

God—The Comforter of Israel

Isaiah 51

Isaiah 40 began God's reoccurring theme of comforting His people

- God is the God who comforts—“*Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God*” (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

➡ In Isaiah 51 we find the word “**comfort**” four times (vs. 3, 12, 19).

The MEANING of comfort.

The Biblical meaning of “comfort” doesn't guarantee a life free of trials, dangers, or struggles.

➡ **The BIBLE DEFINITION** of “comfort”—

Webster's 1828—“To strengthen; to invigorate...”

Oxford Dictionary—“To strengthen (morally or spiritually)...”

Standard Dictionary 1895—“To give consolation; encouragement; or moral strength to...”

1. These definitions carry the idea of strength. Notice the *root word* of “comfort”—FORT. The word “fort” suggests a “stronghold.”
 - To “fortify” something means to strengthen it.
 - When we speak of a person's “forte” we are referring to their strong point.
 - In music “forte” is where the music is played with force or strength. “Fortissimo” means extra loud!
2. Scripturally, to comfort someone means to strengthen them—To help them to stand (see 1 Thess. 3:1)

➡ **The MODERN DEFINITION** of “comfort”—

American Heritage Dictionary, 1997—“To sooth”

Modern Webster's Encyclopedia Dictionary, 1989—“To sooth.”

- This shift in emphasis explains the state of pampered Christianity today. Christians are no longer COMFORTED to stand strong in the Lord. Instead they are “soothed” into a state of apathy.

“Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits” (Isa. 30:10).

“...they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace...” (Ezek. 13:10).

The MEANS of comfort.

Biblically, how is a person to be comforted (strengthened)? Comfort comes mainly through three agencies:

1. The SCRIPTURES—*“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and COMFORT OF THE SCRIPTURES might have HOPE” (Rom. 15:4).*
 - Paul wrote, *“Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:18).* Do you need some comfort today? It is as close as the nearest Bible.
 - The Psalmist wrote, *“This is my **comfort** in my affliction: for THY WORD hath quickened me... I remembered thy judgments of old, O Lord; and have **comforted** myself” (Ps. 119:50, 52).*
2. The SPIRIT—The Comforter (the Holy Ghost), comforts us by bringing God’s truth to our remembrance (John 14:26; 15:26).
3. The SAINTS (Acts 16:40; Eph. 6:22; Col. 4:11; 1 Thess. 5:11).

➡ Notice the paragraph marks at verses 1, 4, 7, 9, 17, 21). Each begins with a call to hearken and wake-up to what God has to say.

➡ God comforts His people in three ways in Isaiah 51

I. By the PROSPECT of RESTORATION (vs. 1-8).

v. 1—*“...ye that follow after righteousness.”* Although it is spoken to Israel (v. 4), it has a spiritual application to Christians today (cf. 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22).

A. Two “looks” (vs. 1-2, 6)

1. **LOOK to where you came from** (vs. 1-2). God hew Abraham and Sarah from the rock pit of idolatry in Ur of the Chaldees (Acts 7:1-4 cf. Josh. 24:2; Ezek. 16:2). It is good to occasional-

ly look back to where God saved you from (Eph. 2:11-12; Rev. 2:5; 2 Pet. 1:9).

- v. 2—“**I CALLED him alone** [away from his father Terah], **and blessed him, and increased him**” (Gen. 12:1-3; 14:19; 18:18; 24:1; Dt. 26:5).
- vs. 3-4 — Palestine will be restored like the Garden of Eden in the Millennium. God will bring His judgment and light.

2. **LOOK up and beneath** (v. 6). The heavens (UP) and earth (BENEATH) will pass away and be replaced by a new heaven and earth (Ps. 102:25-26; 2 Pet. 3:10).

B. **Five things that belong to God**—“*My people/My nation*” (v. 4) / “*my judgment*” (v. 4) / *My righteousness*” (vs. 5, 6, 8) / “*My salvation*” (vs. 5, 8) / “*Mine arm*” (v. 5).

1. There are only two kinds of righteousness and salvation: [1] **God’s** (Rom. 3:21-22; 10:3-4; Isa. 54:17; Ps. 51:12); [2] **Man’s** (Isa. 64:5-6).

- God’s SALVATION is having God’s righteousness IMPUTED to our account by faith (Rom 4:3-9, 22-24).
- Two kinds of people in this world— [1] Those who trust the righteousness of Christ to get them to heaven (v. 5- “*on my arm shall they trust.*” cf. Ex. 13:3; Dt. 6:21; Mt. 12:21; Rom. 15:12), and [2] those who trust their own righteousness to get them to heaven.

