

## A COMFORTING WORD

We've all heard the phrase, "light at the end of the tunnel." These words speak of hope, assurance, confidence, and comfort. When we see the light at the end of the tunnel, then we know we are moving in the right direction as we work through problems, the time of the suffering or despair is limited, and a better day of lightness awaits to replace the darkness of the present. There are many situations in life that represent "dark tunnels" to each of us. It could be an extended illness and the light that brings comforts could be words from the medical community that the cause of the illness has been identified and they can now treat the problem properly. It might be financial difficulty in a business and the light at the end of the tunnel could be a large volume customer gives you a contract that puts your business at full capacity for the next five years. It even could be a situation in which an entire nation is under bondage to another nation and a prophetic word comes to these people that there is purpose in that bondage and that purpose has been accomplished. This was the situation for Judah when they were in Babylon. It was a situation of despair and hopelessness. Many could not see an end to it all; however, God had already spoken to them, through his prophet Isaiah, words of comfort.

**ISAIAH 40:1-2** The captivity of exile in Babylon was not a concentration camp existence. In fact, the Jews were productive members of that society with some being successful businessmen. Nevertheless, they were a people with extremely strong ties to their homeland – after all it was the Promised Land. The separation was difficult for them emotionally and spiritually. As is recorded in Psalms 137, they grieved and longed for the land of Israel.

Babylon was not the final destination and purpose for the Jews. God's purpose for these people had not changed. He still intended to bless all nations of the earth through these descendants of Abraham. This captivity was a detour along the way because of the sinfulness of the people. He still regarded them as His chosen people. In fact, they are referred to as "My people". Prior to the captivity, God sent them a message through Hosea that they were going to be regarded as "not My people". You may recall God told Hosea to name his second child Lo-ammi which literally means "not My people". But He also gave a word of comfort through Hosea in that one day they would again be referred to as "My people" or Ammi. God sends His word of comfort along side the word of chastisement and in doing so, confirms His love for us.

The word "comfort" in this passage is not our modern day definition of ease and luxury, but implies reassurance and peace of mind. We have no promise of being comfortable, but certainly we are to be comforted. Comforting is one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit to the Church. As is the case with the blessings we receive from God, we are to pass on similar blessing to others. As we are comforted and reassured, then we are to comfort and encourage others.

This passage is written as if the time of the captivity were drawing near the end. To God, Who is Eternal and sees the end from the beginning, then it could be viewed as an accomplished fact even though it had not occurred in time. This promise was intended to be a tender word spoken to the heart of the people that would help them during the time of tribulation and trial. We should also be storing away the word of God in our hearts so that it will be there to bring comfort to us in times of testing and problems. The message was that this time of battle or warfare and hard service (the punishment for their sins) would run its course and accomplish its purpose of bringing pardon for the sins and iniquity of the people. Sin has consequences and though God forgives us when we confess our sins, we will likely experience the consequences of our choices.

**ISAIAH 40:3-5** Isaiah's prophecy covered broad time spans. Part of the prophetic word dealt with the immediate problems of Judah and the impending fall of Jerusalem to the forces of Babylon. We just saw verses that referred to the end of the period of captivity that would be almost a hundred years away. Now we see a message related to events that would occur some 700 years in the future. John the Baptist saw himself as the fulfillment of this prophecy. He was that voice that cried out for the preparation of the way of the Lord. The imagery used here related to building or repair of roads

that was done when a king would travel. Great preparation would be made to make sure all went well for him. When John the Baptist called the people to repentance he was preparing a road for people to be ready to receive the message and person of the Messiah. In a spiritual sense, the filling in of valleys can be related to a person seeing that God loves him and wants what is best for him. Many people have such a low opinion of themselves they cannot accept that salvation is for them. These are the hopeless of society. The mountains and hills that are to be made low can be related to the proud and self-exalted people who think they don't need salvation. People have to leave this sort of pride before the Lord can get through to them.

When Jesus came, He did show us the glory of the Lord. People did see the nature and character of God in action. Isaiah was confident in these prophecies because they were the word of God.

**ISAIAH 40:6-8** The message here is clearly that mankind can do nothing to save himself. This is the reason God came in the flesh (in the Person of Jesus Christ) to provide Himself a sacrifice for our sin so that we might be saved. Many have proposed their own plans of salvation, but none work because of the weakness of humanity as manifested in the old sin nature. The true and only workable plan of salvation is that proposed and implemented by God and His word stands forever. We have seen some of Isaiah's prophecies come to pass and others are yet to happen. This next passage may well be one of those that is yet to come.

**ISAIAH 40:9-11** If we can assume spiritual Zion is the Church, then see here a precursor of the Great Commission. God's people are to proclaim the gospel (good tidings). The starting place for proclamation is among God's people. There is a call for boldness. We see some fulfillment of this call in the ministry of the early Christians as they boldly stood up in the high religious and governmental places to declare the message that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior and Lord of all. When we proclaim Jesus to the world, we are in effect saying "Here is your God."

There is an indication this passage also points to the Second Coming of Jesus, when He comes to reign in physical presence on earth. The ideal situation Isaiah describes here can exist only when there is an implemented victory over sin, when Satan has been rendered powerless and Jesus is recognized as Lord by all. We are told every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

We see the theme of comfort and assurance being played out in the picture of the Shepherd gently caring for His sheep. This society was very familiar with the care that is needed for sheep and there was a realization that people are somewhat like sheep.

Notice the call Isaiah makes to the people to be observant of what is around them. The word he used was "behold". Behold your God. Behold God's might and power to save. Behold the results of all God had done for them. We need to be sensitized to this also. God has blessed us in so many ways and yet we don't take note of Him, His power, or what He has provided for us. All these things, especially His presence, are sources of comfort to us.

The strength we have when difficult days are upon us must be founded upon the Hope we have in Christ. Just as God's word spoken by ancient prophets gave His people hope, so today, we can have hope by trusting in His word.