

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expository Study of **The Gospel According to Luke** **Chapter 3- Luke 3:1-6** 31- A Voice in the Wilderness- Part 1

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Luke 3:1-6

It has been said that History is nothing more nor less than the ongoing story of God intervening into the affairs of Man. That the imprint of History is, in reality- God Sovereignly imposing Himself, or inserting Himself, into Creation and Providentially bringing about that which will give Himself Glory.

Therefore, History is not the story of Man's exploits - because Man is not the most important object in all of Creation- God is- and so, therefore- History is the story of God's exploits in the earth according to the counsel of His Own Will. And so, because of that- God is the Author of all History. And, therefore, History unfolds- not as a series of random and unrelated events influenced by a disconnected and haphazard forces- but History unfolds itself as the Divine Plan and Purpose of God worked out in perfect precision and perfect harmony with God's Will.

History and all of life unfolds itself from beginning to end under God's Own Sovereign control. And at the center of History and at the very Purpose for History- yea, in fact, the very Purpose for the earth itself and all of its human population is that from before the foundation of the world- God determined within Himself that the maximum amount of Glory that He could receive from all that He has ever or will ever do is for Him to save unworthy sinners by Grace alone through Faith alone in the finished Work of Christ alone.

That this one single act of saving unworthy sinners will bring to God more Glory than a mountain, more glory than a supernova, and more glory than Creation itself. And this is the Story that gives meaning and purpose to Creation. That God brought the Universe, the earth and mankind and all His environment, into being in order that

He might redeem sinners. So History then is primarily His story- it is the Story of Redemption.

And in that sense- all of History has integrity, and all of History has continuity, and all of History has purpose as designed and executed carefully by God.

And nothing proves God's Absolute control over History, and, in particular, God's utmost passion to redeem lost sinners- nothing proves that better or more convincingly than God moving and bringing things together so that prophecy may be fulfilled.

In fact, one of the main reasons why we know that God Authored the Bible is because there are in Scripture literally *hundreds* of prophecies about future events- very precise and intricate prophecies- many of which have already come to pass in the first coming of Jesus and in other historic events that occurred in Old Testament times. And there are many more prophecies yet to come to pass that are connected to the time of Christ's Second Coming and of His Kingdom.

And it is breathtaking to see how passionate that God is, and how much effort is expended so that every single Word of what He has spoken in prophecy will come to pass exactly as He said that it would many hundreds and even thousands of years earlier.

It takes faith to believe in God, dear friends, but it really doesn't take that much faith to believe that the Bible is the Word of the one true living God because all you really have to do is to honestly and thoughtfully and objectively look at what the Bible predicted which has already come to pass with such precise accuracy. The Bible is filled with hundreds of prophecies, most of which relate to the coming of Christ, either His first coming which have already been fulfilled, or His Second Coming yet to be fulfilled.

And one of those amazing prophecies, which is just one of those hundreds of prophecies- a magnificent prophecy- a far-reaching prophecy- is the subject of our study today. Look again at **Luke 3** and let's read through the text.

Luke 3:1-6

1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene,

2 in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.

3 And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins;

4 as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, “THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, ‘MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.

5 ‘EVERY RAVINE WILL BE FILLED, AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL WILL BE BROUGHT LOW; THE CROOKED WILL BECOME STRAIGHT, AND THE ROUGH ROADS SMOOTH;

6 AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.’”

Now in verses 4-6- Luke is quoting from the Greek Septuagint- which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT- from the prophet **Isaiah 40:3-5**. Now God the Holy Spirit moved upon the prophet Isaiah to give him this inspired prophecy some 700 years before this time when John the Baptist is beginning his ministry.

And this is a powerful prophecy. So powerful that I tell you with all fear and trembling that I feel very inadequate to try to unfold it for you. I am in awe of this prophecy, and I stand amazed at what God is doing through what He gave to Isaiah some 700 years before Luke wrote this passage.

The implications around this prophecy are huge, and even the very explicit portions of this prophecy are very powerful and has sweeping implications that will affect the rest of this entire Gospel account. And the fact that most people just casually brush past this portion of Luke's Story of Salvation only shows you that truly we are living in the last days when men will not be able to endure Sound Doctrine.

