

Isaiah 40 • The Arm of the Lord

Introduction

The context for reading chapter 40 should be the preceding section involving condemnation. Surely, for their apostasy, Judah and Jerusalem will come under God's judgment at the hands of the Babylonian Empire. Though judgment awaits in the future, so does hope. Therefore, God speaks to His beaten and rejected people with the words, "Comfort, O comfort My people." The foreshadowing for God's rescue and comfort of His people is found in the concept of the "remnant." God will preserve the Holy Seed through the remnant that He Himself will protect, and through this remnant God will carry out His plan to bring lasting peace and righteousness on the earth.

"Now in that day the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped, will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel.

A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.

For though your people, O Israel, may be like the sand of the sea,

Only a remnant within them will return;

A destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness."

Isaiah 10:20-22

¹"Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God.

²"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."

[Read v.1-2]

Q: Why is "Jerusalem" named (say, instead of Samaria or Israel), and to whom does this refer?

A: Jerusalem is the holy city, the city of Zion, God's capital for His name on the earth. Jerusalem refers to God's people —specifically, the Jews —and more specifically, the remnant. (The word "Jew" is a shortened form of "Judah," referring to those who originate in Judah. It's easier to say "Jew" than "Judahite.") Samaria and Israel are not named because they were the totally apostate Northern Kingdom who had been dispersed a long time before. Yet, in the providence of God, He will bring comfort even to the Dispersion.

Q: What is the good news that is being stated in verse 2?

A: That all warfare has ended, her sin has been removed, her punishment is complete. Therefore, she can look forward to peace.

Application: What lesson do we learn about God concerning His children, even when they disobey and stray?

³A voice is calling,
"Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness;
Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴Let every valley be lifted up,
And every mountain and hill be made low;

And let the rough ground become a plain,
And the rugged terrain a broad valley;

⁵Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
And all flesh will see it together;
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

⁶A voice says, "Call out."
Then he answered, "What shall I call out?"

All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is

[Read v.3-8]

Q: In the NT, verse 3 was quoted to refer to whom? (See Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23.)

A: John the Baptist. He would "clear the way for the LORD" by announcing and introducing Him (Jesus).

Q: What is the significance of verse 4?

A: When royalty traveled in ancient times, slaves would go out ahead and make the roads smooth by leveling rough surfaces and filling in ruts and gullies. Therefore, John the Baptist would announce the arrival of a king. But there is also a dual, immediate meaning that the Lord will prepare the way for their return from Babylon to the land of Israel.

Q: To what future era in history is verse 5 referring to?

A: The Second Coming of Christ specifically, although His First Coming is alluded to here as well. The whole earth will benefit by His First Coming, but the "all flesh" can only be His Second Coming.

like the flower of the field.
⁷The grass withers, the flower fades,
When the breath of the LORD blows upon
it;
Surely the people are grass.
⁸The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever.

⁹Get yourself up on a high mountain,
O Zion, bearer of good news,
Lift up your voice mightily,
O Jerusalem, bearer of good news;
Lift it up, do not fear.
Say to the cities of Judah,
“Here is your God!”
¹⁰Behold, the Lord GOD will come with
might,
With His arm ruling for Him.
Behold, His reward is with Him
And His recompense before Him.
¹¹Like a shepherd He will tend His flock,
In His arm He will gather the lambs
And carry them in His bosom;
He will gently lead the nursing ewes.

¹²Who has measured the waters in the
hollow of His hand,
And marked off the heavens by the span,
And calculated the dust of the earth by
the measure,
And weighed the mountains in a balance
And the hills in a pair of scales?
¹³Who has directed the Spirit of the
LORD,
Or as His counselor has informed Him?
¹⁴With whom did He consult and who
gave Him understanding?
And who taught Him in the path of justice
and taught Him knowledge
And informed Him of the way of
understanding?
¹⁵Behold, the nations are like a drop from
a bucket,
And are regarded as a speck of dust on
the scales;
Behold, He lifts up the islands like fine
dust.
¹⁶Even Lebanon is not enough to burn,
Nor its beasts enough for a burnt offering.
¹⁷All the nations are as nothing before
Him,
They are regarded by Him as less than
nothing and meaningless.

Q: What is the theme of verses 6-8, and how does it relate to verse 5?

A: The theme is that God's Word will never fail. It is related to verse 5 in that *“the mouth of the Lord has spoken”*; therefore, what God says will happen will indeed take place. Hence there will be a time when all flesh living on the earth will see the Lord coming in glory

Application: *Relate with one another how God's Word has changed your life.*

[Read v.9-11]

Q: The word “arm” is used twice in these verses. Look up and read Isaiah 53:1. To whom does the “arm of the Lord” refer, and why?

