

Behold, your God!

Isaiah 39:1-40:14

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Isaiah is a book in three sections. Chapters 1-35 are prophetic, with the theme of condemnation. Chapters 36-39 are historic, and the theme is confiscation. Chapters 40-66 are messianic, and the theme is consolation. Chapter 39 is actually an introduction to the second half of Isaiah.

Isaiah 39:1-8 – Babylonian Envoys (NIV)

At that time Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters and a gift, because he had heard of his illness and recovery. ² Hezekiah received the envoys gladly and showed them what was in his storehouses—the silver, the gold, the spices, the fine olive oil—his entire armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them.

³ Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked, “What did those men say, and where did they come from?” “From a distant land,” Hezekiah replied. “They came to me from Babylon.” ⁴ The prophet asked, “What did they see in your palace?” “They saw everything in my palace,” Hezekiah said. “There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them.” ⁵ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the Lord Almighty: ⁶ The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your predecessors have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord. ⁷ And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.” ⁸ “The word of the Lord you have spoken is good,” Hezekiah replied. For he thought, “There will be peace and security in my lifetime.”

v1 – When did the king of Babylon send emissaries to Hezekiah?

At that time: This was after the miraculous recovery of Hezekiah. The Lord gave King Hezekiah 15 years more of life, but it was up to Hezekiah if those years would be lived in wisdom and to the glory of God.

Why did the king of Babylon send gifts to Hezekiah?
Sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered: Apparently this was a gesture of kindness from the king of Babylon, showing concern to Hezekiah as fellow royalty.

Who was Merodach-Baladan?

The son of the king. His presence showed this was more than a courtesy call. This was an attempt to bring the kingdom of Judah on to the side of the Babylonians against the Assyrians.

- To the Assyrians Merodach-Baladan was a terrorist; but he considered himself to be a freedom-fighter devoted to the liberation of Babylon from Assyrian tyranny.

v2 – How did Hezekiah respond to this visit?

And Hezekiah was pleased with them: We can imagine that this was flattering for King Hezekiah. After all, Judah was a lowly nation with little power, and Babylon was an emerging superpower.

Also, Hezekiah was deeply worried about Assyria. Feeling honored by the embassy, he gladly welcomed the envoys of this archenemy of Assyria. Without consulting anyone, he showed them his vast treasures, his abundant supplies of food, and his military armaments.

- God had given Hezekiah great wealth, so the visitors were duly impressed (2 Chron. 32:27-29).

Why did Hezekiah show the Babylonians all his treasures?

As the coming rebuke from Isaiah will demonstrate, this was nothing but proud foolishness on Hezekiah's part. He is in the dangerous place of wanting to please and impress men, especially ungodly men.

- It was a genuine compliment for Hezekiah to receive this recognition from the king of Babylon. But Hezekiah let it go to his head.
- Just as Samson revealed his strength to the whore, so Hezekiah revealed God's glory to the devils as though he were their companion.

How does have having a biblical worldview about the nature of people reduce the likelihood of being conned?

Jeremiah 17:10 – *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?*

The humanist believes that all people are basically good and are often caught by surprise when they are lied to and cheated. Knowing the nature of man should make you more skeptical of the good intentions of others insisting on checks and balances until they have earned your trust.

How can we avoid being prideful when we receive complements?

It is easy to get too puffed up when people compliment or recognize us. But we should resist taking their praise — and ourselves — too seriously.

Galatians 1:10 – *For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.*

When we live to please men, we cannot at the same time live to please and serve God.

Shouldn't we seek to please men?

Our objective should be to please God. This in turn will often result in our pleasing men as well. Thus, we should follow the example of Jesus...

Luke 2:52 – *Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*

What should Hezekiah have said to the envoys?

Thank you for coming and thank Merodach for his gift and invitation, but the fact is I have a divine promise to lean on; it has been confirmed personally in my return to health and cosmically in the sign of the sun. I cannot turn from faith in the promises of God.

v3-4 – Why did Isaiah question Hezekiah about the Babylonian envoys?

Isaiah's questions were likely guided by God to allow Hezekiah the opportunity to answer honestly (which he did) and to see his error himself (which he apparently did not).

- Hezekiah's pride and inflated ego made him blind to the risk.

v5-7 – What did God have to say about Hezekiah showing the Babylonians everything?

