

Thanks Be To God! (Part 1) – Is 40:1-11

Is 40; I trust you've had a good Thanksgiving; Especially so with family and friends
And if your family is anything like ours, and your interactions like the ones we routinely have – you're well familiar with conversations that are all over the map
Jumping from one topic to the next with absolutely no warning and no let-up

It's kind of like the group chats you get sucked into every now and then, where everybody acts like they understand . . .
Until somebody throws up their arms and begs for an explanation

➤ And that's exactly the situation we find ourselves here in Isaiah
Up to this point, he's been talking about sin, and judgment, and woe, and warning, and repentance; And all of a sudden he says in 40:1 – *Comfort, comfort*
And we're left with that feeling of – “Ok, what did I just miss? Something changed”

And that's correct; Something drastic *has* changed
And one of the worst things we could do would be to gloss over it until we get to something that makes sense
B/c we'd miss some very cool things to be thankful for

So let's take this a few verses at a time, and discover what they are
[1] *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. [2] Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.*

The first reason here for which to give thanks to God, is that . . .

His discipline has an end (40:1-2)

Thanks be to God, his discipline has an end
His correction, his chastisement, won't go on forever

As I mentioned last week, this is now 150 years in the future, compared to the end of ch39; Isaiah left off there, speaking to Hezekiah . . .
And then starts ch40 speaking to a completely different group of God's people; People who are in captivity a century and a half later; Babylonian captivity to be exact

And we know that, not only b/c biblical scholars tell us so, and history confirms it – but b/c of verses like **Is 47:5-6**; Where God says . . .
Sit in silence, and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans [another name for the Babylonian people] . . . [6] *I was angry with my people; I profaned my heritage; I gave them into your hand; you showed them no mercy; on the aged you made your yoke exceedingly heavy.* It's an indicator of captivity

And in **48:20a**, God says to the Israelites – *Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea*;
Again, implying captivity
And in **52:2b** – *Loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion*
All referring to the fact that they're in captivity – Babylonian captivity*****
That's the backdrop for the rest of Isaiah's prophecy

➤ But it's not just Isaiah that talks about it – other biblical writers do as well
B/c it's such a massive *event* in the history of God's people; The history of redemption

So I want to take a few minutes to round out your understanding of it with a little Bible survey; Which means you're going to have to turn to some passages
B/c if you can get this fixed in your mind, you'll not only *understand* more in Isaiah and the OT in general, but be able to apply it more
And isn't that the point of studying the Bible?

So first of all, some Scriptures regarding the fact that . . .

The Babylonian Captivity was clearly prophesied

Clearly predicted; Clearly foretold; Isaiah spoke of it, Jeremiah spoke of it, and even Moses spoke of it; Isaiah in chapter 13, and later on in 39:6-7 (**Is 39:6-7**)

God is speaking to Hezekiah, and says – *Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD. [7] And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.*

➤ And then there's Jeremiah, who spoke of it in Jer 21 (**Jer 21:4-7**), about 100 years later, just before the Babylonians invaded

He's speaking to the messengers from Zedekiah, the king of Judah at the time, and says . . .
[4] *'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands and with which you are fighting against the king of Babylon and against the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the walls. And I will bring them together into the midst of this city. [5] I myself will fight against you with outstretched hand and strong arm, in anger and in fury and in great wrath. [6] And I will strike down the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast. They shall die of a great pestilence. [7] Afterward, declares the LORD, I will give Zedekiah king of Judah and his servants and the people in this city who survive the pestilence, sword, and famine into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of their enemies, into the hand of those who seek their lives. He shall strike them down with the edge of the sword. He shall not pity them or spare them or have compassion.'*

➤ Jeremiah foretold it, Isaiah foretold it, and even Moses foretold it, no less than 700 years earlier! That's found in Deut 28:47-52 (**Deut 28:47-52**)
Moses didn't *name* the nation of Babylon, like Isaiah did, but he totally foretold events of destruction and devastation that closely *matched* their invasion
IOW Moses *could* be talking here about *multiple* situations of judgment down through the ages – but at the very least, he's talking about this one, b/c it fits it to a T

[47] *Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, [48] therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you. [49] The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, [50] a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young. [51] It shall eat the offspring of your cattle and the fruit of your ground, until you are destroyed; it also shall not leave you grain, wine, or oil, the increase of your herds or the young of your flock, until they have caused you to perish.*

[52] “*They shall besiege you in all your towns, until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout all your land. And they shall besiege you in all your towns throughout all your land, which the LORD your God has given you.*”

So big was the Babylonian Captivity, that Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Moses all spoke of it
And that’s just the prophecy (**Summary**)

It’s also recounted and *recorded* in multiple places, *after* the fact; IOW . . .

The Babylonian Captivity was clearly recorded

Like in **2 Kings 25, Jer 39, Jer 52**, and 2 Chron 36:15-21 (**2 Chron 36:15-21**)

[15] *The LORD, the God of their fathers* [referring to the Israelites], *sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place.* [16] *But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy.*

IOW they minimized and ignored God’s warnings of judgment, until his patience ended
He’s long-suffering, yes; But not forever; Stop flirting with disaster

[17] *Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans* [the Babylonians], *who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand.* [18] *And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon.* [19] *And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels.* [20] *He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia* [about 50 years later], [21] *to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.*

70 years, b/c Jeremiah prophesied that the captivity would *last* 70 years (Jer 25:12)
And goes to show that if you fail to observe God’s design and purpose for your life as one of his own, he may force it upon you
Just like he imposed a Sabbath on the land and nation; A time of rest where they were *forced* to consider him (**Summary**)

In any case, the Babylonian captivity was clearly prophesied and clearly recorded – as discipline for God’s people at the time
And the more you understand it, the more you’ll know the heart of God, and the more you’ll live his way

➤ That’s the prophetic situation they were in when Isaiah started speaking words of comfort to them, 150 years ahead of time
Kind of like *you* writing a letter to your great, great, great grandchildren – to console them in the midst of some situation you imagine they are in, in the future
And instead of sealing it in a time capsule or something, you let your family read it now
In which case, they’d probably get warm fuzzies and all, like the contemporaries of Isaiah undoubtedly did . . .

