

Isaiah Chapter 40

This was supposed to be a lesson on the first of the Servant Songs. Originally, I was going to go straight to Isaiah 42:1, the beginning of the first of the four servant songs. Then I thought it would be good to provide the context of Isaiah chapters 40-41. Read those chapters once through and proceed to chapter 42. But, once I read the Hebrew of Isaiah 40:1 I had to reconsider. There is some powerful statements said by God there. Then I realized there is a need to show the flow of the thought from Isaiah 40:1 through the Servant Songs. If all we did was to read chapters 40-41 through with no comprehension, then what is the point? Understanding.

Perhaps you remember the movie “The Karate Kid.” There is a scene in it after Daniel has washed and waxed Mr. Miagi’s cars and painted the fence that he confronts Mr. Miagi with the unfairness of giving him a promise and then used him like slave labor. So Mr. Miagi tells Daniel to show him wax on wax off. Daniel had not understood that those efforts not only helped build his muscles for karate, but they embodied basic karate techniques. He did not understand. Once Mr. Miagi shows Daniel that wax on wax off was a basic karate move, he understands.

So, I want you to have some understanding of what chapters 40 and 41 are doing from God’s perspective.

Though there is no location setting device, it is understood that starting in Isaiah 40:1, like other passages when God is speaking, the location is the throne room or the council room of God. As Goldingay, a respected commentator on Isaiah, suggests, “The Book of Isaiah consciously brings the ministry of eighth-century Isaiah to a close in chap. 39 and, by means of 40:1-8, causes the reader to “reenter the divine council where Isaiah was first commissioned” (He is quoting another commentator, Melugin).

Isaiah Chapter 40
Isaiah 40:1-31

Open your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 40 and let us read chapters 40 and 41. We are standing next to Isaiah in the divine council at the beginning of the appeal trial of Satan. These chapters are the opening arguments from God. When I understood that, it changed how I read these two chapters and the Servant Songs.

Here is a useful comment by L. S. Chafer on Satan's motivation:

“The motive of Satan is four times revealed, and these disclosures stand out like mile-stones in his career.”

“First, his master passion is given in the record of his first sin. His secret purpose, it is stated, was to be “like the Most High” (Isa. 14:14).”

“Second, when he met the first Adam in the Garden and there recommended his own unholy ideal in the words, “Ye shall be as gods” (Gen 3:15).”

“Third, when he met the Last Adam in the wilderness he again manifests his desire to take the place of God. Well he knew that Christ is very God, yet he said to Him, “If thou will worship me” (Lk. 4:7)”

“Fourth, his motive is finally revealed in the assumption of the Man of Sin of whom it is predicted that “as God sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God” (2 Thes 2:4, R. V.).”

Before jumping into Isaiah chapter 40, there are two important points to make.

1. Another reminder: it is important that you be familiar with the “fulfillment of prophetic utterance,” the angelic conflict and dispensations. All three of those concepts come into play in this passage.

Isaiah Chapter 40
Isaiah 40:1-31

2. This is Hebrew poetry. As such, there are different rules that govern the text. We are often told that Hebrew poetry is based upon parallelism in thought. That is perhaps a simplistic description. Here is some helpful information from Goldingay:

“The word parallelism' is misleading insofar as the second colon in a line usually does more than merely repeat the first. Rather it takes the thought further. Even individual words are rarely simply synonyms of words in the first colon. In general, by its nature the second colon strengthens, reinforces, and intensifies the point made in the first. It may do that by giving it more definition or by expanding it, by clarifying it or by explaining how it is so. Parallelism can work over several lines as well as between the cola in a line, again strengthening, reinforcing, intensifying, defining, expanding, clarifying, or explaining.”

He goes on for four pages on how the text of a poem may work.

