

## **Session 13 The Forerunner Message in Isaiah 40**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. The context of this message is probably the Assyrian invasion of Judah around 701 BC.
- B. Outline for Isaiah 40
  - 40:1-2 The call to comfort Jerusalem
  - 40:3-5 Preparing the way of the Lord
  - 40:6-8 The certainty of victory over all enemies
  - 40:9-11 The mighty Warrior is a tender Shepherd
  - 40:12-20 The Lord has all power and wisdom
  - 40:21-26 The Lord has power over all the nations
  - 40:27-31 Practical application: receiving strength
- C. Isaiah 40 has specific application to the time when Judah was fearful related to the Assyrian invasion (Isa. 36-37), when John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord, when the body of Christ has faced persecution throughout history, and the Antichrist's assault against Israel and the nations (Rev. 12-13).

### **II. THE CALL TO COMFORT JERUSALEM (ISA. 40:1-2)**

- A. The Lord's messengers are mandated to speak a message of God's comfort to Jerusalem (40:1-2).  
*<sup>1</sup>“Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” Says your God. <sup>2</sup>“Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.” (Isa. 40:1-2)*
- B. **Speak comfort:** The Lord commanded His messengers to comfort Jerusalem (40:1).
  - 1. There are two groups being addressed in Isaiah 40:1. The Lord commands one group of believers (outside of Jerusalem) to give a message of comfort to a group who live in Jerusalem, referred to as “My people Jerusalem.”
  - 2. One group claims the Lord as “their God,” and the other is called “My people” by the Lord. They are the redeemed who are distinct from those living in Jerusalem. They include Gentiles believers speaking an end-time message of comfort to Jerusalem.
- C. God called Gentile believers in the ends of the world and in the chief of nations to comfort Israel.  
*<sup>11</sup>Indeed the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the world: “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Surely your salvation is coming; behold, His reward is with Him...’” (Isa. 62:11)*  
*<sup>7</sup>Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, “O LORD, save Your people, the remnant of Israel!”...<sup>10</sup>Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, “He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock.” (Jer. 31:7-10)*

- D. Jerusalem will receive a double portion of God's grace (not double punishment) as indicated in 61:7. Jerusalem will be praised by all as the joy of the whole earth (Ps. 48:1-2; Isa. 62:7). The Lord can only give double mercy to His people because of the justice of God seen in the cross.

*<sup>7</sup>Instead of your shame you shall have double honor ...they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be theirs. (Isa. 61:7)*

*<sup>7</sup>And give Him no rest till He establishes...Jerusalem a praise in the earth. (Isa. 62:7)*

### III. PREPARING THE WAY OF THE LORD (ISA. 40:3-5)

- A. The Lord's messengers will comfort Jerusalem (40:1) and prepare people for the Lord's coming to the earth (40:3-5). John the Baptist prepared people for Jesus' first coming (Lk. 3). The context here in 40:1-11 is focused more on Jesus' second coming when all the nations see His glory (40:5, 10).

*<sup>3</sup>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..." (Isa. 40:3-5)*

- B. The command went forth to prepare a highway in the desert because the Lord was coming (40:3-4). In the ancient world, a city would build a special road to welcome a visiting king. The desert describes a place where there were many rough places and obstacles in building such a highway.
- C. It is called *a highway for our God* because God will manifest His glory through people who agree with Him instead of drawing back in compromise, fear, or offense. The message prepares God's people to agree with His values and plans so they can participate with Him in releasing His glory.
- D. The command to prepare people spiritually to receive the Lord is applicable at both His first and second comings. John the Baptist prepared a "spiritual highway of truth," calling people to repent and agree with God's values and plan. The Lord's messengers are to build a spiritual highway. After Jesus returns, a physical highway will be built (Isa. 11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 40:3; 57:14; 62:10).
- E. John the Baptist modeled the way to prepare a spiritual highway by his message in Luke 3:7-20. He emphasized a twofold message—calling people to repent and announcing the coming of Jesus.

1. John called people to repent, or to live in agreement with God's values— His love, purity, humility, generosity, righteousness, etc. (Lk. 3:8-14).