But those who read it a century and a half later, would probably hang on every word

That’s how this is; Only in this case, Isaiah’s not *imagining* the hardship and relief, he’s prophesying it in no uncertain terms, under the inspiration of God’s Spirit

➤ And what he says, coming full circle, is cause for thanks; Thanks for 2 reasons
One, b/c Isaiah’s discouraging commission is over; His call to ministry
Remember that, from chapter 6? Where Isaiah saw the Lord in a vision, high and lifted up; And inspired by the glory of it all, he responded to God’s call to go?
“Here am I! Send me” he said

Only to have God say – “Great; Go tell them they’re going to get it; Go tell them the very things that are going to harden their hearts even more” (**Is 6:11-12**)
And with that dose of reality, Isaiah *said*, “*How long, O Lord?*” And he *said*: “*Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, [12] and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.*”

Speak the message of judgment until it comes God says; And in the prophetic sense, it’s here; *Finally*; Which is cause for thanks – both for the listener *and* the speaker
B/c *nobody* likes to hear that stuff; And nobody likes to speak it*****

➤ Second, the second reason this is cause for thanks, is that it indicates that God’s discipline in our lives, has an end
Look at v2b again – *Her warfare is ended, her iniquity is pardoned, and she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins*; As in, more than enough
Indicating that just as God’s patience has an end, so does his discipline

His discipline for his *children* – for those who *know* him

It’s not talking about his punishment for those who *don’t* – those who *aren’t* his own, those who *don’t* believe in him, those who *don’t* follow him as Lord
Their torment, their punishment, their discipline – goes on forever
But not ours; And thanks be to God for that; Otherwise we’d be doomed

➤ It’s like the Psalmist said in **Ps 118:18** – *The LORD has disciplined me severely, but he has not given me over to death.*
Implying that there’s an end to it; Even an end to the severity; Just like there was with our spiritual forefathers in captivity; Thanks be to God for that

And if you’re in the *middle* of God’s discipline, I trust this is comforting*****

I’m not talking about suffering due to the ill-effects of a fallen world and fallen people
Like natural disasters, or accidents, or the persecution of people who oppose the truth for which you stand

I’m talking about the discipline of difficult times that you well *know*, is a direct consequence of your sin

I’m talking about hardship that has an uncanny *connection* with your rebellion
And I’m here to comfort you by saying it has an end; Especially as you humble yourself
It’s the first reason for which we can and should be thankful; His discipline has an end

Second . . .

A way has been made (3-5)

Thanks be to God, b/c a way has been made; A way for *us* to come to *God*, and *him* to come to us

[3] A voice cries: “*In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. [4] Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.*

[5] *And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*”

It’s a message of hope; The first 2 verses are a message of comfort, while these are a message of hope

Hope that God would come to them, and provide a way back to Jerusalem

Removing their obstacles along the way

Obstacles like the *wilderness* of their lives in captivity; And the *desert* of their souls

And the *rough ground* of their journey

And the *mountains* of powerful nations, like Babylon

And the *valleys* of death and despair in which they walked

God would make a way Isaiah’s saying – to come to his people, reveal his glory, and restore their lives

And when he does, it’s going to be unmistakable; Everybody’s going to see it

That’s hope; And they must have hung on those words

➤ But the coolest part, is that what was hope for them, is *reality* for us

Reality, b/c the NT tells us that John the Baptist, 6 centuries later, was that voice crying in the wilderness; Shortly after Jesus was born; That’s **Mt 3:1-3**

In those days [i.e. the days after Jesus returned from hiding in Egypt to live in Nazareth]

John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, [2] “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” [3] For this is he [Matthew says] who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”

John the Baptist is the voice of Isaiah 40:3; Something he says himself, in **Jn 1:23**

“*I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.*”

Which means that the *Lord* to whom Isaiah refers (3), is *Jesus*; B/c that’s who John is talking about*****

➤ Not only that, but Luke, in *his* gospel, says that the *it* that all flesh will see, from v5 of

Isaiah, and the *glory of the Lord that shall be revealed* . . .

Is the salvation of God (Lk 3:6)

The glory of the LORD shall be revealed Isaiah said, and *all flesh shall see it*; See what?

The salvation of God according to Luke

And who’s that? Jesus; B/c Jesus is the embodiment of our salvation; He is the way, the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6)

So what was hope for the Israelites of old, is *reality* for us

It’s a prophecy with a near term fulfillment for the Israelites, a long-term fulfilment for us, and a yet-to-come fulfillment when the Lord returns

B/c one day, with *all* the obstacles removed, *the Lord himself will descend from heaven, with the voice of an archangel* to prepare the way (1 Thess 4:16a)

And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together (5a) . . .

When he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and marveled at among all who believe (2 Thess 1:10)

It was true in the past, it’s true in the present, and it *will* be in the future; B/c it fits, and *the mouth of the LORD has spoken* (5b) (**Summary**)

Thanks be to God; A way has been made; And his discipline has an end

Prayer – Lord, thank you for making a way, a way of salvation, and preparing our hearts when we couldn’t; Thank you that your discipline has end – it’s one of the many ways you love us; And thank you for the truth of your word that we can depend on for life and godliness

We give now, to further your work; And ask that you bless both the gift and the giver