

ISAIAH 40



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Isaiah 40 -- Plan

- Dispensationalism
- Author's Intended Meaning
- Context
- Text
- Further Discussion

Origin of Dispensationalism

- What is it?
- Dr. Scofield defines a dispensation as a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God. He teaches in the Scofield Bible that there are Seven Dispensations:
 1. The Dispensation of Innocency: before the Fall;
 2. The Dispensation of Conscience: before the Flood;
 3. The Dispensation of Human Government;
 4. The Dispensation of Promise: from the calling of Abraham until Mt. Sinai;
 5. The Dispensation of the Law: from Mt. Sinai to the cross of Christ;
 6. The Dispensation of Grace: from the cross of Christ to the Second Advent;
 7. The Dispensation of the Kingdom: the Millennium.

Dr. H. A. Ironside, a dispensationalist and an ardent disciple of Scofield, acknowledges that the dispensational doctrine of the Church is of comparatively recent origin and that it was brought to the fore through the writings of Mr. J. N. Darby, the leader of the 'Plymouth Brethren,' who died in 1882.

Dispensationalism

- (Col 2:13-14 KJV) 13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; 14 Blotting out **the handwriting of ordinances that was against us**, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;
- **Question: What was nailed to the cross?**

Dispensationalism 2

- (Col 2:13-14 ESV) 13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.
- **Question: What was nailed to the cross?**

Dispensationalism 3

- The word that Paul uses which KJV translates as “handwriting of ordinances” and which the ESV (and multiple other newer translations) translates as “the record of debt” was: **cheirograph**. He uses that word nowhere else in the New Testament.
- The word that Paul uses in others of his letters for THE LAW was: **nomos**.
- The word **nomos** does not appear *anywhere* in the letter he wrote to the Colossians.
- The word **cheirograph** turned up on some ancient scrolls in Egypt during the 1800’s. Turns out the word normally means a debt, sort of an **IOU**.
- Does it make sense that the “record of our debt” was nailed to the cross?
- If (IF!) it were not THE LAW, but OUR DEBT, that was nailed to the cross... **what impact does that have** on our study of Isaiah 40 today?

Video Links

- [Author's Intended Meaning](#) (1.5 minutes)
- [Context](#) (6.5 minutes)
- [Text](#) (5.5 minutes)

Isaiah 40

- What is the CONTEXT of Isaiah 40?
- What is the AUTHOR's INTENDED MEANING of the book of Isaiah?
- Pre-study: What are the two main topics of the chapter?

Isaiah 40

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^{4a};
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.^{4b}

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."

⁹ You who bring good news to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.

You who bring good news to Jerusalem,^{10a}
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^{13a} 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?

¹⁵ Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket,
they are regarded as dust on the scales;

he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

¹⁶ Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires,
nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.

¹⁷ Before him all the nations are as nothing;
they are regarded by him as worthless
and less than nothing.

¹⁸ With whom, then, will you compare God?
To what image will you liken him?

¹⁹ As for an idol, a metalworker casts it,
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold
and fashions silver chains for it.

²⁰ A person too poor to present such an offering
selects wood that will not rot;

they look for a skilled worker
to set up an idol that will not topple.

²¹ Do you not know?

Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood since the earth was founded?

²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,
and its people are like grasshoppers.

He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

²³ He brings princes to naught
and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

²⁴ No sooner are they planted,
no sooner are they sown,
no sooner do they take root in the ground,

than he blows on them and they wither,
and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

²⁵ "To whom will you compare me?
Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:
Who created all these?

He who brings out the starry host one by one
and calls forth each of them by name.
Because of his great power and mighty strength,
not one of them is missing.

²⁷ Why do you complain, Jacob?
Why do you say, Israel,

"My way is hidden from the LORD;
my cause is disregarded by my God"?

²⁸ Do you not know?
Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.

²⁹ He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.

³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;

³¹ but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

Pre-Background

- There is a span of about 150 years between chapter 39 and chapter 40 of Isaiah.
- The historical background for the material in chapters 40-66 is the Babylonian Exile and the post-exilic period. These chapters have been referred to as "the Book of Consolation" and "the heart of the Old Testament."
 - In chapters 1-39 Isaiah spoke to his own generation regarding the ability of God to defend them against the Assyrians. Sennacherib (king of Assyria) was the predominant world leader.
 - In chapters 40-66 Isaiah envisioned the day when the Babylonians would destroy Jerusalem and take the Jews into Captivity (586 B.C. and see also 2 Kings 25). He also envisioned the events that would result in the Jews returning to Jerusalem to rebuild and restore their nation. Cyrus (king of Persia) was the predominant world leader.