**Isaiah 40:1 “Comfort, O comfort My people,”
says your God.**

Isaiah 40:1-2 at first glance is a good introduction to the remaining text of Isaiah. I was just going to gloss over this when I realized how awesome this verse appears to be once the details are unpacked. What caught my attention was the “Comfort, Comfort.” The speaker is God talking. The “Comfort, Comfort” is a piel (intensive) imperative (command) in third person plural. It is in the intensive form of the verb. It is repeated which can also up the intensity. It is an imperative word which is repeated, a “double imperative.” Per the NIV Study Bible, “The double imperative for emphasis is found also in 51:9,17; 52:1, 11; 57:14; 62:10.” In other words, these two words break with the previous context and clearly mark a new section in the text. They also are emphasized to get our attention to focus on a new topic. As in other verses that follow,

Isaiah Chapter 40
Isaiah 40:1-31

the addressees are not named. In some cases, the reader must understand based upon context and logic and the ministry of God the Holy Spirit.

Since the commands are from God, who is He commanding to comfort His people? It is in the plural leading the reader to look around to see who that might be. If it is not God, since He is speaking, and it is not Israel or the Jews because they are the ones to be comforted who is left? Angels? Maybe.

John Goldingay, author of a commentary on Isaiah, grapples with this issue. “Comfort is a plural verb. Thus God is not its subject. Who is the subject is more difficult to determine. Ancient and modern interpreters have sought to make the matter explicit. The latter have been inclined to see the comforters as Yhwh’s supernatural agents, but there is no background for that in the book so far, and what follows will tend to emphasize the way Yhwh stands and works alone. While the prophet may well be overhearing events in the heavenly court, this does not carry the implication that Yhwh is acting via its heavenly members...”

Yet, we know that God often involves angels and people to implement His will. We know from this context that indeed God uses people to implement His policy and will. Isaiah 40:3 involves a person: John the Baptist.

I have a suggestion based on context and logic. Based upon the contextual description, the time is the beginning of the Millennium. Verse two gives a clue since Jerusalem’s warfare has ended and her iniquity has been removed. Israel’s warfare will not end until the end of the Tribulation/Jacob’s Troubles and the beginning of the Millennium/Kingdom, when the Jews will have to recover from the intense suffering they endured for at least 3 ½ years. Jews were likely hunted down and killed during that period, even more intense than during the “holocaust.” Those that survive the hunt and the Baptism of Fire will

Isaiah Chapter 40
Isaiah 40:1-31

have found hiding places in caves, under the ground or other safe places. They would have become terrified.

Have you ever seen a movie in which someone is kidnapped and then released in a wooded area by a “hunter.” The hunter says, “I’ll give you x amount of time to run, after which I will hunt you down and kill you. If you stand here and don’t move, I’ll shoot you where you stand. If you run, who knows, you might escape.” That may be the situation of the Jews near the end of the Tribulation. Once Satan and his forces are dealt with, at that point, God sends out his emissaries to comfort his people. Perhaps these emissaries are ministers of the New Covenant... That might be you and me. Just a question here: Are we, as ministers of the New Covenant to be used at the beginning of the Millennium to comfort the surviving remnant of Jews? If that is true, then...Wow! Again, if true, perhaps we need to memorize our marching orders now.

Here are some summary points.

1. The words themselves suggest someone other than God and Israel. God is speaking, He is commanding. So God does not say, I will comfort.
2. Since Jerusalem (Jews) are to be comforted, it is likely not Jews that are comforting Jews.
3. Whoever is doing the comforting, God is their God. In other words, saved believers in heaven are sent to earth to comfort them. It is still possible that angels are doing the comforting. But my sense is that those doing the comforting know what suffering is. God sometimes puts you through some undeserved suffering so that you will be able to comfort someone else who needs encouragement to learn to walk by faith.

Isaiah Chapter 40
Isaiah 40:1-31

4. Church Age believers will return to earth during the Millennium as part of the administration of Jesus Christ.
5. The Church is not revealed in the Old Testament. If the unnamed emissaries are resurrected Church Age believers we don't know since these people are not named in the verse. But it is a distinct possibility.

This is the opening verse in this new section of Isaiah. It starts with comforting His people. As one outline from last week showed, the chapters 40-66 are about "comfort." And part of the comfort is a compendium of descriptions of the Messiah/Savior, who He is, what He will do, and the outcome of that action.

Isaiah 40:2 "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."

Speak kindly to Jerusalem. Literally, "speak to the heart of Jerusalem."

Warfare. Means army or warfare.

Has ended. Literally "is full," or complete.

