

Comfort in the coming of God's Glory

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Hebrew Text: Isaiah 40:1–8

נַחֲמוּ נַחֲמוּ עַמִּי יֹאמֶר אֱלֹהֵיכֶם : 2 דַּבְּרוּ עַל-לֵב יְרוּשָׁלַם וְקִרְאוּ אֵלֶיהָ
 כִּי מִלְאָהּ צָבְאָהּ כִּי נִרְצָה עֲוֹנָהּ כִּי לָקַחְתָּ מִיַּד יְהוָה כַּפְלַיִם בְּכָל-
 חַטָּאתֶיהָ : 3 קוֹל קוֹרֵא בַּמִּדְבָּר פִּנּוּ דֶרֶךְ יְהוָה יִשְׂרוּ בְּעֵרְבָה מְסֻלָּה
 לְאֵלֹהֵינוּ : 4 כָּל-גֵּיא יִנָּשֵׂא וְכָל-תֵּר וְגִבְעָה יִשְׁפָּלוּ וְתֵהָּ הֶעָקֵב לְמִישׁוֹר
 וְהָרִכְסִים לְבִקְעָה : 5 וְנִגְלָה כְבוֹד יְהוָה וְרָאוּ כָל-בָּשָׂר יַחְדָּו כִּי פִי יְהוָה
 דִּבֶּר : 6 קוֹל אֹמֵר קָרָא וְאָמַר מִה אֶקְרָא כָּל-הַבָּשָׂר חֲצִיר וְכָל-חֲסֻדּוֹ
 כְּצִיץ הַשָּׂדֶה : 7 יִבֶּשׂ חֲצִיר נִבְּלָ צִיץ כִּי רוּחַ יְהוָה נִשְׁבָּה בּוֹ אֲכַנּוּ חֲצִיר
 הָעֵם : 8 יִבֶּשׂ חֲצִיר נִבְּלָ צִיץ וְדַבַּר-אֱלֹהֵינוּ יָקוּם לְעוֹלָם : 8

Translation:

1 “Comfort, comfort my people!”, says your God. **2** “Speak upon the heart of Jerusalem and call out to her that her war was fulfilled, that her iniquity was accepted, that she received from the hand of Adonai double for all her sins”.

3 A voice calls out, “In the wilderness, prepare a way for Adonai! Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. **4** Every valley will be lifted up and every mountain and hill will be made low; the uneven terrain will become level, and the mountain ridges a plain. **5** The glory of Adonai will be revealed, and all flesh will see it at the same time”. For the mouth of Adonai has spoken.

6 A voice says, “Call out!”. And I said, “what should I call out?” All flesh is grass, and all its glory¹ is like the flower of the field. **7** Grass withers, flowers fade when the breath of Adonai blows on them. Surely, the people are grass. **8** Grass withers, flowers fade, but the word of our God will stand forever.

¹ ⚭(Sv) 1 Petr 1,24 δόξα; see also 6:3.

Verb Parse:

| Verse Ref | Verb | Root | Stem | Form | PGN | Special |
|-----------|----------------------|------|--------|------------|-----|---------|
| v. 1 | נְחִמּוּ | נחם | Piel | Imperative | mp | |
| v. 1 | נְחִמּוּ | נחם | Piel | Imperative | mp | |
| v. 1 | יֹאמֶר | אמר | Qal | Imperfect | 3ms | |
| v. 2 | דַּבְּרוּ | דבר | Piel | Imperative | mp | |
| v. 2 | וְקִרְאוּ | קרא | Qal | Imperative | mp | |
| v. 2 | מָלְאָה ^a | מלא | Qal | Perfect | 3fs | |
| v. 2 | נִרְצָה | רצה | Niphal | Perfect | 3ms | |
| v. 2 | לְקַחְהָ | לקח | Qal | Perfect | 3fs | |
| v. 3 | קוֹרֵא | קרא | Qal | Participle | ms | |
| v. 3 | פָּנוּ | פנה | Piel | Imperative | mp | |
| v. 3 | וַיִּשְׂרוּ | ישר | Piel | Imperative | mp | |
| v. 4 | וַיִּנְשֵׂא | נשא | Niphal | Imperfect | 3ms | |
| v. 4 | וַיִּשְׁפֹּלּוּ | שפל | Qal | Imperfect | 3mp | |
| v. 4 | וַדְּבִיחַ | דבח | Qal | Perfect | 3ms | |
| v. 5 | וַיִּנְגְּלוּ | נגל | Niphal | Perfect | 3ms | |
| v. 5 | וַיִּרְאוּ | ראה | Qal | Perfect | 3cp | |
| v. 5 | דַּבֵּר | דבר | Piel | Perfect | 3ms | |
| v. 6 | אֹמֵר | אמר | Qal | Participle | ms | |

