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Comfort, Comfort My People Says Your God

40: 1-11

Comfort, comfort my people says your God DIG: Jerusalem's deliverance in 701 BC from the Assyrian King Sennacherib in Chapter 37 climaxes the prophecies of Chapters 1-39. Chapters 40-48 deal with events that occur 150 years later. In 587 BC Jerusalem was sacked, its people deported to Babylon, the new world power (2 Kings 25). Given this situation, what does Isaiah mean when he says comfort and speak tenderly to my people? How far was Isaiah looking into the future when he wrote the second half of his book?

REFLECT: The gospels quote 11:3 in reference to John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus. What does that imply about the identity of Yeshua? How can you prepare the way for the Lord in your own life? What needs leveling or shoring up? In verse 11 Yeshua comes as a Shepherd as well as a King. What sort of sheep do you feel like: Cradled? Content? Wandering? Caught? or Lost? Why?

At this point we need to pause and reflect on **Isaiah's** life in **his** later years. The last time we read about **Isaiah** involved in public ministry was the invasion of the Assyrian King Sennacherib in 701 BC. If **Isaiah** was about thirty years old when **he** started his public ministry, **he** would have been about sixty-nine years of age when **King Uzziah died (6:10)**. By the time **Hezekiah** died, three years later, **Isaiah** would have been seventy-two. But more than likely **he** lived longer than that because tradition teaches that **he** died as a martyr during the reign of Manasseh, who had **him** sawed in two (**Hebrews 11:36-37**). Therefore, if **he** lived several years after **his** public ministry had ended, what might **he** have done during this latter part of **his** life?

As early as 712 BC, possibly as much as twenty years before **his** death, **Isaiah** could see that the Babylonian exile was coming (**39:5-7**). It must have weighed heavily upon **him**, but as far as we know **he** did not preach on it. For most of the following fifteen years the more immediate Assyrian crisis demanded **his** attention and, with the accession of Manasseh and the fierce repression that came with it, it would have been impossible to preach anyway. The nation and its leaders were unwilling to listen. It would only be after **the Babylonian** captivity for seventy years that they would become teachable again, and then they would not

need judgment, but **comfort**.

It is more likely, therefore, as the gap in time between **Chapter 39** and **Chapter 40** implies, that in the latter part of **his** life **Isaiah** was called to a new task, to **comfort Isra'el** in words that **they** would remember and preserve in the dark days ahead until **she** was ready to hear them again.¹⁵³

The specific question dealt with in **40:1-11** is this: **Does God want to deliver Judah (and us)? And doesn't He give up on Judah (and on us) because of our persistent sinning?** The message **God** gives is for people whose whole world has fallen apart. And for people like that, cheap **comfort** is not only a waste of time, it is cruel. **Comfort** not grounded in reality is no **comfort** at all; it must be based on truth. And the truth is that **sin, Judah's** or ours, does not defeat **ADONAI**. Not only does **He** want to restore the united kingdoms of **Isra'el** and **Judah** (and us), but **He** intends to use **her** (and us) in the proclamation of the Good News. **The LORD** can be trusted to deliver **Isra'el** (and us).

Comfort, comfort My people, says our God (40:1). This verse starts out with a command to **comfort**. The command then is to the Jewish prophets, **Isaiah** in particular, and perhaps **his** contemporary **Micah**, or the later prophets of **the Babylonian** captivity such as **Jeremiah, Ezeki'el, Dani'el**, or the post-exilic prophets such as **Zechariah, Haggai**, and **Malachi**. The basic thrust now is **comfort my people**. The word **comfort** is so emphatic that the NIV says it twice. **My people** is the object, meaning **My people** of the united kingdom of **Isra'el**. Up to now the first **39 chapters** have been chapters of judgment against **Judah**, with the final threat in **Chapter 39** that although **ADONAI** will save **Judah** from the Assyrians, about one hundred years later **the LORD** would send the southern kingdom of **Judah** into captivity. **But now the content and the tone of the message changes; it is one of comfort rather than judgment.**



The method of speaking is given in the first part of the next verse, which says: **Speak tenderly to Jerusalem (40:2a)**. Literally, the Hebrew reads: *Speak comfortably, or speak*

to the heart of. The basic thrust of the message is that you must win the heart of **the nation**. Not merely threaten **them**, but win the heart of **the nation**. This phrase *win the heart of* is used elsewhere in Scripture for courtship (**Genesis 34:3; Judges 19:3; Hosea 2:14**). The one that is closest to what **Isaiah** is saying here is in **Hosea 2:14**. In the first **13 verses** of **Chapter 2**, **Hosea** had a message of judgment. **God** was going to destroy **the nation** for **her** idolatry, for chasing after other gods. But sometime after the fall of **the nation** **Hosea** prophesied: **Therefore, behold, I will allure her, I will bring her back into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her (Hosea 2:14)**. In other words, the word for **comfort** in **40:1** and the word for **tenderly** in **40:2** are two different Hebrew words. This is why the **NIV** uses the word **comfort** in **40:1** and **speak tenderly to** in **40:2**. The word for **comfort** in **40:1** means *to soothe in time of grief or to console*. But the word **tenderly** in **40:2** is the Hebrew word meaning *speak to the heart of*, meaning to *win the heart of*, in the sense of wooing for the purpose of courtship.