Hezekiah thought that this display of wealth would impress the Babylonians. All it did was show them what Judah had, and what they could get from them.

- One day Babylon would come and take it all away. This was fulfilled in 2 Kings 24:10-13 and 2 Kings 25:11-17, under the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar.
- It would be more than a hundred years before Babylon carried away the royal treasures of Judah, but they did come, just as Isaiah prophesied.

This prophecy is so remarkably accurate that many skeptics insist — without grounds other than unbelief — a later “Isaiah” must have written it after the fact.

What besides riches would the Babylonians take away?

And they shall take away some of your sons...and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon:

Worse than taking the material riches of the kings of Judah, the king of Babylon would take the sons of the king of Judah — his true riches.

- One fulfillment of this was the taking of Daniel and his companions into captivity (Daniel 1:1-4).
- Because of this prophecy, it is likely that Daniel and his companions were made eunuchs when they were taken to serve in the palace.
- Indeed the “master of eunuchs” was their initial supervisor, Daniel 1:3.

v8 – How did King Hezekiah respond to this prophecy of Babylonian doom?

At least there will be peace and truth in my days: This is a sad state of heart in the king of Judah. God announces coming judgment, and all he can respond with is relief that it will not happen in his lifetime.

- Hezekiah started out as a godly king, yet he did not finish well. God gave Hezekiah the gift of 15 more years of life, but the added years did not make him a better or more godly man.

Is it guaranteed that people get wiser with age?

Time or age doesn't necessarily make us any better. Time will only come and go. It is how we use time that matters.

- Hezekiah didn't make good use of the extra time the Lord gave him.

Isaiah 40:1-8 – Comfort for the afflicted (NIV)

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken." ⁶ A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. ⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

v1 – Chapter 39 warned Judah of a coming future Babylonian invasion, where is the comfort in that?

“Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” Says your God: The previous 39 chapters of Isaiah certainly had passages of comfort and hope, but there was a strong tone of judgment and warning throughout the section. Now, beginning with Isaiah 40, the tone shifts to being predominantly full of comfort and blessing, full of the glory of God.

- How could Judah celebrate the downfall of Assyria when everyone knew that a more powerful invader was on the way?

How is comfort a characteristic of Almighty God?

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 – *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 tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

The Lord wants His people to receive His comfort even when He warns us of tribulation. God wants His messengers to speak comfort to His people.

- It is important for those hurting hearts to hear a word of comfort from God’s messenger. As one preacher put it, “Preach to broken hearts and you will never lack an audience.”

v2 – How should Jerusalem be comforted?

That her warfare is ended: At the moment Isaiah spoke this, the battle may have still loomed. This may very well have been a prophetic word; even though there was still an army against them, as far as God was concerned, her warfare is ended. This was reason for comfort.

What is the application to us knowing that our comfort is coming even in the midst of our current struggle?

It is in this same sense that God speaks to us and tells us we can be more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37). The battle still looms, but as far as it concerns the believer in Jesus Christ, our warfare is ended, because...

1 John 4:4 – *You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.*

How else should Jerusalem be comforted?

That her iniquity is pardoned: This is real comfort; to be recognized as a sinner — as one having iniquity — yet knowing just as much that our iniquity is pardoned.

Why had Jerusalem’s sins be pardoned?

For she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins: This declares the basis for the pardon of iniquity — the sin has been completely paid for.

- Isaiah, speaking in Old Covenant terminology, speaks of Jerusalem bearing the curse for disobedience described in passages like Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

What is the principle here that applies under the New Covenant?

Our iniquity is pardoned because our sin has been paid for. This is a reason for comfort.

Does it seem unfair that God would have a double payment for sin?

Double means ‘to fold over, fold in half’ (Exodus 26:9).... When something is folded over, each half corresponds exactly with the other half, and this would yield the thought of exact correspondence between sin and payment.

- The point is, a payment has been made, and it was exactly the payment that was needed.

Does having our sin pardoned mean that God has simply decided to “let us off the hook?”

No... Under the New Covenant, it is not we who have received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins; it is our sin-bearing Savior Jesus Christ, who received the cup of wrath from the LORD’s hand double for all our sins.

v3-4 – What is the voice of one crying in the wilderness?