She has received double for all her sins.

Isaiah 40:3 A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.

Isaiah 40:4 "Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let

Isaiah Chapter 40
Isaiah 40:1-31

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

Isaiah 40:5 Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, And all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Isaiah 40:3-5 is the Old Testament verse that John the Baptist applies to himself. Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23. He is the royal herald for Jesus Christ.

Matthew 3:3	Mark 1:3	Luke 3:4-6	John 1:23
3 For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight!’”	2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet : “Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way; 3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight.’”	4 as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet , “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight. 5 ‘Every ravine will be filled, And every mountain and hill will be brought low; The crooked will become straight, And the rough roads smooth; 6 And all flesh will see the salvation of God.’”	23 He said, “I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.”

Look! All four evangelists specifically call out that verse as being from the prophet Isaiah! This link to the Old Testament is important and powerful. Like other important human kings, this king has a herald or announcer to proclaim the presence of the king. And, it precedes the “presentation” in Isaiah 42.

It is very interesting that the first item after the “comfort” verses is the identification of the herald of the Messiah, in His 1st Advent. It seems like the first two verses are a statement of where God is taking the content of this prophetic book, to the beginning of the

Isaiah Chapter 40
Isaiah 40:1-31

Millennium/Kingdom. Then immediately, he identifies the statements of the herald of the 1st Advent, where this is starting.

What was John the Baptist preaching? What was his message?

Matthew 3:1 Now in those days John the Baptist *came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying,

Matthew 3:2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Mark 1:14 Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God,

Mark 1:15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Mark links what Jesus says back to John the Baptist. Their messages were consistent. Jesus picks up from John the Baptist. The message was about “the kingdom.” We know that what Christians call “The Millennium” Jews call “The Kingdom.” It will fulfill part of the Davidic Covenant.

Others in the Gospels understood the Jewish Age was very near “the kingdom.”

One of the criminals being crucified with Jesus wanted to be in the kingdom.

Isaiah Chapter 40
Isaiah 40:1-31

Matthew 23:42 And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!”

Matthew 23:43 And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”

The mother of James and John asked that Jesus give her sons prominent places in “His kingdom.”

Matthew 20:20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him.

Matthew 20:21 And He said to her, “What do you wish?” She *said to Him, “Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left.”

Isaiah 40:8 is the summation of the comparison of the transitory nature of creatures on earth to God’s Word which is not transitory.

Isaiah 40:8 The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever.

Compare to Jesus speaking:

Mark 13:31 (also **Matt 24:35; Luke 21:33**)
Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

It is not a quote, but it is the same principle but this time it is applied to Jesus Himself.

Isaiah Chapter 40
Isaiah 40:1-31

God's Word is not just not transitory but is active standing up constantly into eternity. Remember that it is "Alive and Powerful."

Isaiah 40:9 in the NASB 1995 has "good news." The Hebrew means giving news. The context determines whether it is good or bad, although it is usually used of good news. The context demands good news. It is also in an eschatological context. This is future. This is translated in the LXX as a word derived from what the English translates as "good news." It is where "evangelism" comes from. Good news. And the "good news" is mentioned twice in this one verse. It is used five times in Isaiah 40-53. (Biblehub.org). The TDOT confirms that this Hebrew word and the Greek word for giving good news are linked historically. When I was a new believer, I understood the New Testament as "good news." But the understanding of God being present (Here is your God) as good news starts in the Old Testament. Something I didn't realize until I was studying for this lesson. Good news starts in the Old Testament and is picked up by the writers of the New Testament.

Isaiah 40:9 Get 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!"

There is a similar pronouncement in the New Testament (but still in the Jewish dispensation):

Luke 2:10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;

Isaiah Chapter 40
Isaiah 40:1-31

Luke 2:11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

I am not saying this is a fulfillment, only that there is good news in the arrival of the Messiah, both in the 1st Advent and the 2nd Advent. God, the second person of the Trinity, Messiah, Jesus Christ will rule on earth during the Millennium. That should be a joyful time with no Satan and no cosmos diabolicus.

Note the declaration, “Here is your God.” It is followed in verse 10 with

Isaiah 40:10 Behold, the Lord God will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him And His recompense before Him.

