

Review

Chapter 40 begins a drastically new section of the book of Isaiah. As a matter of fact, it is so drastically different that many higher critics believe that it must have a different author than the first 39 chapters.

This theory came about in the late 1700's because of doubts that anyone could have predicted the fall of Jerusalem or the reign of Cyrus hundreds of years before it happened. Therefore, part of the book must have been written after it happened! This is called "the deutero-Isaiah theory," and you will read about it frequently in commentaries, articles, etc. as these so-called "scholars" quote from either "Proto-Isaiah" or "Deutero-Isaiah." By the late 1800's, some even began to believe that chapters 56 through 66 were written by a third Isaiah!

But the Old Testament only mentions the one Isaiah:

Is. 38:1 ...Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz

All through the New Testament, he is also referred to singularly as "Isaiah THE prophet."

But most obvious to me, Jesus and the apostles quotes dozens of times from every "section" of Isaiah, and always attributed it to Isaiah the prophet. So, if Jesus and the apostles believed that there was only one Isaiah, that's good enough for me!

40:1 Not Much Comfort

You can already tell that we're starting a new section! After all, the majority of the first 39 chapters have been calls to repentance and warnings of judgement! What we're seeing now is the time which God foretold in Isaiah 12:

Is. 12:1 Then you will say on that day, "I will give thanks to You, O LORD; For although You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me."

In the first 39 chapters, comfort has been conspicuously absent. In that verse we just read, Isaiah said, "God will comfort us in the far distant future." The only other time the word is used to is in chapter 22:

Is. 22:3-5 All your rulers have fled together, and have been captured without the bow; All of you who were found were taken captive together, though they had fled far away.

Therefore I say, "Turn your eyes away from me, let me weep bitterly, do not try to comfort me concerning the destruction of the daughter of my people." For the Lord GOD of hosts has a day of panic, subjugation and confusion in the valley of vision, a breaking down of walls and a crying to the mountain.

Not much comfort in those chapters! But now, it will show up 15 times before the book is over!

Comfort My People

Here, God is saying to comfort His people. When you think about it, that's really a command to be like Him, for He is a comforter. The Father is described as the God of all comfort (2Cor. 1). Jesus is a comforter, and promised to the disciples,

John 14:16 (KJV) "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever"

So God is commanding us to do as He does: comfort His people.

What Is Comfort?

The word "comfort" in Hebrew is "naw-KHAM." It means, "to console, to be sorry, to have compassion." And the reason we're commanded to do this for God's people is because there are so many in need of comfort.

Think of David, who wrote,

Psa. 69:20 Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick. And I looked for sympathy, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none.

And Jeremiah, who said,

Lam. 1:16 "For these things I weep; My eyes run down with water; Because far from me is a comforter, one who restores my soul

To be in need of comfort and yet have no one to offer it. How many people are in that same situation today? Even people in our own fellowship.

Solomon wrote,

Eccl. 4:1 ...I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them.

There are a lot of people in the world who distribute discomfort, but how many are available to bring comfort?

The wonderful thing is that Jesus promised:

Matt. 5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

How will they be comforted? Often through ordinary people like you or me who obey His commandment to comfort His people!

A Commitment To Comfort

When we make the decision to obey this comfort command, we're faced with the fact that we don't really know how to comfort people. A comforter is one who restores a sorrowful soul (Lam. 1:16). But how do you do that?. The Bible gives us plenty of direction...

Good News

Often times, people just need to hear some good news to be comforted. Paul was distressed and afflicted and suffering in all sorts of ways. But he found comfort from a simple good report. He wrote to the Thessalonians,

1Th. 3:6-8 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.

All Paul needed was to hear some good news - totally unrelated to his afflictions - to lift him up and restore his soul.

Love

3 Love also gives comfort. Remember that Isaac was grieving terribly

over the death of his mother. But then Rebekah came and they fell in love. The Bible says,

Gen. 24:67 ...she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Again, totally unrelated to the source of his sorrow, but the simple act of love restored his soul.