*<sup>8</sup>Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance...<sup>10</sup>The people asked him, saying, "What shall we do?"<sup>11</sup>He answered..., "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none..." (Lk. 3:8-11)*

2. John announced the coming of Jesus including "revival" by the Spirit and God's judgments.

*<sup>16</sup>One mightier than I is coming...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*

*<sup>17</sup>...He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire. (Lk. 3:16-17)*

- F. **A voice:** John told the people that he was “a voice” (Jn. 1:23). He was content to be a voice—not a name seeking a reputation. God is raising up those who will be a “voice” and not merely an “echo.”
- G. **Crying out:** John the Baptist refused to be silent even when rejected by the leaders of his nation.
1. **Make straight:** It is the Highway of Holiness (35:8). This is the only way that the Lord dwells with His people. The Lord’s messengers are to make the message clear by removing the ambiguity instead of seeking only to be politically correct. They are to be bold and remove the gray areas. It is a highway of purity and a highway of understanding (His ways and plans).
  2. **Every valley shall be exalted:** There are valleys or low areas in our lives emotionally and spiritually that need to be healed and brought up. This includes areas where we have wrong thinking in accepting a low view of God and of our spiritual identity. This includes emotional low spots where rejection, condemnation and inferiority dominate our heart and mind. The Lord wants us to resist wrong thinking and replace it with the truth of who we are in Christ.
  3. **Every mountain shall be brought low:** There are high things or proud things in our thinking and emotional life that need to be brought down such as drawing undue attention to ourselves, manipulating situations to gain honor, or being defensive in refusing to accept correction.
  4. **The crooked places shall be made straight:** Crooked places speak of areas where people continue to live in compromise, including addictions or various areas of perversion.
  5. **The rough places shall be made smooth:** Being in a rough place emotionally is to live in a judgmental, critical spirit or with a mean spirit like many of the Pharisees had.
- H. **All flesh shall see God’s glory:** All nations will see God’s glory together when Jesus returns (40:5).

#### **IV. THE CERTAINTY OF VICTORY OVER ALL ENEMIES (ISA. 40:6-8)**

- A. The certainty of victory before the hostile Gentile armies of the earth (40:6-8): Isaiah wanted to know what message would prepare the people. Isa. 40:6-31 is a summary of the spiritual diet that John the Baptist was fed by God, and it is the message he spoke to others to prepare them.
- <sup>6</sup>The voice said, “Cry out!” And he said, “What shall I cry?” “All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. <sup>7</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the LORD blows upon it...<sup>8</sup>The grass withers...but the word of our God stands forever.” (Isa. 40:6-8)*
- B. **The truth about man:** He is unreliable, temporary, and weak (40:6-8).
- C. **The truth about God:** He is reliable, eternal, and powerful (40:9-27).

## V. THE MIGHTY WARRIOR IS A TENDER SHEPHERD (ISA. 40:9-11)

- A. They are to boldly proclaim the coming of Messiah in power (40:9-11). The community of believers in Jerusalem will be emboldened by believers outside Jerusalem comforting them (40:1-2).

***<sup>9</sup>O Zion, you who bring good tidings, get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, you who bring good tidings, lift up your voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid; say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” <sup>10</sup>...[He] shall come with a strong hand, and...shall rule.” (Isa. 40:9-10)***

- B. Jesus warned the people in Jerusalem to flee when they saw the abomination of desolation. An Antichrist siege and attack would soon begin around Jerusalem, reaching into Judah (Zech. 12:2; 14:2).

***<sup>15</sup>“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place...<sup>16</sup>let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” (Mt. 24:15-16)***

***<sup>2</sup>For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity... (Zech. 14:2)***

- C. The reason they are to lift up their voice with strength is because the armies of the Antichrist will be laying siege to Jerusalem. There will be a company of believers in Jerusalem telling the region of Judah that Jesus is coming, even as the Antichrist is surrounding them with a siege.

- D. ***Behold God shall come:*** They will proclaim the coming of Jesus. This is one of the most descriptive passages about what Jesus will do when He returns. Jesus will come as a mighty warrior (40:10) and a tender shepherd (40:11)—so strong, yet so tender. We see His tender heart and care for His people.

- E. Isaiah describes seven expressions of Jesus’ coming with a strong hand (Isa. 40:10-11).

***<sup>10</sup>...the Lord GOD shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him...His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. <sup>11</sup>He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young. (Isa. 40:10-11)***

1. ***His arm shall rule:*** He will take over all the governments of the earth (Rev. 11:15).
2. ***To reward:*** He will reward and vindicate His people who have been persecuted as outcasts.
3. ***His work is before Him:*** He will unveil His glorious plans to restore the nations and the earth.
4. ***He will feed His flock:*** He will satisfy His people. All personal needs will be met.
5. ***He will gather the lambs:*** He will rapture the saints and gather the unsaved remnant of Israel.
6. ***He will carry them in His bosom:*** He will cherish them as those who are near and dear to His heart. He will treat them with great affection and tenderness.
7. ***He will gently lead:*** Multitudes will travel back to Israel (Isa. 49:9-12; 62:10; Jer. 31:21, 23). He will be especially attentive to those with small children.

