

We are entering into the second section of Isaiah. In the first thirty-nine chapters, we read of God pleading with Judah to turn back to God (Isaiah 1:18). God warned of the consequences of continuing to practice injustice and the worship of idols. He spared the city of Jerusalem from the Assyrian army. But in the last chapter God warned the nation that captivity was inevitable (Isaiah 39:7).

This new section begins by speaking to those in that future captivity. It would come to pass by the very nation Isaiah predicted (Isaiah 39:5-7), but the grace of God would put it off one hundred years (586 BC). Most seminaries today teach that this section is written by a second Isaiah. That is because they don't believe the first Isaiah would have written to those people who would eventually go into captivity. That would be prophetic, and they don't believe in miracles. When conservatives respond that the apostles quoted from this portion and attributed it to Isaiah (Matthew 8:17), those learned men say, "It was simply the convention of that day." In other words, they weren't inspired. Could it be that the scholars' skepticism is a convention of our day? But then, rarely do they apply their reasoning to themselves.

The pastors' group was talking about the increasingly obvious fact that the universe had a beginning and that science is showing the world is designed. One pastor thought eventually the world would have to admit there is a creator. I don't think so. Man just comes up with ever more farfetched ideas to explain it away (Psalm 14:1). The odds of a planet like ours in this universe is so infinitesimally small that it is statistically impossible, so there must be multiverses to increase the odds. Now that is faith, or perhaps being obstinate!

Design is so obvious in nature that a prominent evolutionist has said that we must constantly remind ourselves that what we see is the product of time and chance. At the same they can't tell us how time and chance can produce information necessary for the design.

Here in Arizona we have the yucca plant. It can only be pollinated by the yucca moth. The moth then lays its eggs in the flower it has pollinated. The larvae will eat about half the seeds leaving the rest for reproduction. Which came first? The both had to exist at the same time. Each organism is dependent on the other.

Those who insist on being their own lord will find ever increasingly absurd explanations for the reality that is plainly in front of us. This is partially due to an idea of God being the judgmental, finger wagging, nagging old man they perceive to be described in the Old Testament. However, the previous thirty-nine chapters are not a demanding, mean spirited God who insists on His way, but rather a merciful God warning of the consequences of going the wrong direction (Isaiah 45:22).

Commented [PW1]: Isaiah 1:18 (ESV)
18 "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

Commented [PW2]: Isaiah 39:7 (ESV)
7 And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

Commented [PW3]: Isaiah 39:5-7 (ESV)
5 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD of hosts:
6 Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD.
7 And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

Commented [PW4]: Matthew 8:17 (ESV)
17 This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

Commented [PW5]: Psalm 14:1 (ESV)
1 The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.

Commented [PW6]: Isaiah 45:22 (ESV)
22 "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

We see a father warning his children not to ride their tricycle into the street as a loving request to spare them from injury. But those who see God as a tyrant see the same thing in their life from a teenager's perspective. You know what I mean. "What does dad know (Psalm 73:11)? He's so demanding!" And such were all of us until we responded to the Spirit of God moving upon our hearts with His love.

Captivity to a greater power, whether a nation or sin, is not God's desire. His desire is for us to know His love and wonderful plan for each of our lives (Jeremiah 29:11). That is why this section begins with a word of comfort.

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. Isaiah 40:1-2 Right up to the captivity of Jerusalem the people continued to rebel against God. Nevertheless, God still calls them His people. His heart is for them to learn from their sins and change direction. That is His heart for us as well. When we are dealing with the consequences of our idolatry, or our selfish choices, or refusal to heed God's warnings, He comes to us with tender words of comfort (Romans 5:8).

The world can be a very discouraging place. That is because of its fallen condition. We are all on our way to death. Our loved ones will die. Man's inhumanity to man is ever finding new ways to express itself. Corruption in government is reaching new heights. Our prisons are overcrowded. Our seminaries are producing liberal pastors who don't have faith in God's Word. Our education system is telling our children there is no such thing as truth. I could go on and on. But in the midst of it all, God declares comfort to us. There is an end to the struggle. There is hope in Christ.

Why should we be comforted? Judah would hear this prophecy when her seventy years of captivity were about over (Jeremiah 25:11). The consequences of her sins were dealt with. A new generation had risen. The nation would miraculously be restored. The line of David had survived. The Messiah was still coming. That is where this passage is leading us. It is the underlying theme of Isaiah. And for us today, He is waiting for us at the end of our stubborn resistance. When we finally bow our head and cry out for help, we are ready to see He has been there all along.

³ A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Isaiah 40:3 All four gospels tell us that this became the message of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23). The Holy Spirit inspired John to see this as his appointed message proclaiming the coming of the Messiah. Notice that by using this passage, John the Baptist was declaring that Jesus is God. The highway he asks us to prepare is for our God.

The wilderness and desert are not physical locations but the condition of the heart of man. Without God, our hearts are barren and dry. Our thoughts are like hyenas in that

Commented [PW7]: Psalm 73:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?"

