

Isaiah 40

Is. 40:1 "Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God.

The American Standard Version renders this verse as follows: "*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.*" Because God is addressing a plurality of individuals who, in the future, would be speaking into the lives of the Jewish people, He must be addressing Isaiah along with the prophets who followed him (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and etc.). These prophets, even though they address many judgments that would come upon the Hebrew people, always follow with encouraging words relating to the return of the Messiah and the resulting Kingdom—the blessings that would follow judgment. This confirms, once again, that God is a God of grace. Many of Isaiah's prophecies up to this point have been prophecies of judgment. In Isaiah 40 through Isaiah 66, however, much of what is stated serves to *comfort* the nation who is to look to the future blessings associated with the Messianic Kingdom.

Is. 40:2 "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."

The prophets who would prophesy in the future were to "*Speak kindly to Jerusalem,*" *Jerusalem* being the worship center of the nation. The word "*kindly*" in verse 2 is from a phrase in the Hebrew language which means, "speak to the heart of," the same as that of Hosea 2:14. Therefore, the prophets from this point were to state prophecies that would serve to win back the heart of the Hebrew people. This applied to any prophet from Isaiah's day through the last Old Testament writing prophet, Malachi.

What these prophets were to speak is addressed in the remainder of Isaiah 40:2. To *Speak kindly* to the nation they were to tell her: 1-*that her warfare has ended*; 2-*That her iniquity has been removed*; 3-*That she has received of the Lord's hand Double for all her sins*.

Some theologians (such as Keil and Delitzsch, as well as Arnold Fruchtenbaum) view these three statements of comfort as an outline of Isaiah 40:12-66:24. I agree, and I think you will too as we consider these phrases from Isaiah 40:2:

"that her warfare has ended" (Isaiah 40:12-48:22)—From verses such as Isaiah 27:7-8 and Isaiah 29:2-3, it is obvious that God will war with His people so long as they disobey. This statement, "*her warfare has ended,*" points to a time when the Babylonian distress will cease—when the Jews, in 536 BC, return from their seventy years of captivity in *Babylon* in the book of Ezra (which was also encouraged by Isaiah in Isaiah 48:20) as well as when the Jews leave the *Babylon* of the Tribulation (in accordance with Jeremiah's words of Jeremiah 50:8) shortly before the city is destroyed by the *consecrated ones* of Isaiah 13:3. In this section (Isaiah 40:12-48:22), Isaiah deals much with the futility of idolatry; for it was because of idolatry that the Hebrew people were exiled to Babylon. From the day Israel was born as a nation until she was taken to Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar, she struggled with worshipping Jehovah alone. However, since 536 BC, the year the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity, idolatry has not been as major an issue among the Hebrew people. The primary reason their *warfare* will end in the truest sense of the word is that their sin will be forgiven in conjunction with the spiritual regeneration of the nation at the end of the Tribulation—the subject of the next paragraph.

Therefore, Israel's *warfare* ended in one sense when she returned from her seventy years of Babylonian captivity in the book of Ezra, King Cyrus of Persia being the major factor in bringing it about. But her warfare will not totally end until the national regeneration of Israel at the end of the Tribulation and the Second Coming of Christ. This backdrop is absolutely necessary if we are to properly interpret this portion of Isaiah.

“That her iniquity has been removed” (Isaiah 49:1-57:21)—This phrase points to what the Servant of Jehovah, the Messiah (Jesus Christ), will do to insure that all Jews who believe in Him will experience forgiveness of sin and spiritual regeneration. Once the entire Jewish nation (on the earth) repents at the end of the Tribulation and accepts the Messiah's death as the means of payment for her sins (as described in Isaiah 53), God's warfare toward the nation will cease. Therefore, Israel's warfare will end because all Jews living at the end of the Tribulation will have all *iniquity...removed*—the very theme of this section. Isaiah teaches that one Messiah came to die, later to return in glory to save the nation and establish the Kingdom. Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum teaches that the Rabbis (in general) have failed to understand this vital point, and in turn, teach the concept of two Messiahs. The first will come and die; the second will come to save and reign in glory over the nation, as well as resurrect the first Messiah. Obviously, the Rabbis are wrong. This section speaks much about the future glory of the Messiah as well as His involvement in the salvation of the Gentiles. The positive ministry that the Jewish nation will experience with the Gentiles is also addressed in this section.

“That she has received of the Lord's hand Double for all her sins” (Isaiah 58:1-66:24)—When the Hebrew nation *has received of the Lord's hand Double for all her sins*, it will pave the way for her *iniquity* to be forgiven (dealt with in the second section), and *her warfare* will finally end (dealt with in the first section). Therefore, when the Jewish nation experiences *Double for all her sins*, she will be in a position to have her *iniquity* forgiven (through faith in the *Servant* of Isaiah 53, bringing about her national regeneration at the end of the Tribulation), and *her warfare* will end (through Christ's Second Coming). Israel receives *Double for all her sins* (also read Jeremiah 16:18, 17:18, Zechariah 9:12, and Romans 2:9-10) because she is God's *first-born* (Exodus 4:22), and the *first-born* receives twice as much as the other siblings (Deuteronomy 21:17). After all, she had a fuller revelation of God than the other nations. It is only after Israel has *received...Double for all her sins*, a condition which is finalized at the end of the Tribulation, that her *iniquity* will be *removed* in conjunction with spiritual regeneration of the Jews living on the earth (fulfilling the theme of section two). She will then enjoy the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom, where *warfare* will become a thing of the past (fulfilling the theme of section one).

Note that the last verse of each of these three sections describes that which is experienced by the *wicked* (Isaiah 48:22, 57:21, and 66:24). The believer truly is blessed by having access to God's *peace*, something totally foreign to those who walk in rebelliousness and self-centeredness.

Is. 40:3 ¶ A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.

Based on verses 1-2, the nation is to be comforted, so it is natural for a statement of *comfort* to follow in verse 3. In fact, the nation receives a wealth of good news in verses 3-11 through four different voices.

The first *voice* speaks in verses 3-5. As we consider verse 3, we must realize that the common practice in the ancient world was to *Clear a way for* a visiting king, making sure his route was as *smooth* as possible. Therefore, a *way* was to be cleared *in the wilderness*, as well as a *smooth...highway* constructed *in the desert*, for the *God* of Israel (v.3). This will be fulfilled by

Elijah before Christ's Second Coming, but could have been fulfilled by *John the Baptist* had the Jews accepted Jesus at His First Coming (read Matthew 17:1-13, Luke 7:24-27 and Mark 9:2-13). It was John who cleared *the way* for Jesus' First Coming (Matthew 3:3; Malachi 3:1), but based on Mark 9:12 and Malachi 4:5, it will be *Elijah* who clears the way for Jesus' Second Coming. And, by the way, based on Isaiah 40:3, Jesus was, and is, the *God* of Israel—a *highway for our God*. He, as *God*, will also return as *King* (Revelation 19:16). Therefore, He came as a prophet, ascended to heaven as a priest, and will return as King to rule in the Millennium. The exactness of the Scriptures is amazing!

Is. 40:4 "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;

This verse confirms as well that the path of the visiting king was to be as unobstructed as possible. The first voice continues to speak here as well as in verse 5.

Is. 40:5 Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, And all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

When the King (Jesus) returns, after His path has been prepared by Elijah (and the Jews living at the end of the Tribulation have accepted Jesus as Messiah), everyone on the earth *will see* His *glory*. This is also confirmed by Jesus in Matthew 24:29-30.