Lord God. This is literally Lord (Adonai) Yahweh (God). It seems clear to me that this person that is being announced is God.

Isaiah 40:11 (Also Zechariah, Ezekiel 34, Jeremiah 23:1-6; 31:10; Ezekiel 37:24; Micah 5:3) Like 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.

John 10:11 “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep...”

Now, the next three verses ask “Who?” The tenor of God’s opening argument changes. Up to this point there are announcements of comfort,

Isaiah Chapter 40
Isaiah 40:1-31

expectation of the presence of God. Now God is making a reference to a challenge to His character.

Isaiah 40:12 Who 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?

Isaiah 40:13 Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, Or as His counselor has informed Him?

Isaiah 40:14 With 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?

This is leading up to a question of who is like God? In the interim, God describes who He is and what He does. With this description you might feel like Job:

Job 42:1 Then Job answered the Lord and said,

Job 42:2 “I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.

Job 42:3 ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have

Isaiah Chapter 40
Isaiah 40:1-31

**declared that which I did not understand,
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not
know.”**

**Job 42:4 ‘Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask
You, and You instruct me.’**

**Job 42:5 “I have heard of You by the hearing
of the ear; But now my eye sees You;**

**Job 42:6 Therefore I retract, And I repent in
dust and ashes.”**

This is an expression of humility. Job understands the character of God and where he, Job, fits into the scheme of things. As I read Isaiah chapters 40-41, it dawned on me that there are many similarities between it and Job, but from a slightly different perspective. God is answering Job with who and what He is after the encounter with Satan. In Isaiah, God is provoking a response from the one who wanted to be “like the Most High,” Satan.

Now in the next verses, there is the insufficiency of “nations.” Perhaps this is part of the cosmos diabolicus.

**Isaiah 40:15 Behold, 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.**

**Isaiah 40:16 Even Lebanon is not enough to
burn, Nor its beasts enough for a burnt
offering.**

Isaiah Chapter 40
Isaiah 40:1-31

Isaiah 40:17 All the nations are as nothing before Him, They are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless.

**Isaiah 40:18 To whom then will you liken God?
Or what likeness will you compare with Him?**

Uh Oh! Is there anyone who tried to compare himself to God? Yes! I think this may be a reference back to the sin of Satan.

Isaiah 14:12 “How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning (i.e. Lucifer), son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations!

Isaiah 14:13 “But you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north.

Isaiah 14:14 ‘I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’

Make myself like. This is from the same root word used in Isaiah 40:18, and 40:25 and later in chapter 41. In Isaiah chapter 40 it is an intensive verb whereas in Isaiah 14 it is in a reflexive (I will make myself like). God is provoking Satan in His opening arguments. God is saying, look who I am and what I have done and can do. Then look at what you do...push people to make dumb idols that have to be propped up so they don't totter. As Christians we are only to engage in defensive actions. We can defend ourselves with Bible principles as Jesus did when tempted by Satan. But God engages in offense against Satan.

Isaiah Chapter 40
Isaiah 40:1-31

Isaiah 40:19 As for the idol, a craftsman casts it, A goldsmith plates it with gold, And a silversmith fashions chains of silver.

Isaiah 40:20 He 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.

Isaiah 40:21 Do 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?

Isaiah 40:22 It 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.

Isaiah 40:23 He it is who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless.

God is in charge of history.

Isaiah 40:24 Scarcely have they been planted, Scarcely have they been sown, Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, But He

Isaiah Chapter 40
Isaiah 40:1-31

merely blows on them, and they wither, And the storm carries them away like stubble.

Isaiah 40:25 “To whom then will you liken Me That I would be his equal?” says the Holy One.

Again, the word to be like. It is from the same root as that used in Isaiah 14:14 by Satan, “I will be like the Most High.”

Isaiah 40:26 Lift 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.

God provides.

Isaiah 40:27 Why 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”?

Isaiah 40:28 Do 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.

Isaiah 40:29 He gives strength to the weary, And to him who lacks might He increases power.

Isaiah Chapter 40
Isaiah 40:1-31

Isaiah 40:30 Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly,

Isaiah 40:31 Yet 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.