Commented [PW8]: Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV)

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Commented [PW9]: Romans 5:8 (ESV)

⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Commented [PW10]: Jeremiah 25:11 (ESV)

¹¹ This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

Commented [PW11]: Matthew 3:3 (ESV)

³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"

Commented [PW12]: Mark 1:3 (ESV)

³ the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'"

Commented [PW13]: Luke 3:4 (ESV)

⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'

Commented [PW14]: John 1:23 (ESV)

²³ He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

desert barking out their selfish demands. The call is to get ready for things to change. We are commanded to make a highway there for our God. John declared that we do that by repenting (Matthew 3:2). **We must see ourselves as God sees us. We need to see how desperately we need the water of life** (Revelation 22:17). We have to choose life over death and hope over apathy. God can change us, but we must make that highway for Him to enter by agreeing with Him about our condition. Until we do that there is no entry point into our hearts.

The goodness of God leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). He spares us from our own foolishness time and time again, and we begin to see His mercy, grace, and love for us. Our thoughts of Him start to shift from that of a demanding tyrant to that of a patient, loving Father. The more we see of His heart and agree with it, the more the highway is opened up until the next verse comes to pass within our hearts.

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. Isaiah 40:4 This is what citizens would do to the main highway when a king was coming to visit their area. They would go out and improve the road and make repairs to places that had flooded or collapsed. It showed they honored him and welcomed his visit. And this is what we need to do if we would have the King of kings at home in our hearts. We welcome the King by removing the obstacles in our hearts.

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. Isaiah 40:5 John the beloved tells us that Jesus manifested the glory of God (John 1:14). To some extent the world is seeing it as the Gospel is published in the languages of the world. As Christians let the life of Christ in them shine, the world sees Jesus' glory. But as we have seen before, there are intermediate and ultimate fulfillments. Certainly Jesus' first coming and our lives are just an intermediate fulfillment.

In several prophetic passages regarding the Second Coming in great glory, every eye is said to see Him (Matthew 24:30; Revelation 1:7). The eyes of all who ever lived will see Jesus' unveiled glory as He returns to judge the earth. Some will repent at the sight of Him (Zechariah 12:10) while others seek to hide from His presence (Revelation 6:15-16).

In verse two a voice cries that the time of captivity is almost over. In verse three the voice cries out regarding preparing the way for the LORD. Now in verse six a voice cries out regarding the frailty of man and the permanence of God's Word. *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.* Isaiah 40:6-7

Commented [PW15]: Matthew 3:2 (ESV)

² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Commented [PW16]: Revelation 22:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

Commented [PW17]: Romans 2:4 (ESV)

⁴ Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

Commented [PW18]: John 1:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Commented [PW19]: Matthew 24:30 (ESV)

³⁰ Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Commented [PW20]: Revelation 1:7 (ESV)

⁷ Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

Commented [PW21]: Zechariah 12:10 (NIV)

¹⁰ "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

Commented [PW22]: Revelation 6:15-16 (NIV)

¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains.

¹⁶ They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!

When we look at the three cries together we see a message to all humanity. **1. We are in bondage to sin, but that time of bondage can end. 2. Prepare your heart for the coming of the LORD. 3. He is the only One that gives our frail flesh eternal purpose. Without Him we will perish** (John 3:36). That is the Gospel in three short declarations.

Man tends to think he is invincible, especially in his youth. As we age we increasingly see how fragile life is. Loved ones die. Illness strikes. We have some close calls, and we begin to see what God was saying through Isaiah. Get right with God while you have time. Our life has been compared to a dot that begins a line that goes on forever. If we knew how brief this dot of a life is, we'd certainly invest it in the line that is before us. This is the cry of the as yet unidentified voice. Life is short. Get serious about it. Think about what matters, about what is eternal. Act with wisdom (James 4:14).

⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. Isaiah 40:8 We look on the brevity of life and realize that we should be preparing the way for the Word to enter our hearts. This Word of the Lord is forever. The so called scholars can redefine it any way they want, but it doesn't change its beauty or power. Their little wooden hammers of man's ideas are hammering on the granite mountain of the enduring Word of God. A billion of their hammers will wear away without any effect on the mountain of God's Word.

The emergent church is based on the philosophy of evolution being the source of this world. Therefore, they conclude that the Bible is a collection of good stories. We can't know which are allegories and which are true, but certainly the miraculous is all allegory. Bang, bang, bang, go the little wooden hammers as they wear themselves out. Philosopher and theologian go to their graves like withered grass, but the Word of God is unchanged. They do influence young minds, that is, until the Spirit of God moves on those young hearts and they begin to see the power of Almighty God and His own intervention in their lives. Then the veil is lifted and suddenly everything from nothing sounds absurd. Intelligence from non-intelligence sounds unintelligent. Then the Christian they once thought believed in fairytales is now their brother or sister in the faith. Sound familiar? It is the story many of you share.