Isaiah speaks for the LORD’s messenger, who cries out to the barren places...

Prepare the way of the LORD: The idea is that the LORD is coming to His people as a triumphant King, who has the road prepared before Him so He can travel in glory and ease. Every obstacle in the way must be removed: every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth.

How do we prepare the way of the Lord?

The idea of preparing the way of the LORD is a word picture because the real preparation must take place in our hearts. Building a road is very much like the preparation God must do in our hearts. They are both expensive, they both must deal with many different problems and environments, and they both take an expert engineer.

v5 – To whom is the glory of the Lord revealed?

God's glory is revealed to the prepared hearts described in the previous verses. And it is revealed without regard to nationality; all flesh shall see it together. This glory of the LORD is not revealed only to Jerusalem or Judah, but to every prepared heart.

How was this prophecy of preparing the way of the Lord fulfilled in the time of Jesus?

This passage of Isaiah 40:3-5 has a direct fulfillment in the person and ministry of John the Baptist.

- Jesus was the coming Messiah and King, and John the Baptist's ministry was to be one crying in the wilderness, and through his message of repentance, to prepare the way of the LORD.

v6 – What was the message of the one crying out in the wilderness?

All flesh is grass: The message is the frailty of man.

- Isaiah thinks of the beautiful green grass covering the hills of Judah after the winter rains, and how quickly the grass dies, and the hills are left brown and barren. This is how frail and weak man is.
- Even the beauty of man is fleeting and passes as quickly as spring wildflowers (*all its loveliness is like the flower of the field*).

v7 – Why does the grass wither and the flower fade?

Because the breath of the LORD blows upon it: Man is in this frail state at the pleasure of God. It is to God's glory and according to His plan that man is this frail, and the glory of man is so fleeting.

v8 – What is contrasted with mankind's fleeting nature?

The word of our God stands forever: The message is the permanence of God and His word. In contrast to the frailty and fleeting glory of man (*the grass withers, the flower fades*), the word of our God endures.

- The voice crying out in the wilderness was meant to prepare hearts for the coming of the LORD by leading them into repentance. The understanding of our frailty and fleeting glory, contrasted with the eternal enduring of God and His word, should humble us in repentance before the LORD.

How has the word of our God endured?

It has survived centuries of manual transcription, of persecution, of ever-changing philosophies, of all kinds of critics, of neglect both in the pulpit and in the pew, of doubt and disbelief — and still, the word of our God stands forever.

- Written on material that perishes, having to be copied and recopied for hundreds of years before the invention

of the printing press, did not diminish its style, correctness, nor existence.

- The Bible, compared with other ancient writings, has more manuscript evidence than any ten pieces of classical literature combined.

In A.D. 303, the Roman Emperor Diocletian demanded that every copy of the Scriptures in the Roman Empire be burned. He failed, and 25 years later, the Roman Emperor Constantine commissioned a scholar named Eusebius to prepare 50 copies of the Bible at government expense.

Voltaire, the French skeptic and unbeliever who died in 1778, said that 100 years from his time, Christianity would be swept from existence and passed into history, and that the Bible would be a forgotten book. Many years after Voltaire's death, the Geneva Bible Society used his press and his house to produce stacks of Bibles.

If the Bible had not been the book of God, men would have destroyed it long ago.

What is the application that the Apostle Peter made by quoting this verse?

1 Peter 1:22-25 – *Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever.*

Peter gives a stirring call for love among believers. Then, using the passage from Isaiah 40:8, he makes a beautiful connection, showing that the enduring word Isaiah spoke of is the same word of the gospel that is preached and believed, bringing salvation.

- Since this eternal, fruit-bearing seed is in us, we have both the obligation and the ability to have a sincere love of the brethren.

Isaiah 40:9-14 – Behold Your God! (NIV)

⁹ *You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"* ¹⁰ *See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.* ¹¹ *He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.* ¹² *Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his*

hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? ¹³ Who can fathom the Spirit of the Lord, or instruct the Lord as his counselor? ¹⁴ Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge, or showed him the path of understanding?

v9 – Why should the one bringing good tidings, get up into the high mountain?

From on top of the high mountain, the messenger can proclaim this great message to as many people as possible. It is a message that should be shouted out, so the messenger is told, Lift up your voice with strength.