Truly the Holy Spirit has moved upon Luke to pick the perfect prophecy from the Old Testament to identify John. This prophecy has powerful theological implications, powerful historic implications, and powerful Salvation implications. And this prophecy is not limited to John either- the forerunner crying in the wilderness- but it is the whole message of what he is saying that is coming to fulfillment at that very moment of the arrival of the Messiah.

And this prophecy has powerful implications for all of Israel and for all flesh over the entire earth- as verse 6 indicates- that is all the

people across the entire face of the earth- this is a sweeping prophecy that literally covers all the ground of Redemptive History.

And that's why I say, it puts a tremendous burden on the back of a human preacher to even begin to unload the greatness of this prophecy, and I am very confident that my feeble effort this morning will be very lacking, and so I beg you to pray for me as we go through this and I also beg you to spend time with this passage at home during our time of rest and meditation this afternoon so that we can try to grasp the impact of what God is saying here.

As I was studying much about this passage and meditating over it and searching the Scriptures- an amazing thing happened to me. As I became more and more excited about what God is saying here- a deep and profound grief rose up as well.

As God was graciously giving me understanding of this passage- I also began to see just how the Jewish people of the first century would have heard this and how they still need to hear it- as do all men and women- and as that began to sink into my mind- I began to feel myself becoming sad. I began to understand very clearly that most of the people who call themselves Christians in our day will never come to grips with the greatness of this text. And that is very bad. That is a tragedy. That is a serious tragedy because of all that is here.

You see, my beloved, there are well meaning theologies and there are very sincere preachers and teachers everywhere who teach in error about the Purposes and the Will of God, who teach in error about the future of Israel, who teach in error about the Plan of God- because they do not understand this one prophecy and they miss the great framework that this prophecy lays out, and they fail to see the context of what God spoke to Isaiah some 2700 years ago. And this one prophecy is the cause for great joy if you rightly understand this, but it is cause of great of sadness because you realize that not only does the lost world in general miss the greatness of this prophecy, not only does Israel- in a state of absolute unbelief miss this, but most of the people who call themselves Christians do not and will not come to grips with the richness of this magnificent part of Biblical Truth.

So I will do my best here today to unfold this tightly packed treasure that Luke is giving us here for you this morning that will provide for us this very important foundation that Luke is giving us. Now remember that Luke is at the point where the Story of Jesus'

Ministry really begins. John- the chosen forerunner to Jesus- walks onto center stage here to announce that the Messiah is coming and six months later- Jesus begins His ministry. But as John walks on to center stage and readies it for the Messiah- Luke wants us to understand the setting.

You see, Luke knows that we can't understand the Story of Salvation if we don't understand the context. And so in verses 1 and 2 Luke gives us the historical setting. And he didn't just set the time for us- but he also gave us the main characters so that it was more than just dating this time- it was more like painting the drama that surrounded the arrival of John and Jesus.

Luke 3:1

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene,

So here is Tiberius Caesar and Pontius Pilate, and Herod the tetrarch, and his brother Philip, and Lysanias, the tetrarch of Abilene, and all of these men were part of the Roman war machine which had brutally subjugated the land of Israel, and they were a part of what the Jews hated and what they feared and what had robbed them of the freedoms which they so loved and cherished. So when you go over these names- I want you to feel the bitterness and the hatred and the injustice and the cruelty that went along with these men and what they did and who they were.

Luke 3:2a

in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas...

And then in the first part of verse 2- Luke tells us about the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas- who were corrupt and wicked men- who ran a kind of mafia-style temple operation which made merchandise of the people, and finessed them out of all their money, and propagated an apostate kind of religion- very similar to what you can see and hear on what is called Christian Television today.

So Luke provides the historic setting with seven names- five of them pagan ungodly Gentiles, and two of them pagan and ungodly Jews, and then in the last part of verse 2- Luke tells us that it was during all of this- when these ungodly and wicked men were in the zenith of their power and control that:

Luke 3:2b

... the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.

