

Fact Sheet for “Comfort” Isaiah 40:1-11

Pastor Bob Singer
03/15/2015

Today we leave that island of narrative (story) in the middle of Isaiah (chapters 36-39) and return to what we typically refer to as prophecy.

Often when we think of “prophecy” we think of “fulfillment”. Some of that has already taken place, some is yet future. We would identify that fulfillment as belonging to “end times”. We may also think about theological truths. But, we don’t normally think of application to our own life now. I would encourage you as we take a closer look at the first 11 verses of Isaiah 40 to explore how this passage may apply to you personally.

Isaiah has been communicating judgment for God’s people. This passage takes a decidedly different direction.

^{ESV} ¹ ¶ **Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.**

² **Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that her warfare is ended,
that her iniquity is pardoned,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.**

The repetition of the word “comfort” in v. 1 is for emphasis and communicates emotion. Also, the command to comfort is plural and is a command to more than just Isaiah. The tender words to Jerusalem that her warfare has ended refer to the ending of the coming Babylonian captivity. The statement that “she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins” does not mean that she has been over punished. Instead it means that she has been sufficiently punished.

³ **A voice cries:**

**"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.**

God is getting ready to show up! Every one of the four Gospel authors applies this verse to John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-3; Mark 1:2-4; Luke 1:76; 3:4-6; John 1:23). The highway being made straight for our God meant that obstacles would be removed and the way would be prepared. Today we might say that the red carpet would be rolled out. But remember Jesus’ words in Matthew 17:10-13 and its parallel passage Mark 9:11-13. Jesus is indicating that the ministry of John the Baptist will be similar to Elijah’s return in the future. John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus’ first coming. Elijah would help prepare the way for Jesus’ second coming (Revelation 11:1-13).

The fog here is typical of prophecy. The people hearing Isaiah’s prophecy would naturally think of God restoring the fortunes of his people after a time of judgment. Looking back they would identify this as the end of the Babylonian captivity... but the words here don’t exactly fit.

⁴ **Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.**

Proverbs 3:5-6 contain a similar thought.

⁵ **And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,**

for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

When will every person see the glory of the Lord? This finds its best fulfillment in the Millennium. Now a different voice cries... God's

⁶ A voice says, "Cry!"

And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All flesh is grass,

and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades

when the breath of the LORD blows on it;

surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades,

but the word of our God will stand forever.

A similar thought about man is found in Psalm 103:15-16.

People are temporary in this life but the word of God stands forever! This is true not only of this prophecy but of all of God's word. We can trust it. We can rely on it. It is our sole source of authoritative truth from God. That is why it is one of our values at Cottage Grove Bible Church.

⁹ Go on up to a high mountain,

O Zion, herald of good news;

lift up your voice with strength,

O Jerusalem, herald of good news;

lift it up, fear not;

say to the cities of Judah,

"Behold your God!"

¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,

and his arm rules for him;

behold, his reward is with him,

and his recompense before him.

¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd;

he will gather the lambs in his arms;

he will carry them in his bosom,

and gently lead those that are with young.

Notice the terminology of shepherds, lambs, and gentleness.

There's certainly prophecy here about the end of the Babylonian Captivity, John the Baptist and Jesus' 1st coming, and Elijah and Jesus' 2nd coming. There's the statement about the word of God standing forever. But don't miss the fact that this passage tells us about God's character. He is a God who judges sin, but also a God who mercifully forgives! This is true of nations as well as the individual people who make up those nations. Think about some of the major people of the Bible... Adam and Eve, Moses, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, David, Solomon, Mary (Jesus' mother), and Peter. All of us carry the permanent scars of times when we failed God. Those scars often have the effect of us thinking we are 2nd or 3rd class citizens of the kingdom. We can't change the dents and scars of the past. We can only rely on the mercy of a God who forgives... and restores! Each of us has an important place in God's kingdom.

There's more to this passage than just prophecy!