

Weekly Scripture and Sermon Study: History & Context Guide

Isaiah 40:1-11

History, Culture, & Context

This section of Isaiah begins the second section of the book. Whereas chapters 1-39 focused on darkness and judgement, chapters 40-66 give promises of restoration through the release of Israel from captivity, and the coming of the Messiah. Take comfort: God will come and care for God's people!

Verse 2 says, "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone, and her sins are pardoned. Yes, the Lord has punished her twice over for all her sins."

Verses 3-5 call on God's people to a spiritual renewal in preparation for the Messiah's advent. Verse 3 begins with "a voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare a way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.'" The comfort being discussed in this section of Isaiah will come by way of God's arrival, in which God's people should prepare for by making a "highway". Verse 3 is quoted in each of the New Testament Gospels (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 3:4-6; and John 1:23). As a matter of fact, John the Baptist called himself "the voice" in John 1:23, calling for the preparations (i.e., repentance) to "Make straight the way for the Lord" for Christ's ministry of salvation.

Verses 6-8 speaks of how we all wither away like grass and flowers, but God's Word is eternal. "Shout that people are like grass. Their beauty fades as quickly as the flowers in a field. The grass withers and the flowers fade beneath the breath of the Lord. And so it is with people. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the Word of our God stands forever." God's prophetic promises will never fail!

Verses 9-10 read, "You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, 'Here is your God!' See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him."

The Book of Isaiah Shepherds Notes explains, "With His strength, the Lord will rescue Israel, return them to the land, and inaugurate the millennial kingdom. Isaiah did not envision the time gap between the two comings of Christ. He merged the two comings into one, anticipating the inauguration of the messianic kingdom when Israel returned from captivity in Babylon. Like a tender shepherd carrying the weak lambs, so the Lord will bring the Israelites back into the Promised Land (v. 11)."

Questions to Consider

1. To whom was Isaiah's prophecy of comfort directed? Why? How can we apply this to our times?
2. How did Isaiah use the surrounding land to illustrate the change that Isaiah envisioned when God would intervene on behalf of His people? (See v. 4)
3. In times of distress or uncertainty, what brings you comfort?

