

Comfort In The Darkest Hour

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“Isaiah Chapters 40ff. serve to answer the dark picture that the thirty-ninth chapter had created. They see the people of God in human bondage, yet they go far deeper and look to the people as being in bondage spiritually, subject to the taskmaster of sin. From this bondage there is to be a deliverer, the Servant of the Lord. As they face the future the people are assured that God will be with them in the vicissitudes of their existence” (**The Book of Isaiah**, Vol. III, Young, 17). With this in mind, let us remember that we too may find ourselves sinking deep in dark times. The question that we must all ask ourselves, however, is what we will do in response to the suffering. When faced with trials, will we look to the future with gladness and hope, knowing that something far better awaits at the close of this life? Or will we look on and lose faith?

Isaiah 40:1-3

“Comfort, O comfort My people,” says your God” (**Isaiah 40:1**). It seems that this is a direct command to the prophets of that day to comfort the people of Judah with the words about to be unfolded in Isaiah’s book. After reading such prophecies of doom, it would be necessary for the messengers of God to go to those Jews who still remain righteous and offer hope to them. It can be very disheartening for faithful individuals to find themselves no more blessed than the evil people around them. In the case of this chapter, Isaiah is being told to comfort the blameless Jews because they have just been informed that they will be led into captivity right along with their more disreputable brothers and sisters. Are there times when good people in a nation suffer because of the vast majority of evil people there? Are there any examples in the Bible of this? Think about Daniel and his three friends, nicknamed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. They were good men, but were led into Babylonian captivity in spite of their righteousness. One of the primary lessons for us from **40:1** is that we have an obligation to comfort the people around us. When we witness someone crying, it is our duty as Christians and representatives of God to investigate, or to be a shoulder to cry on when necessary (**Romans 12:15**).

“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” (**40:2**). Isaiah is now given the specific message of blessing that is to be presented to the people of Jerusalem. *“Her warfare has ended”* is a phrase that means Jerusalem’s call to war is over. That is, there would come a time when there would no longer be a need to draft soldiers into a physical army. One thing that we must understand about this text is that it is written in the present-tense, but surely looks to the future for its fulfillment. Otherwise, the whole of the prophecy would be a lie – Jerusalem was besieged and went to war numerous times after this point in Jewish history, so the text must be looking toward a future cessation of physical warfare. If this is true, then it is clear the Kingdom of Christians is what is meant (**2 Corinthians 10:3-6**).

“Her iniquity has been removed.” Again, these things must be referring to a point in the future, because no sins were removed from the world until Christ died (**Hebrews 10:11-18**). What is the one thing that removes our iniquity? Is there any source but God from which the blessings of forgiveness flow? Consider **Acts 4:12**.

“That she has received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” This verse actually has two interpretations, and both are valuable. First, the text could mean that Jerusalem has received an adequate amount of punishment for her sins – that is, adequate enough to satisfy God’s righteous ends. Truly, there is no punishment that can make up for our sins, but one writer puts it well when he writes, *“If the word refers to suffering or punishment, it indicates that in God’s sight Jerusalem has suffered sufficiently because of her sins. Although she has not been punished as much as she deserved, nevertheless her punishment has been sufficient to accomplish its purpose”* (Young, 24). On the other hand, the word double could refer to a double blessing offered to Jerusalem after her many travails and punishments. Having suffered so much, God may be promising that a time will come when the gift of His Servant would be so far beyond what they truly deserve that it can only be described as “double.”

“A voice is calling, ‘Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God’” (40:3). This verse is quoted in **Mark 1:3** as being fulfilled by John the baptist as he prepared the way for Jesus, who is the fulfillment of this and every other Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. We are so blessed to be the beneficiaries of these divine promises!