So Luke is faithful to remind Theophilus and us that while all of this was going on, and while all of these evil men were in charge, that the Word of God came to John and it was in *this* setting among this wickedness and injustice and sin that John *began* his ministry of calling men to repent for the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand.

And I tell you this morning that Jesus Christ is Sovereignly building His Church and ungodly rulers and pagan kings and apostate religious leaders will not prohibit- they cannot stop- what God is doing- yea, that the very gates of hell itself shall not prevail against the Church because the Church is a creation of God, dear friends- a living and breathing organism made up of the lively stones of elected sinners and which exists as the City set on a hill for the purpose of bringing Glory to God in the earth and letting our light so shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our Father Who art in Heaven. And in the midst of great sin and great wickedness, and evil rulers, and in a time of great apostasy and great compromise and the great falling away- the Word of God will go forth with power and conviction so that every foe is vanquished and Christ is Lord indeed!

Luke 3:3

And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins;

Now here we see the geographical setting. And we are reminded here that John's ministry was *outside* the conventional population areas. John was in the wilderness. And Luke is faithful to tell us that ever since the time of his birth, ever since the time of his circumcision on the eighth day after his birth in **Luke 1:80**- this strange man named John spent his whole life in the wilderness. And now he's reached the

age of 30 and the wilderness is where he lives. And John is very strange and weird, and he wears camel's hair and he eats locusts and wild honey. We are safe to say that John is a man who is apart from the establishment. No concern here for things like fine dining or GQ clothing. This man walks and lives outside the influences and the attitudes and the life style of his own culture. And we need to know that this is by design, dear friends- that John was not the original hippie who was protesting order and rebelling against wearing ties to Church- but this man was like he was by God's Design- and he was utterly uninfluenced by his society. Another way of saying this is that John as set aside, that he was distinct- that he was holy.

And to some extent John is ignorant of the subtleties and the trends of first century Jewish and Roman life. But I tell you that this was by Divine Purpose- so that John could speak the pure message of God to people being completely uncluttered by the nuances of society.

And we can safely say that John stands as a large looming rebuke to the popular Church growth movement- which claims that cultural relevance and social savvy are the keys to effective ministry. That if we could just look and act and talk and carry ourselves more like the lost world- if we could just spike our hair and pierce our bodies and tear holes in our blue jeans that the world would then automatically love our Jesus and love the life of self-denial and love the straight and narrow path.

But John didn't care about cultural relevance; he didn't have any social savvy. He didn't know his culture by personal experience or study or focused marketing surveys. But John knew his God, and he knew the message of his God, and that's the way God wanted it. The true prophet of God has never been called to find common ground with the culture. The true prophet of God is not trying to relate to people by building areas of commonality with them around things that are passing away.

No, the true prophet of God has always been concerned with one thing and one thing only- that he speaks the pure uninfluenced Word of God to a lost and backslid people, and to confront that culture and the sins of that culture- calling men to repent and preaching the forgiveness of sin. And that's exactly what John did.

And so we see that Luke unfolds the historical setting and the geographical setting, and then we look and see the theological setting-

which is John's message- John came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

And the Jews were very religious people. They were religious and they were lost. They needed the forgiveness of sin. So the theology of John's message was that the Jew of the first century had a form of religion without the reality of it. They had a zeal for God but not according to a true knowledge of God, as Paul put it. So they don't need more Law, they don't need "Law light"; what they need is forgiveness. And so John tells them their sins can be forgiven- but only if they repent. And if they repent so deeply that they're willing to be baptized in the same way that the Gentile was when a Gentile wanted to enter into Judaism.

You see, when a Gentile wanted to be a Jewish proselyte- they were baptized in a special ceremony to show that they needed to be cleansed before they can engage themselves with the covenant people of God.

So by baptizing the Jews- John was teaching that a Jew had to repent to such a depth that he is confessing that he is no better off than a pagan Gentile. And that is exactly what Jesus told Nicodemus in **John 3**. Jesus looked this ruler of the Pharisees in the eye and told him that all his labor to be righteous, all his work that he had tried so hard to earn God's favor with, all his rituals, and all his ceremonies, and all his washings, and all his efforts to be holy had not made him one iota closer to God than was a prostitute.