In the second part of the verse, the prophet had a **three-fold message of comfort** to declare. **Proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, and that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins (40:2b)**. First, **that her warfare had been completed**. Second, **that her sin had been pardoned**. And third, **that she had received from the LORD double for all her sin. This three-fold message is the outline for the rest of the book of Isaiah. And each section ends with one verse that describes the state of the wicked.**

First, that her warfare had been completed is developed in **40:1** to **48:22**. This first section will be divided between **Isaiah's** consolation (**Chapters 40-41, 44-45**) and **his Creator (Chapters 42:5 to 43:28 and 46 to 48)**.

*The person primarily, but not exclusively, talked about is Cyrus and how **God** will use Cyrus to bring about the return of **the Jews** from **Babylon**. Because of this, there is more **near historical prophecy** than **far eschatological prophecy**.*

Back in **Isaiah 29**, **God** was viewed as being at war with **Ariel**, which is another name for the city of **Jerusalem**. In **42:25**, **Isaiah** tells us that **God** had **poured out on Judah His burning anger**, the violence of war. But now in **40:2** we see that **ADONAI's** war against the people of **Judah** is finished. Throughout this section we are going to see a contrast of several things. First, we will see a contrast between **the LORD** and idols. Secondly, we will see a contrast between **the Jews** and **the Gentiles**. And thirdly, we will see a motif of contrast between a **near historical fulfillment** and a **far eschatological fulfillment** regarding **Babylon**. *The Bible talks about two Babylons*. In **Isaiah's** day there was **the city**

and empire of **Babylon**. Because the near fulfillment would be the Babylonian captivity, which would begin one hundred years after the prophecy of **Isaiah**, we call this the **near historical Babylon**. Then after **the Babylonian** captivity, when **her warfare had been completed**, men like **Zerubbabel**, **Nehemiah**, and **Ezra** would lead **her** back to **Jerusalem** to occupy the Land in 536 BC. But the Bible also talks about another **Babylon**. There is a **Babylon** yet to be rebuilt and become the worldwide capital of the antichrist during the Great Tribulation. We call this the **far eschatological Babylon**.

Finally, **Isaiah** is going to be talking about the overthrow of **the Babylon** gods. Remember that the main reason why **ADONAI** had to send **the Jews** into captivity in **Babylonian** was because of their idolatry. **The Jews** from the time of Abraham down to the **Babylonian** captivity were always prone to idolatry. So, throughout **Chapters 40** to **48** there will be constant references made to **God's** war against idols and idolatry for the purpose of showing the absolute stupidity of idolatry. This will especially be true in **Chapter 41** and **Chapters 46** and **47**. But **Isra'el** did finally learn **her** lesson because once **the Jews** returned from the Babylonian captivity in 536 BC, idolatry would never again be a **Jewish** problem. This section ends with a statement that describes the state of the wicked. **There is no peace, says the LORD, for the wicked (48:22)**.

Second, that her sin had been pardoned is seen in **49:1** to **57:21**. This second section will be divided between **Judah's Redeemer (Chapters 49:7 to 50:3, 50:10 to 52:12, and 54 to 57)** and **Judah's Servant (Chapters 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9 and 52:13 to 53:2)**.

*In this section, the reason **that her sin had been pardoned** was because of the death of **the Servant of the LORD**. Here **Isaiah** deals with the final salvation and restoration of the united kingdom of **Isra'el** and **Judah**. Because of this, there is more **far eschatological prophecy** than **near historical prophecy**.*

Isaiah will make four points. First, **her sin** had been pardoned. This is the reason that her hard service had been **completed**. The Hebrew word **pardoned** here means *to be satisfied*. In other words, **God's** righteousness and justice has been *satisfied* because the price of **sin** has been paid. The theological word is *propitiation*. It means the averting of **ADONAI's** wrath by means of the substitutionary sacrifice of **Messiah**, which satisfies every claim of **God's** holiness and justice so that **the LORD** is free to act on behalf of sinners. On the cross, **Yeshua** said: **It is finished** in Aramaic. In Greek it would be translated **paid in full** or *tetelestai*.