| | | | | | | |
|------|--|---------|------------|--|------------|--|
| v. 6 | קָרָא | קָרָא | Qal | Imperative | ms | |
| v. 6 | וַאֲמַר LXX ² : וַאֲמַר | אָמַר | Qal | Perfect LXX ² : Imperfect | 3ms | |
| v. 6 | אֶקְרָא | קָרָא | Qal | Imperfect | 1cs | |
| v. 7 | יִבְשֵׁא ^a | יָבֵשׁ | Qal | Perfect | 3ms | |
| v. 7 | נִבֵּל | נָבַל | Qal | Perfect | 3ms | |
| v. 7 | נִשְׁבָּה | נָשַׁב | Qal | Perfect | 3fs | |
| v. 8 | יִבְשֵׁ | יָבֵשׁ | Qal | Perfect | 3ms | |
| v. 8 | נִבֵּל | נָבַל | Qal | Perfect | 3ms | |
| v. 8 | יִקְוִים | קִוִּים | Qal | Imperfect | 3ms | |

² Shalom M Paul, *Isaiah 40-66: translation and commentary*, (Eerdmans, 2012), 133.

Background Information

The name Isaiah in Hebrew, יִשְׁעָיָהוּ, is formed by the combination of ישע, which means “to save”, and יה, which is short for יהוה, or “Adonai” (the Lord’s holy name). Thus, in Hebrew, Isaiah literally means “Adonai saves” or “Adonai is salvation” and that is the overarching message of 40:1–8, as well as the entire prophetic book of Isaiah.

The book in its entirety is 66 chapters but can be bifurcated into two sections. The first section is comprised of chapters one through 39, which were authored by the prophet Isaiah in Jerusalem. These chapters record his prophecy during the second half of the eighth century BCE, or pre-exile, and overlap the Judean monarchies of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. The central theme of chapters one through 39 is one of judgement of the Israelites for their rebellious ways, which include rampant idolatry and social injustice towards the poor and vulnerable. Isaiah calls on his people to repent of their sins and turn towards God, otherwise they face the wrath of God vis a vis invasion and destruction by a neighboring kingdom’s army. Isaiah’s call to repent comes with a corresponding message of hope for salvation, which will come through a savior born from the line of King David (11:2). Through this savior, upon whom God’s Spirit will rest, God’s people will be returned to peace in a new Jerusalem and Judah’s enemies will come to an end.

The story line of this first section climaxes in chapters 36 and 37, around 700 BCE, when the Assyrian army threatens to invade Jerusalem and destroy it. Hezekiah famously goes to prayer in 37:14–20, to which Adonai responds by wiping out the Assyrian army and subsequently killing their king, King Sennacherib (nonetheless while he’s worshipping his god, Nisroch).

But as a rebellious people does, the Judeans did not give the glory to God after His divine intervention. Instead, they resorted to their prideful ways, including in chapter 39 when King Hezekiah shows off his treasuries to the then king of Babylon. Thereafter, Isaiah prophesied on behalf of Adonai that the Israelites would eventually be conquered and sent into exile by the Babylonians (39:5–7). Hereafter, the Babylonians would in fact conquer Jerusalem and send exile them for nearly 100 years. As tragic as this was, the exile would give God an even greater opportunity to show His covenanted loyalty to and love for His people.

The second section of the book of Isaiah, chapters 40 through 66, resumes in the final years of the Babylonian exile (in the second half of the sixth century BCE). With the prophet Isaiah obviously deceased now, authorship is attributed to an anonymous author herein referred to as ‘Deutero-Isaiah’, who is believed to have been another prophet and maybe even a student of Isaiah’s original works. The second section begins in chapter 40 with an immediate message of comfort from God, as He prepares to bring His people out of exile and back into Jerusalem. Chapter 40 sets the overall encouraging tone for the remainder of the book, in which the hope for a Davidic savior to usher in a new Jerusalem is brought into focus (i.e., God’s revealed glory).

Theological Explanation of Key Words

The word רַחֵם is used back-to-back in the piel stem in 40:1. By also using it in the imperative form both times, Deutero-Isaiah sets a tender, heartfelt, and hopeful overtone for this post-exilic half of the book, such that God is now bringing *comfort* to His people whose service has been fulfilled and whose iniquities have been forgiven (40:1).