A: The *“arm of the Lord”* is used in Isaiah to represent the Lord's servant who will be given power and authority to carry out His will. Arm is symbolic of strength, power, and handy work.

“Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”
—Isaiah 53:1

Q: If the “arm of the Lord” represents strength, power and authority, in what unusual way does verse 11 contrast?

A: His power and authority does not preclude His compassion and gentleness.

Application: *Imagine you were one of the survivors of the deportation crossing the desert. How would these words bring comfort to you? In what way does this remind you of the Exodus? Is there anything going on in your life today that might result in this verse bringing meaning?*

[Read v.12-17]

Q: Why does this section gives us comfort regarding “threatening nations”? (Compare with Dan. 2:21.)

A: God is always in control, even of the bad guys.

*“It is He who changes the times and the epochs;
He removes kings and establishes kings;
He gives wisdom to wise men
And knowledge to men of understanding.”*
—Daniel 2:21

Q: What is the meaning of v.16? What does this teach us about the true meaning of the Old Testament system of sacrifices?

A: In reality, there's no amount of burnt offerings that can bridge the gap with God. It shows that the sacrifices were intended as a symbol of the condition of one's heart, not as a sufficient substitute in and of themselves. Therefore we have to conclude that it is the love and grace of God that causes the sacrifices to bridge the gap.

¹⁸To whom then will you liken God?
Or what likeness will you compare with Him?

¹⁹As for the idol, a craftsman casts it,
A goldsmith plates it with gold,
And a silversmith fashions chains of silver.

²⁰He who is too impoverished for such an offering
Selects a tree that does not rot;
He seeks out for himself a skillful craftsman
To prepare an idol that will not totter.

²¹Do you not know? Have you not heard?
Has it not been declared to you from the beginning?

Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

²²It is He who sits above the circle of the earth,
And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers,
Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain
And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.

²³He it is who reduces rulers to nothing,
Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless.

²⁴Scarcely have they been planted,
Scarcely have they been sown,
Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth,
But He merely blows on them, and they wither,
And the storm carries them away like stubble.

²⁵“To whom then will you liken Me
That I would be his equal?” says the Holy One.

²⁶Lift up your eyes on high
And see who has created these stars,
The One who leads forth their host by number,
He calls them all by name;
Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power,
Not one of them is missing.

[Read v.18-20]

Point: All other substitutes for God are a limited creation of man's mind that cannot begin to describe the breadth and character of God as provided in v. 12-17. Israel's core problem has been devotion to and worship of other gods which exist solely because human hands decided to create them. It's a stark contrast to v.8b, "But the word of our God stands forever" versus man's works that crumble and disappear in a single lifetime.

Application: Is your entire faith and belief system built on the Word of God or is even the smallest part a work of your own or another's hand? How do you fix that?

[Read v.21-26]

Q: What are the 3 classes of earthly people mentioned in v.21-23? To what does this allude?

A: Inhabitants, rulers, and judges. It alludes to man's creation of a duplicate heavenly structure on earth, but instead of the Godhead man has substituted others as ruler and judge.

Q: What is the common problem for each of these classes?

A: Each has forgotten Who is really in charge, that God is the Ruler, Creator, and Judge.

Q: According to v.24-25, what should we keep in mind concerning earthly structures and organizations?

A: They're temporary. We're supposed to keep a focus beyond them to the eternal.

Q: In v.26, what is the comfort the remnant going to Babylon should derive from this verse?

A: The fact that the uncountable number of stars are each known by name to God and 100% accounted for reaffirms that He knows each member of the remnant and fully accounts for them; none of them will go missing.

Point: God is in complete, eternal control over and above what temporarily exists on earth, yet He knows and accounts for us individually by name. God's grand eternal work incorporates us individually by name!

²⁷Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel,

“My way is hidden from the LORD,
And the justice due me escapes the notice
of my God”?

²⁸Do you not know? Have you not heard?
The Everlasting God, the LORD, the

Creator of the ends of the earth
Does not become weary or tired.

His understanding is inscrutable.

²⁹He gives strength to the weary,
And to him who lacks might He increases
power.

³⁰Though youths grow weary and tired,
And vigorous young men stumble badly,

³¹Yet those who wait for the LORD

Will gain new strength;

They will mount up with wings like

eagles,

They will run and not get tired,

They will walk and not become weary.

[Read v.27-31]

Q: How do you suppose this applies to Israelites dispersed outside of the land of Israel?

A: Regardless of temporary, present conditions, God's hope is strength for endurance to realize reconciliation and return to Him.

Q: How would you summarize the main teaching of this passage?

A: God's strength sustains us as we wait on Him to work everything out.

Application: *How does this speak to you in the things you're going through right now? How about for the immediate future? For all of life?*