What is the great message, that should be shouted so loud?

Say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God”: It is an invitation to behold your God. There is nothing greater for a believer to do than to study and to know their God.

What does it mean to behold your God?

The message isn’t to give God a passing glance. It speaks of studying Him, of a long-term mission to grow in the knowledge of the greatness and the character of our God.

- After every sermon, a preacher should ask, “Did I help the people to behold your God?”

v10 – What specifically should we behold about God?

Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong hand: One aspect of our God we should behold is the fact of His return. Our God will return to this earth, and He will come with power (*a strong hand...His arm shall rule*).

What did Isaiah want us to know about God’s coming?

When the LORD comes back, He comes to reward His people (*His reward is with Him*). He comes to inspect His work (*and His work before Him*).

v11 – What else should we know about God’s coming?

He will feed His flock like a shepherd: Another aspect of our God to behold is His loving care as a shepherd. The first thing a shepherd must do for his sheep is feed them, and the LORD feeds us like a shepherd feeds his flock.

Why does the Bible often refer to people as sheep?

Sheep must be directed to the good pasture and must be moved on to new pasture when they have stripped the grass bare. We need as much carefully directed feeding as sheep! No creature has less power to take care of itself than the sheep; even the tiny ant with its foresight can provide for the evil day, but this poor creature must be tended by man or else perish.

- God loves to identify Himself with a shepherd. Many of the greatest men of the Bible were shepherds, and their character as shepherds points to Jesus Christ.

How were the shepherds of the Old Testament types of Christ?

- Abel, the sacrificed shepherd.
- Jacob, the working shepherd.
- Joseph, the persecuted and exalted shepherd.
- Moses, the called-out-from-Egypt shepherd.
- David, the shepherd king.

What does it tell us that *He will gather the lambs with His arm?*

Our LORD shows special care for the lambs. The youngest, the weakest, are not despised — they are given special care by the LORD who first actively gathers them and will carry them in His bosom. He doesn’t cast the weak lambs over His shoulder, as a shepherd might carry a sheep. Instead, He lovingly cradles them in His bosom, close to His heart. That is both a safe place and a tender place.

- To carry is kindness, but to carry in the bosom is loving-kindness.
- He also shows special care for the parents with young ones.

How is Jesus the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-15)?

He is good in His care and sacrifice for the flock.

How is Jesus the Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20)?

He is great in His glorious triumph over every enemy.

How is Jesus the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4)?

He is the Chief over all His people.

How will Jesus act as a shepherd when He returns?

He divides the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:31-33). He will separate them one from another as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats, and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, ‘Depart ye cursed.’

v12 – What else should we behold about God?

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand: Another aspect of our God to behold is His authority over all creation. Our God is so great, and so dominant over all creation, that He has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand and has measured heaven with a span (1/2 cubit).

How is this an example of an anthropomorphism?

An anthropomorphism speaks of God in human terms so we can partially understand some aspect of Him. God is not a being with the body of a giant, so large that all the waters of the earth could be cupped in His hand, or so large that the universe could be measured by the span of His hand.

- The Bible tells us that God the Father is spirit, so He does not have a body as we know it (John 4:24).

What does it tell us that God *calculated the dust of the earth in a measure*?

God knows exactly how many grains of dust there are on the earth.

- To take it further, God knows how heavy the mountains are (*He weighed the mountains in scales*), and the hills also for that matter! (*And the hills in a balance*)

v13 – What is another aspect of God we should behold?

Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has taught Him? His great wisdom... He has the raw intelligence to know how much dust there is in the earth, and how heavy the mountains and the hills are. But more than that, God has the wisdom to use that knowledge. God is so wise, that no one has directed the Spirit of the LORD; no one as His counselor has taught Him.

With whom did He take counsel: God needs no counsel, no instruction, no teacher, and no one to show Him the way of understanding.

What applications come to mind from our discussion?

- Don't have a worldly view of the nature of men, trust but verify!
- Don't be a Hezekiah, resolve to finish well!
- God is the God of comfort... knowing Him puts our worldly suffering in the right perspective.
- God is the God of comfort... knowing He paid the penalty of our sins is a great, eternal comfort.
- The reality of our eternal salvation will cause us to love the brethren.
- There is a lot to behold of our God; more that we will be able to learn in all eternity.