

Comfort for Zion

Isaiah 51

By Scott Huckaby

8/13/2023

**BIG BEND
BIBLE
FELLOWSHIP**

Isaiah 51:1-8 – “Listen to Me” (NIV)

“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; ² look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was only one man, and I blessed him and made him many. ³ The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing. ⁴ “Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: Instruction will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations. ⁵ My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm. ⁶ Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail. ⁷ “Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have taken my instruction to heart: Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals or be terrified by their insults. ⁸ For the moth will eat them up like a garment; the worm will devour them like wool. But my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations.”

v1 – Who does God want to listen to Him?

You who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord: The LORD here speaks to His people, but His people have had trouble listening to Him. So, three times in this chapter, the exhortation is given: Listen to Me.

v2 – What is the rock from which you were hewn?

Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you: God counsels His people to look at His work in His people in days past. This is one of the great glories of God’s word to us; it tells us how God has dealt with His people and gives us faith and guidance for His work in our lives — if we will listen to Him.

Why did God remind Israel about how He blessed Abraham?

As Isaiah spoke to them here, God’s people were in a discouraging place. They felt defeated, and the prophet told them to look at God’s work in and through His people in days past.

- Just as He did great things with Abraham and Sarah, He can do great things through them.

v3 – What should comfort Israel?

For the LORD will comfort Zion...He will make her wilderness like Eden...Joy and gladness will be found in it: Remembering Abraham and Sarah should give them hope for this promise. The promise seems too good to be true, but by faithfully remembering God’s work in people like Abraham and Sarah, they would have the faith to believe God’s promise to them today.

Why is it important to share with one another what God has done in our lives?

When we hear of what God has done and is doing in the lives of others, it can build our faith for God’s work in our own lives.

When would God make Israel’s wilderness like Eden?

This reminds us that though these promises had a near fulfillment in the return from Babylon’s captivity, their ultimate fulfillment is in a regathered, blessed, and saved Israel in the Millennial Kingdom.

v4 – When would God make His justice as a light to the peoples?

During the Millennial Kingdom. When the LORD ultimately regathers, blesses, and saves Israel, He will also shine forth His justice to all the world — to Israel (*My nation*) and to all the nations (*the peoples*).

How is God’s justice distinguished from man’s justice?

Man’s justice aka social justice favors certain select groups of people. God’s justice is true justice that doesn’t discriminate between people.

Romans 2:11 – *For there is no partiality with God.*

v5 – How is it God’s righteousness is near?

God is near, and acquiring righteousness is near as well. All a person has to do is trust in God’s provision for our sins to be forgiven.

Romans 3:22 – *the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.*

As we’ve seen before in Isaiah, righteousness goes along with salvation... those who are saved are saved by the righteousness of Christ imputed to all who believe (trust in Him).

How is it the Lord’s arms will judge the peoples (NKJV)?

Psalm 77:15 – *You have with Your arm redeemed Your people*

Jesus stretched out His arms on the cross, the ultimate redemption of His people. The ultimate question is: are you trusting in the Lord’s work on the cross for your eternal salvation? That is the standard by which people will be judged at the Great White Throne judgment.

NIV: *my arm will bring justice to the nations*: this sounds like the Millennial Kingdom (ruling with a rod of iron). Differences like these is why I prefer study with a word-for-word translation like the NKJV.

I’ve heard Psalm 77:15 compared with:

Psalm 8:3 – *When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;*

God’s work of redemption was greater than His work of creation... He used His arm vs. His fingers

What does it mean the islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm?

Here again the NKJV sheds light: *The coastlands will wait upon Me, and on My arm they will trust.* The Gentiles that are far away will trust in the Messiah and His redemptive work.

v6 – When will the heavens vanish away like smoke, the earth will grow old like a garment?

These are references to phenomena during the Tribulation prior to Second Coming of Jesus to establish the Millennial Kingdom (Matthew 24:35, 2 Peter 3:7-10, Revelation 6:12-17). The Lord will clean up the earth and the heavens removing much of the curse foreshadowing the Eternal State.

Isaiah 65:17 – *For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind*

In context, Isaiah 65 refers to the Millennial Kingdom, not the Eternal State because death is still around for unbelieving mortals.

What does it mean the earth will wear out like a garment?

It will be a bit frayed around the edges, an apt description of the earth following it becoming polluted from wars and God’s judgment and also the devastating earthquake of the final bowl judgment that flattens cities and mountains.

When will the earth’s inhabitants die like flies?

The Tribulation... not a good time to be on earth, it will be much better to escape with the Bride of Christ.

Isaiah 13:12 – *I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold*

What is this salvation that will last forever?