And that unless Nicodemus was Sovereignly and Graciously born again by the Spirit of God- he was going to burn in hell along with every pagan Gentile on earth. You cannot earn Righteousness, dear friends- you cannot take communion enough, you cannot try to obey enough, you cannot get baptized enough to earn Righteousness. We are not made righteous by what we do- but we are wondrously and marvelously made righteous by the gracious imputation of Christ's spotless Righteousness by the agency of Faith alone.

And so John preached a baptism for repentance for the forgiveness of sin. And that was the theological perspective. People were under the damning burden of guilt brought about by their failure to perfectly and continuously keep the Law of God in thought, word, and deed, 24 hours every day, and seven says every week, and they needed forgiveness which God always has given and always will give to those who repent,

and whose repentance is genuine and is brought about by their utter desperation over their own inability to stop sinning. And in this case true repentance was evidenced by a willingness to say, *"I am no better than a pagan Gentile"*.

Now that brings us to a fourth component of this setting. We have the historical setting and the geographical setting and the theological setting, and now we come to the fourth setting- which is the prophetic setting .

You see, there is a context here that fits into the scheme of Scripture. History and geography and theology are, of course, very important components for Luke- but the really important element comes at this point because with the coming of the Messiah it is critical for Luke to make certain that everybody understands that this Man is, in fact, the true Messiah, and that this John is the true forerunner of the Messiah, and so irrefutable evidence that Jesus is the True Messiah and that John is the true forerunner can be gained by looking backward at a 700 year old prophecy.

Now it is critical for Luke that Theophilus and all who hear these words believe them to be true, and so that is going to necessitate some connection to the Old Testament. Luke has to establish some continuity with the Old Testament. And Luke doesn't want John to just appear on the scene and launch into something from a vacuum. No, Luke wants to put a hook in the Old Testament that is very tight, and a hook that can't be broken, and prove to Theophilus and to us and to all who read these words that John's ministry and the coming of Jesus is a precise fulfillment of an ancient Old Testament prophecy.

And so Luke brings up a prophecy from the great prophet Isaiah. And this is a powerful prophecy in the sense of its great weightiness. And it is this prophecy that comes from **Isaiah 40:3-5**:

3 A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.

4 "Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley;

5 Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, And all flesh will see *it* together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Now there is a lot here. And the obvious thing here is that the prophet Isaiah predicted a time when a "voice" would come "in the wilderness". And Luke says, *"Here's John- and he's been in the wilderness since a child- That's his stomping grounds; that's where he's always lived"*. And Luke is telling Theophilus and us that John is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, and that John is that "voice in the wilderness". But Isaiah doesn't stop there and just say that the "voice" will come. No, in verse 3- Isaiah said that when that "voice" comes it will say,

Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.

...and that's exactly what John was called to do. A strange, odd sounding voice- a cry if you will- giving a strange odd sound to both excite and to warn the people to get ready and to prepare the way of the Lord.

Now remember back in **Luke 1** that the angel Gabriel came to Zacharias and said, *"You're going to have a son, and that son is going to be the forerunner of the Messiah and he's going to make a people ready for the coming of the Lord."* That's what Zacharias was told by the angel Gabriel- who came from God. So from the beginning- John was to be the prophet in the wilderness- who got the people ready for the Lord's arrival. That's what he did; that is what his ministry was all about- to be the one who would physically and literally point the people to Jesus as being the Messiah.

So John himself is the precise fulfillment of this prophecy. But there's much more here than just that. And we're going to look at the richness of this- but before we get into some of the detail- let me just give you kind of a broad picture here.

John's responsibility was to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. And the analogy that is used by Luke is from the prophecy of Isaiah in which Isaiah- under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit- likens preparedness to getting the highway ready for a king.