Mercy

Some people are in need of comfort, but our instinct is to let them suffer, because they deserve to have some discomfort! Think of Joseph's brothers: they beat him up, threw him into a pit, and sold him into slavery. As a result, he ended up spending time as a slave, and then years in prison.

Finally, he gained a position of control, and had them in his grasp. His brothers realized that they were most likely about to be put to death.

Gen. 50:18-21 Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

They were comforted when Joseph showed them mercy - reassuring them that God had intervened, and that they weren't going to get what they deserved.

Intercession

We also see Scripturally that prayers of intercession bring comfort. Often, when faced with someone in terrible sorrow or grief, the best thing I can do is simply begin praying for them.

In the book of Zechariah, we see an angel interceding for God's compassion to be upon Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. Zechariah writes that then...

Zech. 1:13 The LORD answered the angel who was speaking

with me with gracious words, comforting words.

That intercession had been comforting to Zechariah, and will be a comfort to those that you pray for as well.

The Word

Also, I find that the ministry of the Word of God will offer comfort to a person. The psalmist wrote in Psalm 119,

Psa. 119:49-50 Remember the word to Your servant, in which You have made me hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your word has revived me.

"This is my comfort: Your Word has revived me." How true that is! When I'm down in the dumps, all it takes is for someone to remind me of the blessed promises of God, and my soul is refreshed and restored.

Think of the great promises you can minister to people who are discouraged and depressed. How about this one: Jesus Christ is coming at any minute to snatch us up out of this miserable world! That's why Paul wrote of the rapture, saying,

1Th. 4:17-18 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Just Being There

Sometimes, you will find that you don't know what to do or say to bring comfort. I learned early on in ministry that just being there for someone brings great comfort.

Another time that Paul was down in discomfort and discouragement, Titus showed up. He told the Corinthians,

2Cor. 7:6 ...God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus

Just by showing up, Titus brought Paul comfort.

In 1Chronicles chapter seven, Ephraim's sons had been killed when the men of Gath tried to steal their livestock. Ephraim's relatives certainly didn't know what to say to bring the sons back, but...

1Chr. 7:22 Their father Ephraim mourned many days, and his

relatives came to comfort him.

They were just there with him, and it comforted him.

Even Job's friends started out well in this regard:

Job 2:11-13 Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, they came each one from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite; and they made an appointment together to come to sympathize with him and comfort him. When they lifted up their eyes at a distance and did not recognize him, they raised their voices and wept. And each of them tore his robe and they threw dust over their heads toward the sky. Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great.

They were applying the principle that Paul taught us in Romans:

Rom. 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

How Not To Comfort

The problem with Job's friends was that they didn't stick to the basics. They tried to find reasons for his discomfort. They offered suggestions as to the source of his sufferings. They ended up accusing him of having secret sin. To that, Job responded,

Job 16:2 "I have heard many such things; Sorry comforters are you all."

Few things are more destructive than trying to rationalize and theorize in the midst of someone's suffering. A well-timed "I told you so" or "You brought this on yourself" can be more destructive than a stick of dynamite.

Those Who Refuse

And so, we are commanded to offer comfort. Truth be told, some will refuse it:

fused to be comforted (Gen. 37:35)

Asaph once wrote,

Psa. 77:2 ...In the night my hand was stretched out without weariness; My soul refused to be comforted.

And certainly, there is the famous prophecy of the slaughter of the baby boys in Bethlehem, saying,

Jer. 31:15 "...Rachel is weeping for her children; She refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more."

There will be times that offers of comfort will not be received. But don't let that fear stop you from obeying the commandment to comfort.

In Your Affliction

Maybe you've been focused on your own situation tonight. Maybe you're like I am sometimes, hearing messages like this and thinking, "I hope people are hearing this, 'cause I'm afflicted. I need someone to learn how to comfort me!"

If you're thinking that you're the one who needs comfort today, you may be. But don't forget how we started this out: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are available to be our comforters. And we can use that comfort to turn around and offer it to others:

2Cor. 1:3-7 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.