

July 12

Isaiah 40-41

Today we read Isaiah 40-41 and began the second half of the Book of Isaiah. By now you have probably realized that Isaiah doesn't have 80 chapters, so our distinction between the first and second halves of the book is only an approximate one, and it has nothing to do with the number of chapters or verses in the Book. In fact, it has to do with content, and the first significant difference between chapters 1-39 and chapters 40-66 is signaled by the very first words of the section: "Comfort, comfort ye, my people."

Remember now, the overarching theme of the whole book is that the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, is the only valid object of our faith and trust. Within the parameters of that overall message, chapters 1-39 put a great deal of emphasis upon the futility of trusting in earthly kings for safety and national security, and upon warning Judah (and the surrounding nations as well) about the judgment of God that is coming because they have not trusted in Him. "Woe, woe," are words that well represent that portion of the book! But now, the Lord is beginning this section by saying, "Comfort, comfort my people."

Chapters 40-66 are still written to the people of Judah in Isaiah's day. (More about that in just a moment.) But the focus here is more like 200 years in the future (and then, as we have seen before, all the way out to the end of time). The message is that even though Judah will be judged because she has forgotten to keep her part of the covenant she had with God, God has not forgotten His end of the covenant and, when the punishment has ended, He will keep all of His promises to Israel. So, in chapters 40-66, speaking comfort to His people through Isaiah, God tells them that the captivity in Babylon will end and that they will return to Zion.

Almost everyone has memorized the great promise with which this chapter concludes. "They that wait upon 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 never faint." After reading Isaiah 40 again, I put it on the list of "Chapters I want to memorize." It has so much theology and deep truth packed in there that it is worth storing in your heart

Besides that, I want to introduce you to three key themes to look for as you read Isaiah 40-66.

1) The omnipotence of God (remember that long word omnipotence just means "all-powerful") is the subject of chapters 41. But it is not just the omnipotence of God that is in focus. It is the omnipotence of God versus the impotence of false gods and idols. 'I am everything,' God is shouting at Israel, and they are nothing, literally no-thing.

Two times in quick succession in chapter 40 the challenge rings out, "To whom, then, will you compare Me?" -- To an idol made of wood? 'I created the heavens -- I sustain the starry host -- and call them each by name' "Because of my great power and mighty strength not one of them is missing." As a bit of some trivia for you, do you have any idea how many stars are out there? Well this is difficult to calculate but according to one source I looked at it is estimated at 1×10^{22} power...that is 1 with 22 zeros after it...or 10 BILLION TRILLIONS!!! And to think, God knows each one. This chapter not only powerfully states a case for the supremacy of God as creator, but as ruler, and deity as well.

2 - Idolatry - In the same chapter, God summons us to a court of law. "Set forth your case," he shouts to the idol worshippers: "Let the idols tell us what will happen next or do something -- anything -- to prove their reality." But they can't. They are nothing. They are less than nothing! With such mocking words, we are introduced to yet another of the distinguishing features of chapters 40-66. The powerful statements of a strident monotheism -- and the utter disdain for any polytheistic or idolatrous ideas -- are here in a way that we have not previously noted in the Old Testament.

You'll get more of that in future accelerators and much of Isaiah.

3) The last thing that I want you to notice in these two chapters is the fact that Israel here is called "the servant" of God. "But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen...I will strengthen you and help you." The theme of the 'servant of the Lord' is going to be very prominent in this part of Isaiah, starting with some chapters that we will read tomorrow.

In particular, I want you to watch for the theme of the servant as the messiah who is to come. Isaiah writes multiple songs about Jesus before Jesus ever shows up! These are called the "Servant Songs." And it is amazing that they are prophesied at least 600+ years before Jesus!

Hey, today, just enjoy reading Isaiah 40. It is truly one of the most delightful pages in the whole Bible.