Second, there is a connection between the suffering of **the Servant** and **His** future glory. On the one hand, **Isaiah** will speak of a suffering **Messiah**; on the other hand, **he** will speak

of a conquering **Messiah**. Today we understand that this was fulfilled by **Yeshua** coming twice; **His** First Coming to die for **sins**, and **His** Second Coming to rule in the millennial Kingdom. **The sages have never completely comprehended the truthfulness of One Person fulfilling both prophecies. So, they invented the theory of two Messiahs. The first Messiah would come and die and the second Messiah would come to reign and bring the first Messiah back to life again.** This section ends with a statement that describes the state of **the wicked. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked (Isaiah 57:21).**

Third, that she had received from the LORD double for all her sin is discussed in **Isaiah, Chapters 58 to 66**. This third section is about **Isaiah's Messiah** and will be divided between **Judah's sins (Chapters 58 and 59), the coming Messiah (Chapters 60 to 62),** and finally judgment and salvation (**Chapters 63 to 66**).

*The second section gives the reason for the first, because her **sins** had been **pardoned**, her hard service had been **completed**. Likewise, the third section gives the reason for the second. The reason **that she had received double for all her sins** was so that **her sins** could be **pardoned**. So, we have a progression in thought.*

The principle of **Judah** receiving double for all her **sins** comes out of the Torah. It clearly states that the first son was to receive double. So, if you had three sons, you would divide your land into four parts. The two youngest sons would be given one part each. But the first-born son would be given two parts. The firstborn son always received double. When Pharaoh would not let the people go, **God** sent Moses to Pharaoh with a message: **Then say to Pharaoh, this is what ADONAI says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, let my son go, so he may worship me. But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son (Exodus 4:22-23).** For that reason, **Judah** is to receive double in blessing *and* punishment. What is emphasized here is not the double blessing, but the double punishment aspect. **Isaiah** is not the only one to say this (**Jeremiah 16:18** and **Zechariah 9:12**). This principle, found in both the five books of Moshe and the Prophets, is the reasoning behind the statement by Paul: **There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile (Romans 2:9).** The reason why **God** would move against **the Jew** first in punishing **sin** is because of the principle of receiving double for **her sins**. But the other side of the coin is also true. **But glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile (Romans 2:10).** So because the nation of **Israel** was the first born of the nations and has a special relationship with **God**, **Israel** receives double blessings, but **she** also receives double for all **her sins**.

In this third section, aside from the point that the nation of **Isra'el** had received double for all **her sins**, **Isaiah** will mainly be concerned with the distinction between **Isra'el** the whole, the faithful remnant of believing **Jews**, and **the Suffering Servant**. This section, and book, ends with the condemnation of the wicked: **And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind (Isaiah 66:24).**

From this simple command to **comfort His people (40:3-11)**, **four different voices respond. First, there is the voice of urgency in 40:3 to 5.** This takes us back to a long-standing custom of the ancient world. Roads of some kind must have existed in former times in Palestine, though nothing worthy of the name is to be found there today. The use of chariots, and the opening and preservation of the way to the Cities of Refuge, and such expressions as are found in this text, seem to imply a knowledge and a use of artificial roads. It has been the custom from ancient times for Oriental monarchs, when wishing to travel through their dominions, to send men before them to prepare their way, by removing stones (see **62:10**), leveling rough places, filling up hollows, and making the road pleasant and easy for the distinguished travelers. The Assyrian Queen Shammuramat (in Greek, Semiramis), on one of her journeys, coming to a rough, mountainous region, ordered the hills leveled and the hollows filled, which was done at an enormous cost. Her object was not only to shorten the way, but also to leave to posterity a lasting monument of herself. There have been modern instances of a similar character, though not involving so much labor and expense.¹⁵⁴ The point here is that **the LORD** is coming so there had to be a way prepared for **Him**.

A voice of one calling, "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, and the rugged places a plain" (40:3-4). This is quoted in reference to John the Immerser by all four gospel writers (**Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; and John 1:23**). John the Immerser could have fulfilled this prophecy had **Jesus** been accepted. That is the point of the gospel writers quoting him. John the Immerser *was* a forerunner of **the Messiah** of **Isra'el**. But **Messiah** was rejected, so this prophecy awaits fulfillment at some other time (**Mark 9:9-13**).