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!" Isaiah 40:9 These verses can also be translated, "O herald of good news to Zion," and "O herald of good news to Jerusalem." I think that fits the context better. Zion and Jerusalem are the people in captivity, but God still calls them His special city. Again, this was true when Jesus came to Jerusalem and people could see God (John 14:9). It will be ultimately true when He comes again in glory. It is then the Jewish people as a whole will finally recognize Jesus is their God (Zechariah 13:1).

Zechariah tells us this will happen during a time of distress for Jerusalem. It will appear that they are doomed, just as it did when Pharaoh's army closed in on Israel at the

Commented [PW23]: John 3:36 (ESV)

³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Commented [PW24]: James 4:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

Commented [PW25]: John 14:9 (ESV)

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Commented [PW26]: Zechariah 13:1 (ESV)

¹ "On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

waters of the Red Sea. The LORD will fight for them as they mourn over their past rejection of their Savior (Zechariah 14:2-3). While some are quietly declaring the Good News today in Israel, in that day it will be shouted from the mountaintops.

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. Isaiah 40:10 Jesus came as a Lamb the first time. He is coming as a Lion to rule and reign the next time. He is coming in power and great glory. Isaiah refers to Jesus as "the arm of the Lord" (Isaiah 53:1). Jesus will reign on Zion (Isaiah 24:23). Evil will be swiftly dealt with. All the voices that have asked why God doesn't wipe out evil will have their answer and be out of excuses. The Millennium will show once and for all that the real problem is not how God acts, but how we act (Revelation 20:7-9).

Jesus will bring His reward and recompense with Him. Some will be justly compensated for a life of service to Jesus. Others will be punished for their evil actions toward others. In my message *Rewards* I explained that these words, "reward" and "recompense" mean both blessing and punishment. Jesus promised to reward us for service rendered to Him. It is His sense of justice. We know that any good thing we accomplish is because of Him, yet His justice and grace assure we will be rewarded (Matthew 10:42).

The chapter began as a word of comfort. It is the introduction for the rest of the book, for the coming of the Messiah is the most comforting hope the world had. Now that we know He has come, we look back on what He accomplished as our hope of eternity in His presence.

I close on another word of comfort. *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.* Isaiah 40:11 He is the Shepherd of Psalm 23, our LORD. He declared He is the good shepherd in John 10:11, and explained that He knows each of us by name (John 10:3).

Shepherd's make sure to lead their sheep to pleasant pastures. He gives us the Word of God for our spiritual sustenance and the Holy Spirit to help us digest it. He looks after our wounds. He protects us from the predators. He guides us through life. He tends to us like no other. He is the Good Shepherd to whom none can compare.

Those who are young, immature in the faith, He carries in His bosom. Some of us remember that honeymoon time when we first came to Christ and He seemed to intervene constantly. We weren't strong enough to face adversity, so He protected us by holding us in His arms. Don't you love the imagery!

The shepherd is different from a cattleman in that he leads instead of drives. For those with little lambs that would have a hard time keeping up, that is a person who is discipling a new believer, He will lead at a pace that both can maintain. He is concerned about each and every sheep in His flock. He knows you. He knows your need. He

Commented [PW27]: Zechariah 14:2-3 (ESV)

² For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped. Half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

³ Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle.

Commented [PW28]: Isaiah 53:1 (ESV)

¹ Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

Commented [PW29]: Isaiah 24:23 (ESV)

²³ Then the moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed, for the LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and his glory will be before his elders.

Commented [PW30]: Revelation 20:7-9 (ESV)

⁷ And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison

⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea.

⁹ And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them,

Commented [PW31]: Matthew 10:42 (ESV)

⁴² And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."

Commented [PW32]: John 10:11 (ESV)

¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Commented [PW33]: John 10:3 (ESV)

³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

knows how fast you can go (Genesis 39:13-14). He'll steer you away from the poisonous weeds and lead you to good pasture and calm water if you'll just keep following Him (Psalm 23:2).

This is what the people of Judah in captivity were told to look forward to. The line of David was intact. A Savior would be born, a Son would be given (Isaiah 9:6). The answer to our sin debt was the Lamb of God (John 1:29). They could look forward in hope. We can look back in assurance. It is the reason for their souls and ours to find comfort. Our shepherd will lead us through this fallen world and on to glory.

Questions

- 1 Why is it so hard to believe in miracles?
- 2 How is God like a good father?
- 3 What was John the Baptist's message?
- 4 What is verse 4 about?
- 5 How are the 3 cries connected?
- 6 How fragile is life? What is eternal?
- 7 How can people see the truth?
- 8 When will Israel be saved?
- 9 Who will see Jesus' return?
- 10 In what ways is Jesus a good shepherd?
- 11 What is the comfort for us today?

Commented [PW34]: Genesis 33:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail, and that the nursing flocks and herds are a care to me. If they are driven hard for one day, all the flocks will die.

¹⁴ Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, at the pace of the livestock that are ahead of me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir."

Commented [PW35]: Psalm 23:2 (ESV)

² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

Commented [PW36]: Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Commented [PW37]: John 1:29 (ESV)

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"