You see, in ancient times when a monarch went on a tour of his domain and approached the various cities and towns along the route, there would be an "advance team" who would go before the king into that region and they would say to the people of that region:

"The king is coming and you need to make things ready. We don't want the king going through deep ravines, and we don't want the king having to climb over great high rocks and mountains. We don't want the king going on some ill prepared pathway. We don't want the king to have to come stumbling over rocks and boulders and great holes in the path. We want a highway for the king that's suitable for his dignity and one that provides ease for the monarch. We want you to get ready and prepare a highway for the great king to come to your city by removing all the barriers and all the obstacles that re in the road."

Now once the advance team came and gave them the message- the people went to work to make this happen. You see, it was the greatest privilege to have the Sovereign Monarch come to your town, and to have the king come to your home. And they would know in advance of such an arrival. Now keep in mind that at this point- they still hadn't actually *seen* the king- so this was an act of faith. But a forerunner came first and said that the King was coming, and for you to get everything ready so that he would have an easy access into your city. Start preparing a road. Start constructing a road, because in a matter of a few months or weeks- the king will be arriving.

And so Isaiah said in his prophecy, that the king will come some day but before he comes- a voice will come in the wilderness and tell the people to get the highway ready for the king. And so here Luke quotes that because John is the fulfillment of that. John the Baptist is the voice crying in the wilderness. He has come to the people and he is saying to the people of Israel,

"Get the highway ready because the King of all kings is right behind me."

And about six months later- the King did come and He began His ministry.

So John is taking that prophecy of Isaiah and fulfilling it. And Luke makes note of that fulfillment to prove to Theophilus and to all who read these words that not only is John the true forerunner- but that Jesus is the true Messiah. So John was calling on the people to prepare a highway for the true King- Who was the long-awaited

Messiah. So there is an *individual* element of this that, Lord willing, we will talk about next time. And there's a *national* element of that as well.

But before we look at the specific fulfillment of this prophecy in **Luke 3**, let's go back to **Isaiah 40**. And I need to do this because I need you to understand this prophecy the way the Jews of the first century who heard it would have understood it.

Now we need to know that during the time of Jesus- the Jewish people- for the most part- knew the Old Testament. Even though many of them were illiterate- they knew the Old Testament. It was read aloud to them and it was discussed at every meal and it was taught to them from a child and it was learned at a young age. That is why they knew the Word of God- which at that time was the 39 Books of the OT.

And the reason that they *knew* the Word of God is the very same reason why we do *not* know the Word of God in our day- because, although we are not illiterate- we do *not* read God's Word on any consistent basis; we do *not* read it aloud- it is becoming fashionable today to not even bring your Bibles to Church- they don't need them because whatever they are saying and whatever they are doing is not in the Bible. But I pray that in every Service- you are looking at the Word of God and reading along with me and that you are underlining Scripture and taking notes about what God has said and not just sitting there being entertained.

We are a people who have been so blessed by God and so protected by God and so favored by God, and yet we no longer see the need of reading God's Word. We do not read it and we do *not* study it and we are *not* taught it and we no longer deem God's Word to be valuable enough to push things aside that are passing away and to spend time with that which is eternal and Absolute.

And the result is that while we know about movie stars and video games and sports stars and Hollywood actors, and even though we understand politics and the latest political scandals- we are ignorant of the only thing that really matters and that is what has come out of the Heart and Mind and Mouth of Almighty God- the Owner and the Creator of the Universe. We are ignorant of eternal matters and absolute matters and inspired words and infallible statements and inerrant Truths and authoritative pronouncements.

In all our wealth and our freedoms and liberties and in all our opulence and with all our rights- we are ignorant of the one thing that matters most- the Word of God, and I beg you today to fix that problem, and I beg you to repent of being too busy to spend time with God and thinking the Bible is boring and a waste of time and not worthy of your energy, and I beg you to spend time with God's Word and taste and see that the Lord is good and chew on deep and profound Truths and sing about them and meditate about them and ponder them and allow yourself to be disturbed about them and pray about them and digest them and smell them and savor the aroma of what came out of the Mouth of God.

The Jews of the first century knew the Word of God and if these Jews knew *anything* at all about the Old Testament- it was that they knew about the prophet Isaiah. You see, Isaiah was a great and a beloved prophet to the Jew- after he was dead and gone. The Jewish people highly valued what Isaiah wrote- after he was dead. Now while he was alive- they scorned Isaiah and they laughed at him and they rejected him. But after he was dead- they valued what he said.

