peace, true comfort and true hope come only when one knows that his or her sins have been removed. *How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit!* (Psalm 32:1-2).

Although Isaiah was speaking in the time before the captivity concerning the time of comfort that will come after the captivity, he also looks further into time and prophecies concerning the time of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist makes reference to this passage when questioned concerning his mission. He said that he was not the Christ but rather the forerunner who prepared the way for the coming of the Christ, the Messiah or "Anointed One" (John 1:19-23; Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:3, Luke 3:4-6). It was ancient custom for runners to go ahead of the king's caravan to smooth out the road before Him and to proclaim to the people that he was coming. And this was John's call—he came to make a people spiritually ready, through repentance and humility, to receive their king, their Messiah—Jesus Christ.

THE ETERNAL WORD OF GOD DOES NOT CHANGE. IT WILL NOT COME TO AN END. ITS PROMISES ARE STILL VALID. ITS WARNINGS ARE STILL FORMIDABLE. THE WORD OF GOD STANDS ETERNAL BECAUSE THE ONE WHO UTTERS THEM IS ETERNAL.

And this promise of comfort was stamped with the assurance of being fulfilled by the statement in verse 5, "the mouth of the LORD has spoken." Isaiah is not a coach giving a pep talk to a demoralized team or a politician giving "hopeful promises" that may or may not come true. This word comes from God Himself who later declared, *Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it* (Isaiah 46:11a).

This assurance is continued in verses 6-8. The hearers of God's promises through Isaiah would grasp the picture painted here by "the voice." In early May, just before the rainy season in Palestine, the hot winds from the desert east of Palestine would thoroughly dry out everything in the land. The grass that was still alive would shrivel up and whatever splendor a flower had

Missouri

The LORD Almighty--The Giver of Hope (Isaiah 40:1-11)

would soon disappear. These things showed their beauty for a season, but then were gone (cf. 1 Peter 1:24-25).

Such is the way of all flesh—not just people, but all living things. We are here today and gone tomorrow. And this portrait is used in stark contrast to the eternal Word of God which does not change or come to an end. Its promises are still valid. Its warnings are still formidable. The Word of God stands eternal because the One who has spoken them is eternal.

Therefore, the voice commanded the deliverer of good news to stand on a high mountain and boldly declare to the people of Judah, הַנְּהָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם (*hinnah Elohichem*) “Behold, (or Here is) Your God.” God Himself is once again with His people. What a comfort for the people of God; what a hope that will sustain them through the disciplinary years.

But just the fact that God is again with His people does not give great assurance to a people who do not know Him. Therefore, Isaiah reminded them of God’s great glory, power, and mercy. In verses 10 & 11, he illustrates God’s power by talking of His mighty arm (cf. Psalm 89:13; 98:1; Jeremiah 27:5; 32:17) which will deliver. This same arm, at the same time, will also show much tenderness and mercy, even to the most vulnerable and weakest of His people. God is seen to be strong enough to fulfill His purposes while being a King of much compassion (two characteristics found only in Christ Himself and no other person on earth).

BEHOLD YOUR GOD

So what does this passage tell us about God?