And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it (40:5a). The synoptic writers all describe what took place on the Mount of Transfiguration (**Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:1-13; and Luke 9:28-36**). The disciples had seen the Sh'khinah **glory** manifested in the person of **Jesus Christ**. That raised a theological

question. **Why did the sages teach that before the Messiah would come, Elijah must come first?** This is based on **Malachi Chapter 4** where it clearly teaches **Elijah** must return before the coming of **Christ**, but before the Second Coming not before the First Coming. So first, **Jesus** said that **Elijah** would indeed come first and restore all things, but if **Elijah** had come before the First Coming all the prophecies regarding the suffering, death, and resurrection of **Christ** would never be fulfilled. That is why **Elijah** was not promised to come and restore all things before the First Coming, but only before the Second Coming. John the Immerser was a type of **Elijah**, in that **he** was a forerunner of the First Coming. Had **Yeshua** been accepted as **the Messiah**, then **John** would have fulfilled the prophecy of **40:3-5**. But **He** was rejected. As a result, this prophecy awaits a future fulfillment when **Elijah** will indeed return and fulfill all things. Then a smoothing of the way is described so all obstacles are removed. Then **Isaiah** speaks about the Sh'khinah **glory**. At that point, when the way has been prepared for the coming of **the King** (when **all Isra'el** is saved as a nation in **Chapter 66**) and **Jesus** will come back, **His Sh'khinah glory** will be seen by all mankind (**Matthew 24:29-30**). The guarantee that all of this will come to pass is given at the end of this verse. **For the mouth of God has spoken (40:5b)**. Because **He** said it, it will indeed come to pass. That was the first voice; now comes the second voice.

Second is the voice of hope in 40:6a. The second voice says: **Cry out**, meaning, **Cry out to Jerusalem the same three-fold message of comfort**, the same message found earlier in **40:1-2**.

Third voice is the voice of discouragement in 40:6b-7. Immediately after that, the voice of discouragement asks: **What shall I cry?** This voice emphasizes the transitory, or temporary nature of man. The voice of discouragement says: **All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of God blows on them. Surely the people are like grass (40:6b-7)**. In effect this voice says, "What good is it? We have had revivals before. There have been periods during **Isra'el's** history when we have turned to **God**, only to let that period of righteousness slip through our fingers as the nation returned to a life of **sin**. All we do is see continuous cycles. Why bother giving the message of **comfort** in **40:1-2**? It is useless because human righteousness is so fickle, it comes and goes.

But then the voice of hope responds to the voice of discouragement. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of our God stands forever (40:8). This voice says, "You are right. Man's righteousness is fickle. But I will give you some hope, and tell you something that is *not* fickle. That is **the Word of our God spoken by His prophets**. It is sure. It is not transitory. It is not temporary. Therefore, since the promise of

the final restoration and redemption of the united nation of **Isra'el** is sure, because **the mouth of the LORD has spoken** it, let us proclaim that message!

We have heard three voices so far, **but now comes the fourth voice, the voice of good tidings in 40:9-11**. Finally, the command to **comfort** and **speak tenderly to My people** in **40:1-2** is carried out. **Though God is a mighty warrior striking down Isra'el's oppressors, He is also like a good Shepherd, gentle and considerate to His redeemed people.**

You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid. Say to the towns of Judah, "Here is our God" (40:9)! Here the phrase **good tidings** is the Hebrew word for *the Gospel*. Ultimately, the way the promise of **40:2** is going to be fulfilled is by means of preaching the Gospel to both **Isra'el** and **Judah**. This will ultimately bring about the salvation of the united kingdom **Isra'el**. She **has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Isra'el will be saved**, as it is written: **The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them when I take away their sins (Romans 11:25b-27)**. That will be especially true in the preaching of **the Two Witnesses** (see the commentary on **Revelation, to see link click [Dc](#) - I Will Give Power to My Two Witnesses and They Will Prophecy for 1,260 Days**).

But what are we to preach? The answer to that comes next. **See, the LORD of heaven's angelic armies (CJB) comes with power, and His arm rules for Him, and His reward accompanies Him (40:10)**. In **40:10** the word **See**, has a special meaning in the book of **Isaiah**. When **he** uses it, it always means something in reference to the future. In other words, "See, your **God** is coming in the future." And when **He** comes, **He** will come **with power, and His arm rules for Him**. This is the second of nine references to **the arm of the LORD** in **Isaiah (30:30 and 32, 50:2, 51:5 and 9, 52:10, 53:1, 59:1 and 16, 62:8, 63:5)**. In **His Second Coming, He** will come as **the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5)**, but in **His First Coming, He** came as **the Good Shepherd**.

Even though the nation of **Judah** would have to endure the discipline of the **Babylonian** captivity; **He** would eventually come to them as **the Good Shepherd**. **The arm** raised in discipline would be lowered in compassion. **He tends His flock like a shepherd (Ps 23:1, 80:1; Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 2:25 and 5:4), He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart (Jeremiah 13:17 and 20; Micah 4:8, 5:4 7:14; Zechariah 10:3); He gently leads those that have young (40:11)**. He said of Himself: **I am the**



good Shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me - just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father - and I lay down My life for the sheep (John 10:14-15). Does God want to deliver Isra'el (and us)? Indeed He does. Doesn't He give up on Israel (and on us) because of our persistent sinning? No, He does not! And that, my friend, is **Good News.**