And Isaiah's prophecy was a very large prophecy and it was a prophecy that they were all very, very familiar with. And so when Luke in his Story of Salvation refers to **Isaiah 40:3-5**- which is what he quotes here in **Luke 3**- the average Jewish reader would sit up and take notice of this and would immediately understand the whole context and flavor of that prophecy. And because the Jews paid so much attention to the words of Isaiah- the Romans and the Greeks were forced to sit up and take notice also.

So there would be a complete setting in the mind of any knowledgeable Jew that we need to appreciate today because nobody can really grasp the greatness of this prophecy if you don't already have a framework and a context for it.

Now let's go back to **Isaiah 40**. And let's look at verse 1. The great prophet begins this masterpiece with these words:

“Comfort, O comfort My people,” says your God.

Now the average American in the 21st Century looks at that and might flippantly say, *“Oh, that's nice, I'm glad that God feels that way about comforting His people.”* Or we might even say, *“Look, God is*

saying comfort to me!" And that might be the extent of what we get out of this in our day because we have never known one second of living under anything other than the Grace of Jesus Christ.

But we need to remember, dear friends, that the great book of Isaiah has 66 chapters- not just this one. And the first 39 chapters of Isaiah focus on very severe Divine Judgment. Now we don't have the time this morning- but read through the first 39 chapters and you will find repeated threats of severe judgment. The northern kingdom, Israel, has gone into captivity from which they never returned. And the southern kingdom, Judah, in which the city of Jerusalem exists, is now the only Israel that there is. And horrible Judgment has already fallen on the northern kingdom for their unashamed idolatry and they were carried off into captivity- never to come back. And the only Israel that is left is the southern kingdom. And now God has been pronouncing judgment through Isaiah on the southern kingdom- severe frightening judgment which was fulfilled in the Babylonian captivity of 586 B.C. and is still being fulfilled today as God brings judgment on unbelieving Israel even in our time.

So the first 39 chapters of Isaiah speak of very severe judgment on Judah and Jerusalem, which is Israel, and on other nations as well. And so by the time you get through the first 39 chapters- it's pretty easy for you- if you're a Jewish person- to believe that there's not much hope for the future- and that all that's going to be left for you is doom and gloom and judgment and damnation.

And all of this judgment is based on God's reaction to Israel's sin and to the sins of the other nations. And that's why when you come to chapter 40 and you read,

“Comfort, O comfort My people,” says your God.

... it is very dramatic. So this is a very powerful and dramatic moment here. This is an amazing shock and a radical transition. 39 Chapters of damnation and Judgment and then out of the blue- God says, **"Comfort"**? What happened that God changes so dramatically here? And this is so powerful and such a dramatic shift in tone that, in fact, there are some foolish people who have twisted this portion of the Bible and these people teach that since this is so radically different than anything in the first 39 chapters that it couldn't possibly have been

written by the same man. And so they have invented a weird theory called "*The Deutero Isaiah*" or "*The 2 Isaiah Theory*," which says that the prophet Isaiah wrote the first 39 Chapters and somebody else wrote Chapters 40 through 66 because they couldn't possibly have been written by the same man.

Well, why not? There is nothing in history, nothing in literature, nothing in science, nothing in archeology, and nothing in all of Scripture to even suggest that foolish theory, and so we rightly conclude that all 66 Chapters were written by the very same writer and they were all authored by the very same Holy Spirit because the same God who pronounces judgment can also offer comfort.

But **Isaiah 40** is nonetheless a sudden and radical change. Now look a little further in verses 1 and 2:

1 "Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God.

2 "Speak kindly to Jerusalem; And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, That her iniquity has been removed, That she has received of the LORD'S hand Double for all her sins."