2. **Earth dwellers** (v. 6—“*...they that dwell therein shall die in like manner*” cf. Rev. 3:10; 6:10; 11:10; 12:12; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:8). This phrase excludes Christians who are strangers and pilgrims on earth. During the tribulation, Christians will be in heaven and not on the earth.

- v. 6b—Heaven and earth will vanish, but God’s salvation and righteousness shall be forever! When an unsaved man dies, he leaves *everything* behind (Job 1:21; Prov. 27:24; 1 Tim. 6:7). The only thing I can take with me when I die is God’s righteousness and God’s salvation.

II. By the PROMISE of REDEMPTION (vs. 9-16).

➡ v. 9— “Awake, awake...” (v. 17; 52:1). God seeks to wake up Israel to remember (1) what He has done for them (vs. 9-10 cf. Ex. 15:16) and (2) what He has promised them (vs. 11, 16).

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- “*Rahab*” (v. 9) = Egypt [proud one] (cf. Ps. 88:8; 89:10).
 - “...and wounded the dragon?” — Canaanite literature told of a sea dragon slain in by God. Isaiah uses this Canaanite imagery to illustrate how God can defeat any foe that opposes Him. Of course, “*the dragon*” is an allusion to Satan who was wounded at Calvary.
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A. The POWER of God’s deliverance in the past should dispel fear (vs 9-10).

1. v. 10—He is the same One—“...*Art thou not it...*” who will do it again.
2. v. 11—Historically: Israel’s *return* from Babylonian captivity.

Prophetic application: 2nd advent and millennial reign. The curse on the earth will be lifted—“*and sorrow and mourning shall flee away*” (cf. Rev. 21:4).

3. v. 12— God reminds Israel [and us], “*I, even I, am he that comforteth you [John 15:16-18]: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man THAT SHALL DIE... And forgettest the Lord thy maker...*” (v. 12).

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- The fear of man is evidence of a lack of trusting God (Prov. 29:25).
 - Fear arises when we FORGET God who made everything (v. 13). Don’t ever forget your God made the heavens and the earth (v. 13; Ps. 121:2—“*My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.*”). Therefore, with the Maker of the universe with me, I have no need to fear “*the fury of the oppressor*” (vs. 13-16).
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B. The PROMISE of God’s deliverance in the future should dispel fear (vs. 11-12).

- When a person knows he is comforted by God's promises, they need not fear "*the reproach of men*" (v. 7 cf. v. 12; Ps. 118:6—"The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"). Man is going to die like grass (vs. 8, 12; 1 Pet. 1:24), but God will never die!
- 1. v. 13—"Where is the fury of the oppressor?" The AntiChrist will have absolute power on earth in the Tribulation period and greatly "oppress" Israel. Yet he will be done away with at Christ's coming (cf. Dan. 11:36-45).
- 2. Past tense in verse 13—"...HATH stretched forth the heavens, and the LAID the foundations of the earth..." CF. future tense in verse 16—"...that I MAY plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth..." See Isaiah 40:21; 45:17-18; 2 Peter 3:10-13.

III. By the PROPHECY of RETRIBUTION (vs. 17-23).

- v. 17—Another wake-up call to Israel!
- A. The TREMBLING of the CUP (vs. 17, 22)
 - 1. A "*cup*" in the Bible often represents God's fury, desolation (by famine), destruction (by the sword), rebuke, and affliction (Ps. 11:6; 73:10; 75:8; Jer. 25:15, 17; Zech. 12:2; Mt. 20:22-23; 26:39, 42; John 18:11; Rev. 14:10; 16:19; 17:4; 18:6).
 - "...dregs..." (vs. 17, 22) sediments at bottom of the cup.
 - 2. Our text signifies the "*fury*" of the Lord is directed against the nation Israel for their backsliding (v. 17). Israel is "*drunken, but not with wine*" (v. 21).
 - v. 18—Israel lacks guidance. When a person is drunk, they usually stumble without direction.
 - vs. 19-20—"...by whom shall I comfort thee?"—No comfort from man. Comfort can only come from God (v. 3, 12; 52:9; 66:13).
- B. The TRANSFERRING of the CUP (vs. 21-22).

1. God promises to remove the “*cup of trembling*” from Israel’s hand and force the enemies God to drink it.
2. Prophetically this will occur during the tribulation period as Israel drinks “*the cup of his fury.*” But, at the second advent God puts this cup in the hand of them that afflict Israel.

SUMMATION (v. 22— “*Thus saith thy Lord the LORD, and thy God...*”)

Notice:

- *Thus saith thy **Lord**...* = adoni / Master
- *...the **LORD**...* = Jehovah (He who...”)
- *...thy **God**...* = Elohim

This “*LORD*,” who is “*thy Lord*,” is “*God*”— The Lord Jesus Christ