

## 8. “Comfort My People” (1Q 2021—Isaiah)

**Biblical Material:** Isa. 40:1, 2; Isa. 40:3–8; Isa. 40:9–11; Isa. 40:12–31.

### Quotes

- I fear that many people seek to hear God solely as a device for securing their own safety, comfort and righteousness. For those who busy themselves to know the will of God, however, it is still true that “those who want to save their life will lose it.” My extreme preoccupation with knowing God’s will for me may only indicate, contrary to what is often thought, that I am overconcerned with myself, not a Christlike interest in the well-being of others or in the glory of God. *Dallas Willard*
- ...I don’t want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness, I want sin. *Aldous Huxley, “Brave New World”*

### Questions

What is the source of the comfort Isaiah was told to bring to his people? What kind of God is being described here? Why is this important, and why does Isaiah spend so much time in the description of God? What are the fundamental issues? Despite the wonderful depiction of God here in Isaiah, what is still missing?

### Bible summary

Isa. 40:1, 2 begins the chapter with loving words of reassurance from God. He promises that the hard times are over, and that their sins are forgiven. Isa. 40:3–8 provides the contrast between a dependable divine king and his “flaky” people, whose trustworthiness is as durable as fading flowers. The call in Isa. 40:9–11 is to proclaim that God is our God, and that he comes to help and care. Isa. 40:12–31 is a poetic vision of God in all his glory as Creator and Sustainer of our world along with the promise that God will give strength to those who trust in him.

### Comment

This chapter illustrates why Isaiah has been termed the “gospel prophet.” In beautiful language Isaiah sets out in summary the desire of God to save his wayward and rebellious children, to give them comfort and joy, and to experience life to the full (see also John 10:10).

God’s first thought is to want to comfort his people. He recognizes that we are “like grass.” His message is one of “good news.” He wants to carry us close to his heart like lambs. God is incomparable. So no idol could ever be sufficient. He names the stars he has created. He wants to be our hope and source of strength so we can fly like eagles.

Yet once again the issue, though of wonderful benefit for us, is that the true comfort that comes from God is not some emotional reassurance but the evidence that answers the questions raised in the great controversy. The truth is that we have comfort because God is the kind of God he is. Otherwise there really is no comfort—certainly not in a punitive and vengeful God who inflicts pain and violence, or who seeks some legal satisfaction etc.

Nor is God one who is uncaring about us and our situation, which is why he came at such great cost to settle the arguments and to win us back to love and to trust. Yet even here in Isaiah we still miss seeing God’s love in practical action, which is why it was so important that he come in person. Only through Jesus do we see God in all his fullness.

While our own salvation is of course of great importance to ourselves personally, is not the whole perspective of the great controversy more important? Isaiah, and the Bible, are particularly directed to the human situation, but we must not lose sight of the cosmic aspect.

The vindication of God is not some self-referenced concern about a ruined reputation or a maligned character. It is essential for the proper functioning of the whole universe and every thinking being within it. While we obviously relate everything to ourselves and our future happiness, the real issue is over the nature and character of God. Can he be trusted? What are his fundamental principles? Is he the kind of person he says he is? What is the evidence? What about the Devil's accusations? These and many other similar questions need to be asked in the context of the wider issues that have plagued God's government since the rebellion of Lucifer.

While this passage from Isaiah does certainly proclaim God's power and creative ability, that is not the primary issue in the great controversy. Instead it is over how God uses that power, over his true motives and intentions, over the *kind* of God he truly is. The people God was speaking to through Isaiah certainly wanted to know that their God was powerful, that he was the Creator, that he was the only true God. They also needed to know that he cared for them and that he was going to do them good. In the context, and in the conflict they experienced, maybe that was all they needed. But there was more that God wanted to show them aside from what might be called "human basics." He wanted them to do right because it is right, and there is no other way to live. Yet because of their limited perspective, he had to couch his language in concepts they could understand, dealing with the issue of idols and so on.

For us today, worship of some image made of wood or stone or metal may seem ridiculous. Yes, we too have our idols that reflect our materialistic and hedonistic society. But we do not invest man-made objects with divine qualities. That God had to repeatedly deal with this ongoing problem shows the level of the common people of the time, and we cannot ignore that. While we too need to be reminded of God as Creator, as the exclusive and singular God, we need to know more—the true nature of God as revealed in Jesus. Only then can we come to experience the intimate relationship with our loving Lord that he truly wants.

### **Ellen White comments**

Isaiah saw Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem amid the praises and rejoicing of the people. His prophetic words are eloquent in their simplicity. [Isa. 40:9-11 quoted.] Inspiration is revealed in this record of Christ's work. These closing chapters of the book of Isaiah should be diligently studied; for they are full of the gospel of Christ. They reveal to us that Israel was fully instructed in regard to the coming Saviour (MS 151, 1899). {4BC 1144-5}

In Christ is the tenderness of the shepherd, the affection of the parent, and the matchless grace of the compassionate Saviour. His blessings He presents in the most alluring terms. He is not content merely to announce these blessings; He presents them in the most attractive way, to excite a desire to possess them. So His servants are to present the riches of the glory of the unspeakable Gift. The wonderful love of Christ will melt and subdue hearts, when the mere reiteration of doctrines would accomplish nothing. "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God." {DA826}

Many were the messages of comfort given the church by the prophets of old. "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people" (Isaiah 40:1), was Isaiah's commission from God; and with the commission were given wonderful visions that have been the believers' hope and joy through all the centuries that have followed. {PK 722-3}