This is eternal salvation, our resurrection/glorification when the Bridegroom returns for His Bride.

v7 – Why shouldn’t we fear the reproach of mere mortals?

Knowing the permanence of the righteousness and salvation of the LORD, and the passing nature of the wicked (*For the moth will eat them up like a garment*), we should listen to God, and not be afraid of men.

Matthew 10:28 – *do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

What is the worst that men can do to us? Kill us, but then:

2 Corinthians 5:8 – *We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord*

v8 – What is the significance of God’s righteousness being forever?

Knowing that the righteousness and salvation of the LORD are permanent and the mocking of the wicked are temporary, we should stand strong in faith. This is something to listen to.

What is the significance of God’s salvation being from generation to generation?

God’s plan is that parents should share the gospel with their children...

Proverbs 22:6 – *Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.*

Isaiah 51:9-23 – “Awake, awake!” (NIV)

⁹Awake, awake, arm of the Lord, clothe yourself with strength! Awake, as in days gone by, as in generations of old. Was it not you who cut Rahab to pieces, who pierced that monster through? ¹⁰Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made a road in the depths of the sea so that the redeemed might cross over? ¹¹Those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. ¹²“I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mere mortals, human beings who are but grass, ¹³that you forget the Lord your Maker, who stretches out the heavens and who lays the foundations of the earth, that you live in constant terror every day because of the wrath of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction? For where is the wrath of the oppressor? ¹⁴The cowering prisoners will soon be set free; they will not die in their dungeon, nor will they lack bread. ¹⁵For I am the Lord your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar— the Lord Almighty is his name. ¹⁶I have put my words in your mouth and covered you with the shadow of my hand—I who set the heavens in place, who laid the foundations of the earth, and who say to Zion, ‘You are my people.’” ¹⁷Awake, awake! Rise up, Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes people stagger. ¹⁸Among all the children she bore there was none to guide her; among all the children she reared there was none to take her by the hand. ¹⁹These double calamities have come upon you— who can comfort you? — ruin and destruction, famine and sword— who can console you? ²⁰Your children have fainted; they lie at every street corner, like antelope caught in a net. They are filled with the wrath of the Lord, with the rebuke of your God. ²¹Therefore hear this, you afflicted one, made drunk, but not with wine. ²²This is what your Sovereign Lord says, your God, who defends his people: “See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again. ²³I will put it into the hands of your tormentors, who said to you, ‘Fall prostrate that we may walk on you.’ And you made your back like the ground, like a street to be walked on.”

v9 – Who is asking the arm of the Lord to put on strength?

Here, the faithful believer calls out to the LORD, looking to Him for salvation. They know of God’s great works in the past (*Awake as in ancient days*) but ask God to act on their behalf now.

Why would a believer call on God to awake?

It really should be the other way around...

Psalm 121:4 – *Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.*

Though it is phrased this way, it is really more of a wakeup call to faith for the believer than an attempt to wake up God.

How is it the arm of the Lord cut Rahab to pieces, who pierced that monster through (wounded the serpent)?

When did God cut Rahab apart, and wound a serpent? The name Rahab means pride, and ever since the Garden of Eden, the serpent has been associated with Satan (Genesis 3:1-6). This speaks in poetic terms of God’s victory over Satan...

Psalm 89:10 – *You have broken Rahab in pieces, as one who is slain; You have scattered Your enemies with Your mighty arm.*

Satan has fallen from his position near God as the covering cherub at the throne of God. During the Tribulation, Satan will be barred from the spiritual realm, at the end of the Tribulation he will fall from earth to the abyss and at the end of the Millennial Kingdom he will be thrown into the lake of fire.

v10 – When did God dry up the sea so that the redeemed might cross over?

This was the red sea when God delivered Israel from Egypt.

Why did God want Israel to remember His rescuing Him from Egypt?

God redeemed Israel before and He wants them to know He will do that again... from Babylon ...from the Antichrist ...and individually from the consequences of sin.

v11 – Which return to the land of Israel is this referring to?

This has both a near term and ultimate fulfillment: Babylon and from the Diaspora in preparation for the Millennial Kingdom.

What does it mean their return will be characterized by everlasting joy?

This return is as believers trusting in Christ. The return that is happening now is mostly in unbelief. But immediately following the Tribulation it will be in belief.

Jeremiah 16:14-15 – *“Therefore behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when it will no longer be said, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ but, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where He had banished them.’ For I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers.”*

God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt was a supernatural intervention and their return in belief from all over the world will likely be supernatural as well...

Matthew 25:31-32 – *When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.*

Where will this judgment of the nations occur?