According to Botterweck, רַחֵם in the piel stem means to “feel sympathy for someone, comfort, console, pity, requite, strengthen, ameliorate (someone’s pain)”³. In 40:1, Deutero-

³ G. Johannes Botterweck, *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament: Volume 9* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977-2021), 342.

Isaiah is most likely addressing the watchmen of Jerusalem with these imperatives (cf. 52:7–10), as the prophet, speaking on God’s behalf, seeks to comfort God’s people in a situation of suffering. This definition is supported by the fact that נָחַם is used in parallel with דַּבְּרוּ עַל־לֵב (meaning “speak upon the heart [of]...”), which gives additional overtones of love and affection (cf. Gen. 50:21, Ruth 2:13)⁴.

VanGemeran echoes Botterweck’s definition of נָחַם , which he defines to mean “comfort, console” in the piel⁵. Other instances of this in relation to the suffering exiles include 49:13, Jer. 31:13, Lam. 1:2, 16-17, and Zech. 1:17.

The word הִלָּא is used more than 180 times in Biblical Hebrew and used in two different meanings: (1) to uncover or reveal, and (2) to go or send into exile⁶. When used in the niphil stem, as it is used in 40:5, its only meaning is to “uncover or reveal”. Botterweck notes that the use of הִלָּא in the niphil by itself in the Old Testament is used as a technical term for revelation (see also 22:14)⁷. Thus, in 40:5, $\text{הִלָּאֵת הַכְּבוֹד}$ refers to the “revelation of” or the “revealing of” Adonai’s glory.

Herein, God is choosing to reveal His own glory by ending the exile and bringing His people back into their promised land, as He covenanted with them. By doing so, God proves once again His goodness and faithfulness and does so in a way for all people to see. But it’s important to note that הִלָּא is used in a similar application in the first verse of the messianic chapter 53, in which case the “arm of Adonai” (or Adonai’s “salvific strength”) is to be revealed, as well as in 56:1, in which case Adonai’s salvation and righteousness is to be revealed. Thus,

⁴ Botterweck, 352.

⁵ VanGemeran, 82.

⁶ Willem VanGemeran, *New international dictionary of Old Testament theology & exegesis: Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 861.

⁷ Botterweck 484.

the post-exilic, comforting message of 40:1–8 not only applies to God’s ushering of the Judeans out of exile, but also to God’s salvific ushering of all nations into the new Jerusalem with the coming revelation of His glory.

Commentary

Deutero-Isaiah uses 40:1–8 to set an immediate change in tone for the post-exilic half of the book of Isaiah. While Isaiah’s chapters 1 through 39 centered around a pre-exilic message of judgement and hope, chapter 40 begins nearly 200 years later in the second half of the sixth century BCE as Israel’s atonement is over and the Babylonian exile is coming to an end. Verses one through eight preface the transition out of exile with a message of comfort from Adonai, who is about to reveal His glory to all nations (v. 5) by leading His people out of the wilderness (v. 3). Furthermore, His people can rest assured that God will be faithful in His message of comfort and His declaration for salvation as His word endures forever (v. 8). As Webb concludes, “The gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel of Isaiah 40 transposed into a new, higher key. And it, too, is far too important to be contained. It must be shouted from the housetops, not just for the cities of Judah, but for all the world to hear”⁸.

[1] Verse one opens with the consecutive use of נִנְחֵם in the plural imperative of the piel stem, implying that the prophet’s command to comfort God’s people is directed at the watchmen of Jerusalem. Deutero-Isaiah uses this verb as well in 43:11, 51:3, 51:12, 52:9, 61:2, and 66:13, highlighting the recurrent overtures of encouragement in his post-exilic messaging to the people of Israel.

[2] Deutero-Isaiah’s message of comfort continues in verse two, with the prophet instructing the watchmen to speak tenderly to Jerusalem. She (Jerusalem) should find further

⁸Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah* (InterVarsity Press, 1997), 164.

comfort in the genuineness and conclusive nature of this message because Deutero-Isaiah confirms that she has fully paid for her sin, and thus, she is forgiven. In fact, Deutero-Isaiah says Jerusalem received *double* the punishment for her sins, affirming that her payment (through warfare and exile) was satisfactory.