Background

- With this chapter we begin the second portion of the Book of Isaiah, which has as its common theme the salvation and future blessing of God's people. When you work in this section of the book, you have to **work on several levels of significance or application**, and you have to work on them in the proper order.
- **First, you must interpret the passage as the author intended it to be understood.** This means that your first consideration would be to think about how the message would fit the exiled community as they were being encouraged to leave Babylon and return to the land. The prophet was giving them a message they would need later when they were in exile.
- Recall that the Jews had been taken into captivity in three waves, in 605 B.C., 597 B.C. and 586 B.C. when Jerusalem was destroyed. They knew that they were to be there for 70 years, and so toward the end of that exile they were to be prepared to leave. They did leave in 536 when Persia ruled the land. But a lot of the Jews did not go back to the land, but stayed in the east. As we said before, Isaiah did not know these dates, because he is writing beforehand. He probably thought his audience would be in exile, and so he was giving them the message of comfort.

Background 2

- Second, and related to the first, you must **consider the impact of the message on the immediate audience**. This is true of all prophetic passages, in the Old or New Testament. They may predict something far off in the future, but the immediate audience will learn some basic principle under that discussion that will build faith, reprove, or instruct. The theological message of the passage will be the same; but the response to it will be different for different times, perhaps preventive as opposed to remedial. Even if Isaiah's immediate audience never went into captivity, they would have learned from the sermons to **repent (and hopefully stave off the exile)**, and to know that **even if they went they were still the covenant people (if they believed) and would be coming back**. That would have encouraged them.

Background 3

- **Third, you must then consider how the passage would be understood in Gospel times.** This step is usually important because the prophecy probably will have some Messianic import. Often the Messianic passage will have a meaning back in the Old Testament times that is but a type or a foreshadowing of the Christ event. Or, the Isaianic passage may be quoted in the New Testament, especially in some apostolic teaching on doctrine or practice, and this provides a good intermediate step to the present application. Isaiah 40 was applied to John and Jesus in their missions.
- **Fourth, you then may look for the significance or application for the modern audience.** Here you are looking for similar conditions to the original setting so that you can apply the theology in a similar way.

Discussion

- What **attributes or qualities of God** does Isaiah present in these verses?
- Timing:
 - After Hezekiah, to bear the exile?
 - At the end of the exile, going home (150 years later)?
- **Where cited?** -- 3 A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.

Discussion 2

- **What is the significance of naming Lebanon?**
 - 16 Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.
- “Isaiah doesn’t criticize idol-making; he just describes it... Description is all he has to do. Idol-making is too stupid to require comment. His serious tones and careful observations are dripping with sarcasm. Idols may be decked out impressively, they might even inspire awe and mystery, but all they are is what they are.”
 - **But what about today?**

Discussion 3

- The Milky Way is 104,000 light-years across, containing over 100 billion stars. To count them one by one would take us over 3,000 years. And according to the latest probing of the Hubble Space Telescope, there are hundreds of billions of galaxies in God's universe!
 - **100,000,000,000 stars, times**
 - **100,000,000,000 galaxies, equals**
 - **10,000,000,000,000,000,000 stars**
- But so what? Is all this just a big stunt? No. God wants us to see something about himself. The God who brings out their host by number every night, who calls them by name so that not one of them is missing – this God has made a promise to use this fifth-rate little world we live in. He has promised us himself in all his glory. *Do you think this God deserves your confidence? Do you think this God who manages the universe, right down to the faintest star, will lose track of you?*

Discussion 4

- Questions for the exiles to wrestle with:
 - Has God been defeated by the gods of the Babylonians?
 - Has our sin separated us from God forever?
- Just as he had said that judgment would come, and it had, so he now says restoration will come, and it will!

Discussion 5

- How does Isaiah's message of comfort apply to us today?
- What sorts of circumstances or events cause contemporary people today to become weak and weary?
- What Christian within your acquaintance could you encourage with a word about God's comfort the next time you see him or her?