



"THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME"
ISAIAH 61:1

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THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

CHAPTER 40

AND HIS NAME
WILL BE CALLED
WONDERFUL COUNSELOR,
MIGHTY GOD,
EVERLASTING FATHER,
PRINCE OF
PEACE.
ISAIAH 9:6

Isaiah is called "The Book of Salvation." The name *Isaiah* means "the salvation of the Lord" or "the Lord is salvation." Isaiah is the first book containing the writings of the prophets of the Bible. And the author, Isaiah, who is called the Prince of Prophets, shines above all the other writers and prophets of Scripture. His mastery of the language, his rich and vast vocabulary, and his poetic skill have earned him the title, "Shakespeare of the Bible." He was educated, distinguished, and privileged, yet remained a deeply spiritual man. He was committed to obedience over the long haul of his 55-60 year ministry as a prophet of God. He was a true patriot who loved his country and his people. Strong tradition suggests that he died a martyr's death under the reign of King Manasseh by being placed within the hollow of a tree trunk and sawed in two.

Isaiah's calling as a prophet was primarily to the nation of Judah (the southern kingdom) and to Jerusalem, urging the people to repent from their sins and return to God. He also foretold the coming of the Messiah and the salvation of the Lord. Many of his prophecies predicted events that occurred in Isaiah's near future, yet at the same time they foretold the events of the distant future (such as the coming of the Messiah), and even some events still to come in the last days (such as the second coming of Christ).

In summary, the message of Isaiah is that salvation comes from God—not man. God alone is Savior, Ruler and King.

Commentary on the book of Isaiah is by noted theologian Rev. William G. Most (1914-1999). His contributions to theology have been recognized all over the world. He published 12 books and a host of articles on topics ranging from biblical studies to Mariology and Latin grammar.

Book of Isaiah

Summary of Chapter 40

Zion's King and God is coming. Chapter 40. Summary and Comments

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Isaiah speaks of a period about a century after his death, thanks to prophetic light. He says: Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Her hard service, that is, her distress, brought on by sins, but atoned for by suffering, is at an end. For her sin has been paid for. She has received double for her sins.

Only the sufferings of Jesus paid the debt of sin fully. Yet it is the will of God that human should be like Him in this, and in that sense, pay. To speak of double payment is of course just poetic exaggeration: if taken at face value God would be unjust.

Now the prophet hears a voice in the desert calling for making the way of the Lord ready. Roads at that time were not so good, and when a King was to pass over them, his servants would go ahead to make the roads ready. The imagery seems to be that God Himself will lead them back from their exile. The desert could mean the Syrian desert which is between the promised land and Babylon. But those who traveled did not ordinarily go over that desert. So the desert here probably stands for the distress of Israel in exile.

The notion of atonement by suffering is common in the OT, Inter-testamental literature, NT and Rabbis and Fathers in that sin is pictured as a debt which the Holiness of God wants to have paid. Rabbi Simeon ben Eleazar in <Tosephta, Kiddushin> 1. 14 wrote (thinking of a two pan scales): "He [anyone] has committed a transgression. Woe to him. He has tipped the scale to the side of debt for himself and for the world." Cf. Wm. Most, <The Thought of St. Paul> (Christendom Press, 1994, appendix, pp. 289-301.

Of course the Gospel applies these words to John the Baptist, who was to prepare the way for the Messiah, Jesus. Interestingly, in Malachi 3:1 God says He is sending His messenger before Him, that is before God, who is to come to His temple. To apply this passage to John coming before Jesus could suggest the divinity of Jesus. In Mt 11:10 Jesus does use these words about John. But he uses the words of Malachi in the adaptation common in His day, which happened by telescoping as it were the words of Malachi with those of Exodus 23:20 where God said He would send His messenger before Israel on their journey to prepare the way for them.

As part of the work of preparing the way for the Lord, valleys will be filled, mountains leveled - poetic exaggeration of course.

