

ISAIAH

Part 2 - Chapters 40-66

"*Comfort, comfort O my people*" are opening words in Isaiah 40.

Isaiah 40-66 is full of hope: hope for the present, God's restoring work in the near future, and the heavenly time of God's kingdom in the more distant future.

The historical context is the time of exile in Babylon (587 B.C.). The consequences of the broken covenant have come. There are no ominous passages of devastation to come. Now Isaiah speaks to those who have survived. Now is the time to restore the remnant.

One way to get insight into this book is to ask, "How does this apply to someone living far from home and unable to return?" Remember that the trip to Babylon was a forced march across desert and through wild areas. (Remember, too, that we are in exile from heaven.) Isaiah says, "a highway shall be there," "rough places made plain," and that dry places shall have water. In chapter 44, Isaiah reminds the people that the gods of Babylon are made of wood and clay. Babylonian gods may seem powerful and close by, but they cannot hear or speak. God seems far away, but the God who made wood, stone and clay can hear them in Babylon as well as Jerusalem.

Throughout chapters 42-44 and 50-54, a chosen servant of God who suffers is described. Christians quickly identify this servant as Jesus. How would you read this if

you had never heard of Jesus? Do these passages describe Jesus' ministry for you? His suffering and death on the cross? Chapters 52 and 53 are often read on Good Friday. Do you recognize other passages?

The sharpest words of rebuke come in chapter 58. The people ask, "Why do we fast and you do not see?" God replies, "Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight . . . Is not this the fast that I choose? To loose the bonds of injustice . . . To share your bread with the hungry, to bring the homeless poor into your house?" If you do right, says God, your light will break forth and you will know delight.

Isaiah 40 through 59 conclude with words of promise, of renewed covenant: "my spirit that is upon you, shall not depart out your mouth or your children or grandchildren now and forever."

Chapters 60 through 66 describe God gathering people from all nations to worship on the holy mountain. Many of the descriptions of this blessed time in Jerusalem or Mount Zion reappear in the Revelation of John. Isaiah ends with the promise of a new heaven and a new earth, and judgment on those who have rebelled.

"The kingdom of God is at hand" declared Jesus. Isaiah prepared listeners – then and now – to recognize Jesus as the kingdom-bringer.