Probably the land of Israel from where Jesus will rule.

How will all the nations get to Israel for this judgment?

Would there be some sort of subpoena sent out to all people on earth and everyone would have to arrange to fly El Al to Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv? At this stage of the earth’s infrastructure being totally destroyed, I would imagine this would be some sort of supernatural lateral rapture of all the nations to Israel. And of course, the believing Jews would be the happiest to be taken to Israel.

v12 – Who shouldn’t Israel fear?

Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die: With promises this glorious, and a God this mighty, we have no reason to fear man. Man can never undo God’s plan for our lives. Compared to the great power of God, they are like grass.

Who should Israel fear?

God, as should we all...

Matthew 10:28 – *do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

v13 – What is the root problem when we fear the wrong things?

You forget the LORD your Maker... You have feared continually every day: The two go together. We will only live in fear continually every day if we forget the LORD. When we forget the LORD, we forget His tender love and care for us: *I have covered you with the shadow of My hand...and say to Zion, “You are My people”* (v16).

v14 – Who are the cowering prisoners that will be set free?

In context, this has to be Judah in Babylonian exile. God would preserve and care for them even when they are in exile.

v15 – What does the Lord Almighty do?

Stirs up the sea (NIV)... divides the sea (NKJV)... God is in control; it is He who delivers Israel.

v16 – What else did the Lord do?

put my words in your mouth – Told His people representing Him what to say...

Matthew 10:19-20 – *when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you*

covered you with the shadow of my hand – This phrase reminds us of how God covered Moses with His hand, as Moses hid in the rock and the LORD made His glory to pass before Moses (Exodus 33:17-23).

set the heavens in place – God is amazing... 200B galaxies with each around 100B stars per galaxy

laid the foundations of the earth – The earth is a special place in God’s creation... and it happened prior to the 6 days of creation.

say to Zion, ‘You are my people.’ – God chose Israel to represent Him as He chose each of us to represent Him during this Age.

v17 – What did God want those in Jerusalem to do?

Awake, awake! Stand up, O Jerusalem: God’s people sometimes spiritually “fall asleep” and need to be awakened...

Romans 13:11-12 – *And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.*

What is this referring to, you who have drunk at the hand of the LORD, the cup of His fury?

A common picture of judgment in the Old Testament is the cup of God's wrath or fury. The idea is that God gives a cup "full" of His wrath to those who are under judgment, and they must drink it. Here, God calls Jerusalem to remember that they have drunk at the hand of the LORD, the cup of His fury when they experienced God's judgment through the Babylonians.

- Not only did Jerusalem drink the cup, but they also drank down to the dregs at the bottom of the cup. They had experienced desolation and destruction, famine and sword, and this was God's cup for them.

What else comes to mind when we think of drinking from the cup of God's wrath?

This powerful image was in the mind of Jesus when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before His crucifixion...

Luke 22:42 – Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done

He had in mind the cup of God's wrath He was about to drink — to the dregs — at the cross.

v18 – Why were there no children to guide or take Israel by the hand?

When Israel returned from exile in Babylon, they would no longer have kings... they would have only vassals appointed by the Gentiles ruling over them. The next king from the line of Judah who would rule over them would be Jesus Christ during the Millennial Kingdom.

v19 – Who could Israel turn to for comfort from the calamities drinking from the cup of God's fury?

No human comforter, only God. By their being brought to the end of themselves, they had no one to turn to but God.

v20 – What had become of the hope of Israel?

They couldn't put their hope in the next generation, they too are trapped and suffer the wrath and rebuke of the Lord.

v21-22 – What had made Israel drunk if it wasn't wine?

They were drunk in the cup of God's fury... it had made them as senseless as if they were drunk on wine. That is why they needed to awake from their drunken stupor.

How did God limit the cup of His fury?

God took the cup of His fury from Israel. The time would come when He would restore Israel back to the land He had given them.

v23 – What would God do with the cup of His fury that took from Israel?

He would pass it to those who had afflicted Israel. Certainly, the Babylonians would taste this cup when God raised up the Medes and Persians to conquer them.

- God would humiliate those who humiliated His people.

What applications come to mind from our discussion?

- Sharing what God has done in our lives builds up the faith of others... that is what fellowship is all about!
- God's justice is far superior to man's justice... do not be dupped by the ways of the world.
- The Lord's work of redemption was greater than His work of creation... praise Him!
- Israel is returning to the land in unbelief, a fulfillment of prophecy... the day is coming when they will return as believers at the glorious beginning of the Kingdom.
- It is a terrible thing to drink from the cup of God's fury... but it serves its purpose and is limited.