

Exegetical Notes – Isaiah 40:1-11
“The Prophecy Fulfilled: Here IS Your God”

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(During Advent 2024, we will leave our study of 2 Samuel and do an exegetical study entitled, **The Prophecy Fulfilled**. We will look at four passages from the book of Isaiah which Christians believe prophesy the birth of the Messiah. It is important for those joining this study to remember several things as we begin this study.

The first of these things is that this is a Christian view of these passages. The Jewish community does not believe that these passages speak to the birth of THE Messiah. They believe that these passages speak to specific times in the history of Israel and to particular events in Israel’s history.

The second of these things is that the Jews do not believe in the coming of THE Messiah but in the coming of messiahs. In Hebrew, the word “messiah” is plural. The word means “anointed ones.” The Jews believe that God raises up a messiah, or anointed one, to lead them through the current crisis that they face. These messiahs are many throughout their ancient and modern history. The Jews believe that there have been many messiahs.

Christians believe that the Hebrew word refers to Jesus. They explain the plural nature of the word as an “honorific plural.” The use of the plural to impart honor to the one who bears it is common in our history. (The king of England, for instance, is referred to as “we,” even though he is only one person.) This use of the plural has fallen into disfavor in our time. None-the-less, Christians believe that this is why the Hebrew plural is used in passages in the Old Testament which refer to THE Messiah.

The third of these things is that the Old Testament gives a very specific test for determining if a prophet is a “TRUE” prophet. Deuteronomy 18:22 says, *“If what a prophet proclaims in the name of YHWH does not take place or come true, that is a message YHWH has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do*

not be afraid of him.” The prophet whose words do not come true is to be put to death (see Deuteronomy 13:2). This would be an ineffective test of the prophet’s veracity if the words the prophet spoke were about events far in the future. How could this test be applied to Isaiah if Isaiah was speaking about events which would not happen for a thousand years after his death?

Christians believe that the prophecy of Isaiah is a dual prophecy. It talks about two things. One of these things happens during the life of Isaiah and affects the immediate future and the other speaks of the coming of THE MESSIAH, Jesus.

These problems prevented the Jews from understanding who Jesus was in the first century, too. Jesus and Paul spoke of Jesus as THE Messiah, the savior of the world. But the Jews of their day were looking for A messiah; one who would come to free them from Roman rule.)

The Historical Setting (See 2 Kings 18:1-25:13):

It is believed that Isaiah the prophet died in the year 686BC. That would mean that Isaiah died at the end of the reign of King Hezekiah (715-686BC.) Hezekiah was a good king who instituted religious and civil reforms which restored Judah to following YHWH. The first part of the book of Isaiah deals with this period in Judah’s history. However, Isaiah understood that the kingdom of David would continue to exist only as long as the descendant of David who sat on David’s throne was obedient to YHWH. He realized that if Judah’s king did not follow God’s plan for the nation, the nation of Judah would fall. He saw a time when Judah would be ruled by those who were not descendants of David. Beginning in Isaiah chapter 40 is recorded an account of the days when disobedient Judah would turn again to God and be restored as the people of God.

When Hezekiah died, Manasseh, his son, became king of Judah. He was an evil king who abandoned the reforms set in place by his father and reinstated the evil practices of his grandfather, Ahaz. He reigned from 695 to 642.

Manasseh was followed by Amon his son. Amon was an evil king who followed the ways of his father. He reigned from 642 to 640 BC.

Amon was followed by his son, Josiah who reigned from 640-609 BC. Josiah was a good king who instituted massive religious reforms in Judah. During the reigns of Manasseh and Amon, the Torah, the recorded word of God had been entirely disregarded and lost. In Josiah's time, the Torah was rediscovered and Judah attempted to live by the word of the Lord.

Josiah was followed by his son Jehoahaz who disregarded the reforms begun by his father. His reign was in the year 609BC. But it lasted only a few months. Egypt invaded Judah and Jehoahaz was replaced as Judah's king by Jehoiakim. Jehoahaz was taken to Egypt as prisoner and died there.

Jehoiakim (aka Eliakim) was Jehoahaz' brother. Josiah was Jehoiakim's father. He reigned over Judah from 609 to 597BC. He was a puppet king and did evil in the sight of God. During the reign of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, invaded Egypt and took control of all the lands which belonged to Egypt including Judah. Jehoiakim became a puppet king who served the king of Babylon. In the year 597BC, he rebelled against the king of Babylon. Judah was again defeated.

The king of Babylon put Jehoiachin on Judah's throne. Jehoiachin was the son of Jehoiakim and did what was evil in God's sight as had his father. He became Judah's king in 597BC and reigned from David's throne for only three months. He was not loyal to the Babylonians so they invaded Judah again. This time, the city of Jerusalem was not destroyed, but the king was taken prisoner, the temple and the king's palace were sacked, and 10,000 people were taken into exile along with the royal family and the army of Judah.