## VI. THE LORD HAS ALL POWER AND WISDOM (ISA. 40:12-20)

- A. Isaiah describes the vast range of God's wisdom and power from the vastness of the heavens to intricate details in the dust. God is all loving (40:11) all powerful (40:12) and all wise (40:13).
- B. Jesus is so great in power and wisdom that He understands everything, fulfill all of His promises, and perfectly administrates justice (40:12-14) in ruling the nations and overcoming all that opposes Him. He can measure the oceans and the distances between the stars, measure the dust, and weigh the mountains.
- <sup>12</sup>Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, measured heaven with a span and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? <sup>13</sup>Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has taught Him? <sup>14</sup>With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, and showed Him the way of understanding? (Isa. 40:12-14)*
- C. The Lord has the power to easily overpower all opposition and solve all problems (40:15-17).
- <sup>15</sup>Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the scales; look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing. <sup>16</sup>And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering. <sup>17</sup>All nations [Antichrist's empire] before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless. (Isa. 40:15-17)*
- D. No force on earth can compare to or prevail against King Jesus (40:18-20). The primary antagonist of Israel in the end times will be the Antichrist and his armies that are energized by demonic powers connected with idols in the Antichrist's global worship system (Rev. 9:20).
- <sup>18</sup>To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him? (Isa. 40:18)*

## VII. THE LORD HAS POWER OVER ALL THE NATIONS (ISA. 40:21-26)

- A. Isaiah gives information that all were familiar with concerning God's greatness (40:21-24). The Lord sits enthroned with power over the whole earth. The "circle" of the earth refers to the heavens (Job 22:14) or to the horizon. People are as weak as grasshoppers in their ability to prevail against the Lord.
- <sup>21</sup>Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning?... <sup>22</sup>It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers... <sup>23</sup>He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless. <sup>24</sup>Scarcely shall they be planted, scarcely shall they be sown, scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, when He will also blow on them, and they will wither. (Isa. 40:21-24)*
- B. *He brings princes to nothing*: People in position of power as princes and judges can easily intimidate those under them, but they are under God's control. He can easily remove them, or the Assyrians in Isaiah's day, or the Antichrist and his top leaders in the end times.
- C. *Scarcely shall they be planted*: The Antichrist shall scarcely be established in power, then Jesus will blow on him, and he and his empire will wither—he will only rule for 3½ years.

- D. No force in the heavens can stop God's plan (40:25-26). Jesus also has authority over the powers in the sky or the heavens (Acts 2:19-20). Jesus is more powerful than the heavenly forces that will seem to threaten the very existence of life on earth (Rev. 6:12-13; 8:12; 16:8-10, 21).

**<sup>25</sup>“To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?” says the Holy One. <sup>26</sup>Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, Who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might...not one is missing. (Isa. 40:25-26)**

1. **Stars:** He calls and directs the stars to the places that He assigns them. When Adam named the animals in Eden, this implied that he understood them and had power over them.
2. **Not one is missing:** Since the Lord understands and directs trillions of trillions of stars, then surely He can take care of His people who are so dear to Him.

### VIII. PRACTICAL APPLICATION: RECEIVING STRENGTH (ISA. 40:27-31)

- A. Isaiah teaches God's people how to respond to the Lord (40:27-31). God's people need not worry that God has forgotten them. Trusting God's leadership will be a premier issue at the end of the age. Israel's complaint was that their life was "hidden" from God because He seemed to allow injustice to continue. They felt overlooked by God in the pressures in their life and the crisis in their nation.

**<sup>27</sup>Why do you say, O Jacob...“My way is hidden from the LORD, and my just claim is passed over by my God”? <sup>28</sup>Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. (Isa. 40:27-28)**

- B. The Lord gives strength to His people to the degree that they pursue it His way (40:29-31).

**<sup>29</sup>He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. <sup>30</sup>Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, <sup>31</sup>but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. (Isa. 40:29-31)**

- C. **Wait on the Lord:** To wait on God is to be preoccupied with *engaging with Him* and His plan and narrative for our life. We wait on God in two ways—by engaging with Him in prayer with faith and by not drawing back into passivity and offense when His promises are delayed. Waiting on God is not about just biding time, but is engaging actively with God in contending for His promises.

- D. **Summary:** The message of comfort that prepares the way of the Lord includes God coming to Jerusalem (40:3), manifesting His glory worldwide (40:5), showing His strength in defending them (40:10) and His tender heart in caring for them (40:11). The message emphasizes her military conflicts ending, her sin being forgiven, and double honor being given to her in the Millennium (40:3). His end-time plans will display His perfect wisdom and power (40:12-17) that triumphs over all the hostile armies on earth (40:18-24) and imparts strength to prevail to all who wait on Him (40:27-31).