

## August 13

**Scriptures:** Read Isaiah 40 & 41

**Key Verse:** “He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs..., and carry them...and gently lead...” (Isaiah 40:11)

### Overview

From chapter 40 to the end of the book, many of Isaiah’s prophecies concern the Babylonian Captivity of the people of Judah and God’s deliverance in their return from the Exile. As Isaiah foresaw this coming event, he also foresaw yet a greater divine intervention: the great spiritual deliverance of the Messiah, the Servant Jesus. This section of the Book of Isaiah is often referred to as the “Book of Comfort” or “Consolation” because of the opening words of this section: “Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” The literal translation is “speak to the heart”, which implies more than merely speaking nice words and strengthening them; it means a spiritual comfort within the hearts of those who are in a covenant relationship with God.

The Lord addressed these words to Isaiah and to other prophets, such as John the Baptist who was “the voice of one crying in the wilderness” (40:3; Matt. 3:3). God would raise them up for the purpose of turning the people’s hearts back to Him and showing them the way of spiritual salvation. They would point people to the “glory of the Lord” (40:5), whom God revealed to be Jesus His Son, the Messiah. He is the “good tidings” of great joy (meaning “gospel”; 40:9; Luke 2:9) concerning whom God’s prophets are to shout, “Behold your God!” (40:10). Isaiah prophesied that Jesus the Messiah would come to do God’s work and that He would feed, gather, carry, and gently lead His people as a good Shepherd (40:10-11; John 10:4; 10:11).

Isaiah wanted the people to understand more fully about their most wonderful and sovereign Creator God, so they might not succumb to the sin that so often plagued the people in Isaiah’s day — idolatry. Isaiah exposes the absurdity of idolatry, for it is nothing but the imagination of man in creating something to worship from that which God has created (40:18-20; 41:7). The God of Israel, however, is explained as being the God of true revelation who was eternally pre-existent, transcendent, and unapproachable in wisdom and knowledge, yet He lovingly condescends to concern Himself with mankind. For those who trustfully wait upon Him, He will renew their strength (40:31).

In chapter 41, the Lord condescends to question all the nations, that they might recognize Him as the true God who providentially controls all events, both past, present, and future, for He is “the first and.. .the last” (41:4; Rev. 1:11). They were to know that it was God who raised up Cyrus of Persia “from the east” (41:2; 44:28), and it was He who gave him victory over Babylon and all the other nations; it was He who accomplished the deliverance of His people (41:4). The Babylonians had scattered their captives, including the people of Judea, throughout the nations under their control (which at that time was considered all over the world). During the seventy years of Jewish captivity, many of them called upon God and repented. Therefore, God pardoned their iniquity (40:2b) and reassured them that He was still their God who cared for them and would help them. He would call them back from Exile, even though they may be in the “farthest regions” (41:9), and He would destroy the nation (Babylon) that had contended with them

(41:11-13). He would provide them with water and “make the wilderness a pool” (41:18). Here Isaiah is using beautiful symbolic language to describe the spiritual transformation that God makes in the lives of those who seek Him and serve Him. It is through Jesus, the “Living Water”, that our souls are revived and made alive.

After describing some of the marvelous things He would do for His people, God challenges all the gods of the nations to prove the reality of their power by the test of prophecy and fulfillment (41:21-23). The conclusion is that they are worthless and those who worship them are an abomination (41:24, 28-29). The true God, however, foretold that He would raise up Cyrus (from the east, but making his attack from the north) to be a victorious conqueror, and that He would send another to bring good tidings (“the gospel”) to Jerusalem (41:25, 27) — the Messiah.

### **Prayer**

O Lord, we long to follow You more closely as Your sheep. You promised that “My sheep know My voice”. We are listening carefully for Your voice, great and tender shepherd. Please speak to Your waiting sheep, and give us grace to recognize Your voice.