

# Isaiah

## Comfort and Restoration

Isaiah 53:1-5

March 21, 2020

### Today

Chapter 39 ended on an ominous note:

- **Isaiah 39:6-7** - Behold, the days are coming when all that *is* in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the LORD. <sup>7</sup> 'And they shall take away *some* of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.
- 

We now begin a new section - chapters 40-66 contain prophecies and proclamations that were designed to comfort God's people when they found themselves in Babylonian captivity. These 27 chapters constitute one of the richest theological collections in all the Bible and can easily be divided into 3 sections:

- Chapters 40-48 – God vs. Idols
- Chapters 49-53 – Salvation through God's Chosen Servant
- Chapters 54-66 – Future Glory of God's People

### Section 1 – God vs. Idols

Chapters 40-48 contain one of most powerful arguments for the existence of God. A recurring theme throughout this section is God's challenge to idols and to the people who worship them to prove their existence.

The first 11 verses of chapter 40 serve as a prologue offering comfort and assurance:

- **Isaiah 40:3-5** - The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; <sup>5</sup> The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see *it* together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."  
{John the Baptist used the very same words as he prepared the way for Jesus - see Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23}

Now we come to a series of rhetorical questions that point to one undeniable truth – the God of heaven is unlike any other manmade god:

- **Isaiah 40:12-14** - Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? <sup>13</sup> Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? <sup>14</sup> Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?
- **Isaiah 40:18** - To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to?
- **Isaiah 40:21-22** - Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? <sup>22</sup> He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.
- **Isaiah 40:28-31** - Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. <sup>29</sup> He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. <sup>30</sup> Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; <sup>31</sup> but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.
- **Isaiah 41:1-4** - Be silent before me, you islands! Let the nations renew their strength! Let them come forward and speak; let us meet together at the place of judgment. <sup>2</sup> "Who has stirred up one from the east, calling him in righteousness to his service? He hands nations over to him and subdues kings before him. He turns them to dust with his sword, to windblown chaff with his bow. <sup>3</sup> He pursues them and moves on unscathed, by a path his feet have not traveled before. <sup>4</sup> Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD-- with the first of them and with the last-- I am he."
- **Isaiah 41:10** - So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

God has laid out His case and now He invites the other gods to make their case:

- **Isaiah 41:21-24** - "Present your case," says the LORD. "Set forth your arguments," says Jacob's King. <sup>22</sup> "Bring in *your idols* to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, <sup>23</sup> tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear. <sup>24</sup> But you are less than nothing and your works are utterly worthless; he who chooses you is detestable.

Next Isaiah described God's care for Israel and His promise to deliver them:

- **Isaiah 42:1** - Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.
- **Isaiah 43:10-13** - "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. <sup>11</sup> I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. <sup>12</sup> I have revealed and saved and proclaimed-- I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "that I am God. <sup>13</sup> Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?"
- **Isaiah 44:24-26** - This is what the LORD says-- your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the LORD, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, <sup>25</sup> who foils the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners, who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense, <sup>26</sup> who carries out the words of his servants and fulfills the predictions of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, 'It shall be inhabited,' of the towns of Judah, 'They shall be built,' and of their ruins, 'I will restore them,'

Then Isaiah names the deliverer = Cyrus:

- **Isaiah 44:28 - 45:1** - who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."' This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut. {see **Ezra 1**}

The primary theme of chapters 46-48 is that Yahweh will defeat Babylon {a future promise}, which will permit Judah to return home in freedom and joyous triumph - **This is the Gospel: Yahweh wins, Babylon loses and Yahweh's people are free.**

## Section 2 – Salvation through God's Chosen Servant

God continues to extend words of comfort to those who will experience exile.

- **Isaiah 51:11-12** - The ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. <sup>12</sup> "I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men, the sons of men, who are but grass,
- **Isaiah 52:6-7** - Therefore my people will know my name; therefore, in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I." <sup>7</sup> How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

The focus, however, is on the Suffering Servant, who will bring ultimate redemption:

**Isaiah 53:1-12** - Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? <sup>2</sup> He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. <sup>4</sup> Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.... <sup>11</sup> After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. <sup>12</sup> Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Outwardly, the exile will be responsible for ruining the lives of God's People. However, Section 2 points out that their real problem is sin and the only cure for that problem is the Suffering Servant. If they can understand that they will go into exile because of their sin, then they will look not only hope for a return to their homeland but more importantly, they will desire the healing of their sins.