- a. He is a God filled with gracious compassion (v1). His compassion and grace are many times coupled together as attributes to praised and lifted up throughout the Old Testament (Psalm 86:5-6; 103:8). It is also God’s reputation as a gracious God that made Jonah unwilling to go and preach repentance in Nineveh. After the people repent and God holds His wrath, Jonah whines, *Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity* (Jonah 4:2).
- b. He is a God of justice (v2). His holiness demands justice for the sin committed against it. God cannot look away from man’s wrongs, but rather must act in justice (Psalm 78:31; Romans 1:18; Revelation 14:9-10, 19; 16:4-9). This is most vividly seen at the cross—where God’s love and justice meet (Romans 5:6-11).
- c. He is a God of forgiveness (v2). The Lord always stands ready to forgive the person who comes to Him in repentance (2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 86:5; Jeremiah 36:3). John gives the great promise: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 Jn. 1:9).
- d. He is a God of royalty (v3-4). His title is *Adonai*, or Lord. Simply put, He is the King of the Universe (Psalm 24:10; 29:10; 47:6-7; 48:2; 68:24; etc). *For the LORD Most High is to be feared, A great King over all the earth* (Psalm 47:2).
- e. He is a God of glory (v5). Isaiah himself saw a glimpse of this glory in “the year of King Uzziah’s death” (Isaiah 6:1-7). Moses saw the backside of God as God’s glory passed by him on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 33:22-23). His glory is praised (Psalm 29:1-2; 1 Chronicles 16:24-27).
- f. He is an eternal God (v6-8). God’s word stands forever because God continues forever. He is from “everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 90:2), an everlasting King (Jeremiah 10:10) and He is the first and the last (Isaiah 44:6).
- g. He is a God who dwells with His people (v9). This is found throughout the Old Testament, but is most visible when the Son of God took on the form of a Son of Man and dwelt amongst men (John 1:14). One of His names is Immanuel, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).
- h. He is a God of power (v10). He is known throughout Scripture as having the arm of a warrior (Exodus 6:6; 15:9-11; Deuteronomy 4:34; Psalm 98:1; Isaiah 48:14) and of the Creator (Jeremiah 27:5; 32:17). He also has the arm of one having authority (Ezekiel 20:33) and being a judge (Isaiah 30:30; 51:5; Jeremiah 21:5). He is not a powerless potentate but one who can accomplish anything He desires to do.
- i. He is a God of tenderness (v11). The Hebrew word translated in verse 11 as “He will gently lead” is the same verb found in Psalm

Missouri

The LORD Almighty--The Giver of Hope (Isaiah 40:1-11)

23:2 "He leads me beside quiet waters." God, with His powerful right arm, is seen as tenderly helping those who are the weakest.

Compared to the gods that surrounded the Israelites during their captivity in Babylon, this description is most welcome and refreshing. None of these foreign gods were known for their power and mercies. The ancient writings discovered by archaeologists describe these gods as "powerful", even though quite limited. But it would be hard to find a god in those days that showed tenderness for it was not a desirable trait during those times.

The people of Israel needed to know that Yahweh God was totally unlike any person or god they knew or had been exposed. He is a God who possessed a victorious, mighty arm which also showed much tenderness and compassion. What a comfort this would bring during the time of captivity which was serving as a punishment for their sins against Him (Isaiah 39:5-7; Habakkuk 1:1-11; Jeremiah 15:1-14).

CONCLUSION

Isaiah 40 is a glorious chapter lifting up and exalting the greatness of Yahweh God. Even this introduction in the first eleven verses is packed with His glory, works and character. It is these attributes which produce true hope and gives true peace.

It is true that the people of Israel turned their back on God with their sin and turning to false idols (Jeremiah 2:9-13) and had prostituted themselves with other gods (Ezekiel 16). It is also true that God, after many years of patiently calling them to repentance, finally turned them over to be disciplined and He withdrew His glory from among them (Ezek. 10). But now, after a season of punishment, He is drawing His people back to Himself again.

This is an excellent picture of grace. The God who restored Israel is still calling people to be reconciled to Himself. He has provided the sacrifice necessary to remove the obstacles of sin that separate Him from His people through the murderous death of His Son, Jesus Christ. He has placed upon His people the spotless garment of righteousness that Christ earned with His life on earth (2 Corinthians 5:21). He is calling all people everywhere to repent of their sins and to trust in the sacrifice which He has provided to cleanse them (Acts 17:22-31).

Friend, as was said earlier, true peace only comes through a forgiveness of sin. Sins can only be forgiven through the sacrifice of Jesus. God is calling each of us, including you, to repent and trust. You are in a dreadful condition without Christ. Therefore, take Him as your portion. If you repent and call upon Him, you will find, as Isaiah did, much grace and forgiveness.

God can forgive your sin--are you interested?