[3] Now that God has pardoned their iniquities, verse three tells us that it is God who will solely bring comfort to His people by breaking into human history and leading them out of the desert Himself (cf. 52:7–10). As Oswalt says, “It is the coming of God, the revelation of Him in human sight”⁹. The anonymous voice delivering the message in verse three gives potential allusion to the seraphim in chapter 6 or potential foreshadowing to John the Baptist in John 3:30. But that is a moot point against the backdrop of this verse, which foretells the ushering in of Adonai’s holy glory and the hope for salvation that will come with Him (cf. 59:15–20).

[4] The magnitude of the glory to come with God’s revelation is illustrated in verse four with the leveling of valleys, mountains, hills and ridges. Nothing, not even the most significant geologic formations on earth, can get in the way of God and His coming glory. The repetition of כָּל־ emphasizes the miraculous nature of this illustration¹⁰.

[5] Verse five prophesies outright that Adonai’s glory will be revealed to all nations upon His coming. The revelation of God’s glory (כְּבוֹד יְהוָה) is an increasingly frequent concept at this point in the book of Isaiah and occurs another 16 times from chapters 41 through 66¹¹. Its climax comes with three instances in 66:18–19, which declares that the final culmination of God’s glory will come when all nations and all tongues are gathered together in His name (cf. Rev. 7:9–10). הִלְלֵינָהּ! As such, 40:5 and 66:18–19 bookend Isaiah’s message of hope with the coming of

⁹ John N. Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah, 40-66 (NICOT)* (Eerdmans, 1998), 50.

¹⁰ Paul, 131.

¹¹ Oswalt 52.

Adonai's glory. The second part of verse five affirms the truth in the coming of God's glory as God has declared it Himself. As verses six through eight demonstrate, what God speaks into existence, happens.

[6] The dialogue at the beginning of verse six, when Deutero-Isaiah responds with, "what should I call out?", parallels the dialogue with Isaiah in God's throne room in 6:11, demonstrating the progression of the prophecy and of God's message to His people from the certainty of judgment to the certainty of hope in God's declaration to reveal Himself to all nations. Deutero-Isaiah's simile comparing humanity and its own glory to grass and flowers, both of which wither and die with time, attempts to illustrate the transient nature of humanity in comparison to the eternity and truth of God's spoken word. It gets at the right point, but nobody needs to look any further than Gen. 1:3–27 to see the divinity and truthfulness in what God speaks.

[7] Verse seven echoes the sheer mortality of humanity in comparison to Adonai, but Deutero-Isaiah draws a powerful comparison of the wind to the breath and to the Spirit of Adonai in the use of רוּחַ יְהוָה. So for the Judeans, even their heroic forefather Moses paled in comparison to the eternity of the Holy Spirit (cf. Ps. 90:5). Furthermore, the עַמּוּד at the end of this verse refers specifically to the people of Jerusalem, serving as a reminder that God's salvation will come solely from God and will be available to all nations¹².

[8] Verse eight repeats the simile a third time, emphasizing the gravity of this concept.

Application

This passage reaffirms the key focuses of the ministry my wife and I have been called to through our non-profit, Cheerful Givers:

¹² Oswalt 54.

1. Responding to our missional call (v. 1, 6): Just as Deutero-Isaiah responded to God's missional call to comfort Jerusalem and prophesy the hope in the coming of God's glory, Cheerful Givers must continue responding to its missional call. In 2024, that call has been to distribute the Word of God across east Africa, as well as begin laying the foundation for efforts in Messianic Evangelism both domestic and abroad.

2. Sharing the Word of God with all nations, Jews and Gentiles (v. 2, 7): As disciples of Yeshua, we are called to share his gospel and the Word of God with all nations. Cheerful Givers must continue responding to God's call expeditiously, no matter how near or how far. Our primary mission in distributing Bibles, especially to geographies and economies whereby accessing Bibles is almost impossible, is central to God's calling for us.

3. The Word of God comforts (v. 1, 2): There's no better healing word than that of the Bible, and there's no better physician than Adonai Himself. He proved this to me when I became ill in the second half of my July 2024 mission trip, and I have faith He will continue to prove it as Cheerful Givers pursues its calling to the betterment of education and training for physicians in Rwanda.

4. We and our legacies are mortal; only God and His glory is eternal (v. 6 –8):
As Cheerful Givers grows and as we become "more successful" in responding to our missions, we must undoubtedly, forever and ever, always give the glory to God and never take the glory for ourselves. We achieve what we do through Him, for Him, and in Him.

5. Salvation comes from God alone (v. 3–5): Nothing we are doing is more important than sharing the Word of God, telling others about Yeshua, and glorifying God's name. **Salvation only comes through Him and where He chooses to reveal His glory.**

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