In other words- Isaiah is saying, "*Tell Israel that the Judgment is over; the war between her and her God I finished. The iniquity is removed and the payment has been made.*"

Now this is a shocking change. And there isn't even a gentle transition- it's just a cold turkey change. So what happened to change all this? Did Israel quit sinning? No. Did Israel suddenly stop her rebellion and start obeying what God said to do? No. Did the other nations of the world come to God to be saved? No. So if nothing changed on the part of the nation of Israel or the individual Jew or the other nations of the world and they are all still sinning and they are all still rebelling and they are all still in sin- why did God suddenly stop pronouncing Judgment and cry out, "**Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God.?**

And Chapter 40 then launches the rest of the 26 Chapters of **Isaiah**- all the way to chapter 66- and the message changes from Judgment to Salvation, and from warning to encouragement. And the latter half of Isaiah's prophecy is all about Salvation and the Messiah and His Kingdom and Righteousness and Joy and Peace. And the simple message of the overall view of the Book is that the very same

God Who has judged Israel for sins will someday save Israel. That is the great message of the book of Isaiah. The very same God Who promised terrible judgment on a sinning Israel, promises Salvation on a penitent Israel.

And that, folks, is at the heart of Redemptive History. God is not finished with Israel. Whatever may lie ahead and the prophet Isaiah knows what's going to lie ahead- he's said it for 39 chapters and the people know it, and it's also been prophesied by many other prophets, but whatever may lie ahead for the people of Judah and Jerusalem, God's *ultimate* Purpose for them is *not* judgment, God's *ultimate* Purpose for them is Salvation. God's *ultimate* Purpose for them is *not* Destruction but Redemption, not death but life. God's *ultimate* Purpose for them is not the abolition of His Covenant, but the fulfillment of His Covenant.

So you see here a very dramatic insight into the unfolding and *eternal* Purposes of Salvation that God has purposed for Israel. There is a future for Israel, a wonderful future for the Jewish people- who today reject their Messiah- but some day they will be mercifully changed and saved by the very same Messiah Whom they rejected and pierced because they will look on Him and see Him for who He really is and turn to Him for Salvation and Zacharias said, "**A fountain of cleansing will be opened to the house of Israel.**"

And that doesn't mean that it is okay to reject Jesus. It isn't- so don't ever reject Jesus and don't ever reject what Jesus said. All it means is that God is faithful and God is strong, and even though they do not want Jesus- now- God knows that Jesus is the only One Who can save them, and so God will one day- for no other reason other than to honor His Own Name- God will Sovereignly change their hearts and they will want Jesus, and God will give them eyes to see, and God will give them ears to hear, and God will take out of them that black hard stony heart and God will Sovereignly give them a heart of flesh, and they will see, and they will hear, and they will be broken, and they will be humble and they will repent and they will come to Jesus for Salvation and they will all be saved.

And that is the only reason why *anybody* ever gets saved. That is the only reason why you are saved. God has to Sovereignly and unilaterally do something to us first or else nobody would ever be saved. And so thank God that He violates our will, and thank God that God is

not fair, and thank God that Mercy and Grace are God's normal and natural Attributes, and thank God that God is a saving God by Nature, and thank God that He doesn't give us what we deserve- but He gives us Mercy and Grace and Unmerited favor and Unearned Love and Undeserved Special Treatment, and thank God that while we are not worthy that He is worthy, and that He alone saves unworthy sinners and He saves them to the uttermost.

So these two verses in **Isaiah 40** have a warm and an affectionate and a tender tone which is completely different from the first 39 chapters. God is saying there will come a time when sin has been paid for. There will come a time when the suffering will be over and the warfare will ended. And there will come a time of Salvation and so here's the message, **“Comfort, O comfort My people,” says your God.**

Now just who is God talking to here? It says "your God," so who's He talking to? Well it really doesn't tell us- but we know, don't we? God is talking here to *anybody* who ever speaks to Israel. So if you ever get an opportunity to speak to a Jewish person- tell them this...

"Yes, you've suffered; yes, God has punished you; yes, God took the northern kingdom into captivity; yes, God took the southern kingdom into Babylonian captivity; yes, God has punished the nation that has rejected Him and rejected Scripture and rejected the Messiah; yes, you have suffered even in this century at the hands of Joseph Stalin, and Adolph Hitler and Arab terrorists; Yes you have suffered- but the eternal Purposes of God toward Israel is Salvation, not Judgment; Redemption- not damnation. The day is coming when the King Himself will change your heart and He will open your eyes and He will forgive you and He will wash you and He will save you!"