Then the glory (<kabod Yahweh>) of the Lord will be revealed. That phrase most commonly stood for the visible presence of God -as in the pillar of cloud at the Exodus -- to reveal the presence of God to help His people. Ezekiel in chapter 10 saw the glory of God leaving Jerusalem. (In chapter 43 Ezekiel saw it returning).

But then a remarkable addition; All mankind shall see it (His glory) together. This probably means that God plans to extend the privilege of being His special people to all. St. Paul in Eph 3:3-6 says that plan of God was not known to previous times. It is only dimly hinted at here in Isaiah, and it seems the Jews did not grasp it. Even when Jesus told the Apostles to teach all nations, they still did not understand, as we notice in Acts 10.

Then a voice, seemingly the voice of God, says to Isaiah: Cry out. He asks: What shall I cry out? The answer: All men are like grass, their glory is like that of the flowers of the field (Cf. Psalm 103:15-17). When the breath of the Lord blows on them -- thinking of the desert wind in May - they wither. Similarly the exile should not be afraid of the power of their oppressors, who seem so strong now. The breath of the Lord can make them collapse. Only the word of the Lord, what He decrees, shall stand forever.

The prophet is also to go up to a high mountain and say: Here is your God. He comes with power. His arm rules for him. His arm stands for his power - really, a poor image for the power of the mere word of the Almighty! He brings reward, and He tends His flock like a shepherd. There is an even more remarkable line in Ezek 34:11 in which God says: "Thus says the Lord God: Behold I, I will search out my sheep and seek them out." We notice the repeated <I, I>. It seems to mean God will come in person. And in verse 23 of the same chapter He continues: "I will set one shepherd over them, my servant David." So it seems to say God will come in person, but will come in the person of the Messiah, my servant David. There is apt to be a similar implication in Jeremiah 23:3: "And I myself shall gather the remnant of my sheep from all the lands to which I have driven them. But in verse 5: "I will raise up for David a righteous branch." Here the Targum understands the word branch as the Messiah. (The Targums commonly take that word branch to stand for the Messiah). Cf. also Jeremiah 30:11: "I am with you to save you." The Targum calls this messianic. Another hint, it seems, that the Messiah is to be God Himself.

Then to increase their confidence in the power of God who will save them: "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand? Or with a breath has marked off the skies?"

In admiration Isaiah adds: "Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or whom did the Lord consult for wisdom". No, God is infinitely above all human designs and wisdom. At the end of the grand sketch of the Providence of God in Romans 11, St. Paul exclaims: "O the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God.

How incomprehensible are His judgments and untraceable His ways! . . . Who has been His counselor?" Similarly in 1 Cor 1:26: [We paraphrase]: "That which seems stupid in God's work is really wiser than men, and what seems weak is stronger than men." We will see a similar thought in Isaiah 55:9: "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways."

He continues saying that the nations are like a drop in the bucket to God's eye. The islands are mere dust. Lebanon with its great forests is not enough for a fire for His altar, nor are all its animals enough for a sacrifice. In His eyes all the nations are nothing, worthless and less than nothing.

Then to the Israelites who were so prone to worship idols: To whom could you compare God? A craftsman laboriously makes an idol, but the idol can do nothing at all. He asks the people: Have you not heard: He sits enthroned above the skies, people look like grasshoppers from that height. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy. He brings princes to nothing. He blows on them and they wither. He calls out the host of the stars - here we might think of some figures from astronomy. Antares in the southern sky seems like a dot, yet it is so huge that if the distance from the earth to the sun were tripled, it could not get in between them. The nearest of the countless spiral galaxies, Andromeda, is so far away that light racing at over 186, 000 miles per second takes 2. 2. million years to reach us. And yet He made all these, not with great planning or computers, but by merely saying: Let it be.

Israel is tempted to say: God does not know our woes. Yet His eye takes in all things, His understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary;, even young men in their great vigor may stumble, but those who hope in the Lord will see their strength renewed, they can soar like eagles.

End of Chapter 40