Zedekiah (aka Mattaniah) was made Judah's king. He was Jehoiachin's uncle. He reigned from 597 to 586BC. He rebelled against Babylon. Again, the king of Babylon invaded Judah. He besieged Jerusalem for 2 years. The city fell and the king of Babylon destroyed the city and the temple. The entire population of Jerusalem was deported. The nation of Israel (Israel and Judah) no longer existed. Nebuchadnezzar made Gedaliah, who was not a descendant of David, governor of the province of Judah in 586BC.

Because Judah and Israel had not followed the way of the Lord, there came a day when God's judgment fell and the throne of David was empty. But God had promised that a descendant of David would reign on David's throne forever.

Before his death Isaiah saw this. Beginning in chapter forty of Isaiah, the prophet began to speak to Judah about the time when the nation would be restored. 70 years after Judah's fall the exile ended. The Jews were allowed to return to their homeland. But the descendant of David who would sit on David's throne did not come until the birth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

The Greater Meaning

Verses 1-2

***¹ Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.***

***² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.***

- Israel, the northern kingdom, had fallen to Assyria because she had not followed the word of the Lord. Hezekiah was king of Judah and had begun sweeping religious reforms in Judah, the southern kingdom, that would bring Judah back into obedience with God's word. But, Isaiah knew that the religious reforms of Hezekiah would not last long after Hezekiah's death. He knew that, eventually, Judah, too, would fall. Perhaps he saw this because of Hezekiah's mistake in showing the Babylonians the wealth and military resources of Judah (see Isaiah 39 and 2 Kings 20). But Isaiah remembered the promise of God found in 2 Samuel 7. God had said he would punish Judah's kings when they were disobedient to Him, but David's line would reign on Judah's throne forever. He, therefore, wrote words to comfort Judah. Though they may be punished for their disobedience, God would restore them, because God was faithful and His word could be trusted.
- The double use of the word "comfort" is a literary form which implies extra measure and absolute assurance. Israel's comfort will be beyond measure and certain beyond doubt because God is faithful.
- "Her hard service has been completed" means that she has paid for her disobedience.
- "Her sin has been paid for" means she is forgiven by God for her disobedience.
- "Received double" means that it is all settled beyond doubt.

- The people of Judah should rejoice because God is faithful and God is loving. He has not abandoned them as they abandoned Him. God will restore them and keep his promise to David.

Verses 3-5

³ ***A voice of one calling:***

***“In the wilderness prepare
the way for the LORD;
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.***

⁴ ***Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.***

⁵ ***And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.***

For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

- Isaiah says that there is a voice in the wilderness calling the people to prepare for the coming of YHWH.
- The voice calls for people to prepare for YHWH’s coming by removing any obstacle in the way. The way of the Lord is to be straight and flat and smooth. Every obstacle to God’s coming is to be removed physically and in the hearts of God’s people. There shall be no resistance.
- All the earth will see the glory of God and they will all see it together.
- These words certainly speak to the time when Judah’s captivity in Babylon ended. However in Matthew 3:3, these words are applied to John the Baptist. He is the voice crying in the wilderness and his call is for the world to prepare for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, at the time of Jesus’ birth and at His second coming.
- The voice must cry out for it is God’s command that he do so.

Verses 6-8

⁶ ***A voice says, “Cry out.”***

And I said, “What shall I cry?”

***“All people are like grass,
and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.***

⁷ ***The grass withers and the flowers fall,***

***because the breath of the LORD blows on them.
Surely the people are grass.***

***⁸The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures forever.”***

- The voice that is command by God to speak is confused by what his message should be. He asks God what he should say and gives the reason for his confusion.
- He realizes that you cannot count on people to be faithful to God. Their faithfulness blooms and dies. There is nothing reliable in people. You cannot trust them.
- Only God’s word is dependable and true! Only God can be trusted to remain faithful.

Verses 9-11

***⁹You who bring good news to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.***

***You who bring good news to Jerusalem,
lift up your voice with a shout,
lift it up, do not be afraid;
say to the towns of Judah,
“Here is your God!”***

***¹⁰See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,
and he rules with a mighty arm.***

***See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.***

***¹¹He tends his flock like a shepherd:
He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.***

- Isaiah proclaims that the voice in the wilderness has gotten the message! He is to go up on the mountain and speak the words loudly to Jerusalem. He is to make sure that this message is heard by the people of God.
- He is to say to Judah, “Immanuel,” “Here is your God,” “God is with us!”
- He is to say that “God’s recompense is with Him.” It means that God has, himself, paid the price of His blessing. The cost of God’s blessing has been paid by God. This is what happened when Jesus died for our sins. He was God’s recompense. He paid the price of our salvation. The restoration of

Judah after the exile was like that. The government changed its mind and allowed them to return and rebuild Jerusalem mysteriously. They did not earn their salvation then either. But the ultimate recompense is THE Messiah, Jesus Christ.

- He, YHWH, will tend to the needs of His people as a shepherd cares for his sheep. Jesus, THE Messiah, is the Good Shepherd. The words of the prophet speak to Him. He is the descendant of David who will reign from David's throne forever and ever. He will show that God is loving and faithful.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon based on Isaiah 40:1-11. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. All rights are reserved by Cornerstone Fellowship & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)