And so, please, whenever you speak to Jewish people, will you say this to them? **“Comfort, O comfort My people,” says your God.** *Your warfare has ended, iniquity has been removed, sin has been paid for- not because you deserved it and not even because you wanted it- but only because the King wondrously wanted it for you. So come to Jesus, repent and believe, and God will save you".* Will you tell them that? Will you tell the Jew that? That's the message, dear friends.

I don't ever want to be responsible to say to the Jews, *"I hate to tell you this, folks, but all the promises God ever made to you about*

salvation are now fulfilled in the Church, so you're out." That is not the Biblical message to Israel. The message to Israel is not that you've been excluded- but the message to Israel is "*Comfort, comfort, comfort. Sin is paid for, all can be forgiven.*" And then that becomes the theme; it's introduced in verses 1 and 2, that becomes the theme of the remaining prophecy of Isaiah. And as you go through this prophecy from Chapters 40 to 66, that is the theme.

And to show you just how dominant a theme it is- let me just show you in succeeding sections what it says. Go down to verse 6, still in **Isaiah 40**:

6 A voice says, "Call out." Then he answered, "What shall I call out?" All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field.

7 The grass withers, the flower fades, When the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people are grass.

8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.

Now we live in a world where things die, people die, grass dies, flower dies, things die, but the Word of our God doesn't die. Whatever God promised- that is exactly what He will do. That's the idea here.

So, look what God says to do in verse 9:

9 Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; Lift *it* up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"

10 Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him And His recompense before Him.

God says, "*Get up on a mountain O Zion, bearer of good news, and lift up your voice mightily. O Jerusalem, bearer of good news, lift it up, do not fear. You talk to Zion,*" which is just a synonym for Israel. "*And you talk to Jerusalem,*" which is another synonym for Israel, "*and you say to the cities of Judah,* here's what you say when you talk to Jewish people, verse 10, "*behold, the Lord God will come.*" You tell them that. You tell them, "*God will come!*"

See, Israel- you've got a problem. You are alienated from God, Israel, you are suffering, you're in unbelief, in an apostate religion. And at the time when John came on the scene and this prophecy was

fulfilled and Jesus showed up, as I said, Israel was apostate and unbelieving. And sad to say, they rejected John, they rejected Jesus, they're still that way. But he says here, "*Whenever you talk to Israel, tell them this, 'The Lord God will come.'*" You need to underline that. This is critical. This solves the problem because the problem is this, how can God say, "*O your warfare is ended, your iniquities removed and your sins been paid for?*" How in the world could God do that? Does He just decide He's not going to make an issue out of sin anymore? Or did the people do enough good deeds to cancel out the bad deeds? Or did the people devise some means to save themselves or to satisfy God? No, no, no.

The only *possible* way that comfort could ever come to sinners, the one single way that Salvation could ever come to *any* sinner- Jew or Gentile, the only possible way that Jerusalem could ever be comforted, that warfare could be ended, that iniquity could be removed, and sin could be paid for was if the Lord Himself came.

And this is so critical to understand. Sin is so pervasive in the human nature that all the treats of damnation and all the promises of eternal blessings cannot and do not and will not remove sin from our hearts. The King Himself has to come and He Himself- all by Himself has to Sovereignly remove sin, and He Himself- all by Himself has to pay for the sins that we have already committed, and God Himself has to die for our Sins so that His Justice is vindicated and that allows God to give us Mercy and say to us- **“Comfort, O comfort My people,” says your God.**

Won't you come to Jesus today? Won't you come to your King today? Won't you run to God and fall on His Mercy and cry out for Salvation? I tell you that Judgment is coming because of your sins but the King has come and paid for your sins. Run to Jesus today and hear Him say, **“Comfort, O comfort My people,” says your God.**

Let's come and pray.

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The Covenant of Peace Church 13600 John Clark Road Gulfport, Mississippi 39503 228.832.7729 www.covenantofpeace.net

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.