Through the multitude of verses describing the Suffering Servant, the Israelites should begin to realize the cost of their salvation. It is easy enough to arrange for their passage back to Judah and as the first sections indicates, God has already chosen that deliverer, Cyrus. The Suffering Servant is the real Savior, however, because He will die for their sins. As a result, the Suffering Servant should be the focus of all their hope.

## Section 3 – Future Glory of God's People

The final section contains more promises of the future glory of God's People, which God graciously extends to Gentiles:

- **Isaiah 54:11-14** - O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. <sup>12</sup> I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones. <sup>13</sup> All your sons will be taught by the LORD, and great will be your children's peace. <sup>14</sup> In righteousness you will be established: Tyranny will be far from you; you will have nothing to fear. Terror will be far removed; it will not come near you.
- **Isaiah 55:6-11** - Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.
- **Isaiah 56:6-7** - And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant-- <sup>7</sup> these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."

Those who will go into captivity are then reminded of the conditions that led to their exile and the humility and repentance that will lead to restoration and peace with God:

- **56:9-12** - Her watchmen (i.e., religious leaders) failed in their duties.
- **57:1-2** - The death of the righteous became a blessing because it removed them from such evil.
- **57:3-14** - Their idolatry profited them nothing and cost them everything.
- **57:15-21** - Humility brings peace with God, but for the wicked there is no peace.

For Isaiah true peace with God begins by doing away with the religious fog {formalism} and replacing it with the practice of true religion:

- **Isaiah 58:5-14** - Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? <sup>6</sup> "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? <sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? <sup>8</sup> Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. <sup>9</sup> Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, <sup>10</sup> and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. <sup>11</sup> The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. <sup>12</sup> Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings. <sup>13</sup> "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, <sup>14</sup> then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." The mouth of the LORD has spoken.

God has every right to be angry and His people deserve what they get, but for those who turn from their transgressions a Redeemer has been promised!!

- **Isaiah 59:20** - "The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins," declares the LORD.

The final seven chapters {60-66} concentrate on the glory to come for restored Zion – even the Gentiles will come. The mission of the Servant {Christ} is reviewed, prompting Isaiah to express great joy for His salvation. Isaiah also prays for the present condition of Israel **{63:7-64:12}**, and the Lord responds with a promise of a glorious new creation for the remnant who heed His call.

- **Isaiah 65:17-25** - Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.... <sup>25</sup> The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD.
- **Revelation 21:1-5** - Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." <sup>5</sup> He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

We will end Isaiah with these words:

- **Isaiah 66:1-2** - This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? <sup>2</sup> Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the LORD. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.

## Take Aways

Isaiah is one of the most important books in all Scripture.

Like most of the Old Testament Prophets, Isaiah was called to announce the “Bad News” regarding the judgments to come because of Israel/Judah’s many and varied sins. Yet, he was also called to announce the “Good News” of a coming Redeemer Who would be “**pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities... through Whose wounds we would be healed.**” {53:5}

Like most Old Testament Prophets, Isaiah also devoted time to the “Bad News” of the judgments of God upon the Nations for their many and varied sins. Yet, he also announced the “Good News” of future blessing and inclusion with God’s People:

- **Isaiah 56:6-7** - And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant-- <sup>7</sup> these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."

Those promised blessings to Gentile believers include you and me – That is indeed “GOOD NEWS”!!

Finally, God inspired Isaiah to declare these words - *“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, <sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor....”* {Isaiah 61:1-3}

Some 700 years later, at the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus walked into His local synagogue on Sabbath morning and stood up to read:

- **Luke 4:17-21** - The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: <sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." <sup>20</sup> Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, <sup>21</sup> and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Isaiah used language and imagery that the readers of his day would understand but the message remains the same in 2020:

**Yahweh wins, Babylon loses and Yahweh’s people are free.**