

EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #75

Isaiah 51:12-23

There is nothing that will drain you or depress you faster than sin, either your sin or someone else's sin. Sin will take away your confidence, it will take away your courage, and it will take away your joy. This is true for the believer and this is true for the unbeliever.

When it comes to things that can make us cry, an infidel, an atheist, an agnostic can weep just as much as a Christian. The whole race suffers from the consequences of sin. We do and they do. The whole world is fallen and broken. Pain, bereavement, and loss hit us all because of sin.

But there is one thing the believer may potentially have and experience in the midst of all of the sin and the hurt and pain which the unbeliever will never have; we can have the comfort of God. If the believer will turn to the Lord and trust the Lord, he/she will experience the comfort of God.

When Isaiah wrote this text, Judah had not yet been taken captive by the Babylonians, but she would be and the reason she would be was because she stubbornly refused to turn from her sin. I find it absolutely amazing that God would actually give a comforting message to His people who refuse to turn from their sin, but that is what He does here. What Isaiah says is this:

GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE, WHO ARE PRESENTLY IN MISERABLE CONDITIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES DUE TO THEIR SIN, TO BE INTENSELY COMFORTED . IN KNOWING THAT HE WILL EVENTUALLY VINDICATE HIS PEOPLE AND POUR OUT HIS VENGEANCE ON THEIR ENEMIES.

We may observe that there is a word that shows up four times in Isaiah 51, the word "comfort" (51:3, 3, 12, 19). This word (nacham) presents the idea of being comforted because we know that God will eventually turn things around for His people and will avenge them (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 544). In each use of the verb in Isaiah 51, the word "comfort" is in the "Piel stem." The particular feature of this stem is that it intensifies the action (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, p. 141). God wants His people intensely comforted. As Keil and Delitsch observe, the double repetition of the pronoun "I" in **verse 12** emphasizes only God can comfort (Vol. 7, p. 289).

Now this text is designed to comfort Israel and she can certainly use this information right now, especially when you have imbeciles like Helen Thomas telling the world that she doesn't belong in her own land that God gave to her. When Israel presently looks at her miserable condition, trying to survive in a small portion of the land she has been promised, she could certainly use some comforting information. Israel certainly will need this text in the Tribulation, especially the last 3½ years of the Tribulation. But this text does not just bring comfort to Israel, it can also comfort you and me, for we too share in the hurts, the setbacks, and the hardships of this world because of sin and we too need God's comfort.

God wants all of His people who are presently in miserable conditions and circumstances to be intensely comforted in knowing that His revenge and vengeance against Israel's enemies is on the way. Now as we analyze this text in Isaiah, there are two main themes that He develops:

THEME #1 – God’s nation is presently in a totally depressed condition. **51:12-20**

When we look down through these verses in Isaiah, we can see the depressing state Israel was in and is in right now. Keep in mind the reason she is in this depressed state is because she refuses to turn from her iniquity and sin and turn to God. God’s righteous salvation is very near (51:5), but Israel will not turn from her sin, and as a result, there are at least eight depressing realities brought out in this section that were and are very real. G. Campbell Morgan said in these verses God gives a “graphic picture of her suffering” (*The Prophecies of Isaiah*, Vol. 2, p. 123).

Depressing Reality #1 - Israel lives in constant fear. **51:12**

Israel is the nation of God and yet she lives in constant fear of destruction from some man all the time. What I find interesting is the analogy that God gives here concerning any human; he dies and he is made like grass. Can you imagine the paranoia of being afraid of grass? Can you imagine the foolishness of sending your son or daughter out to play and they say, we can’t go out, the grass might get us. Here is the point; when you are not walking in the ways of God you’ll spend your life with a paranoia fearing things that shouldn’t faze you. You’ll have no courage, no confidence, and no comfort.

Who wants to live life like that? Fact is, when you are in rebellion and sin against God, you will spend your life in complete fear. Probably the biggest fear is death because the moment you die you will face God.

Depressing Reality #2 - Israel has forgotten God. **51:13**

Specifically, she has forgotten just how powerful God is. God is the Maker of His people and it is God who stretches out the heavens and laid the foundation of the earth. **What Israel should do is not spend her present existence fearing her oppressor, but spend it fearing her God.** All you have to do is to read the news and you will see that Israel spends every waking moment living in fear because she has forgotten her God.

The word “fear” (pachad) is in the “Piel stem” which means this is an intense terror and fear to the point of trembling (*Ibid.*, p. 671). Israel spends her life every day with intense fear because she will not turn to God.

One of the biggest reasons for our fears is to forget about our God and forget about how powerful our God actually is. One of the best things one can do is turn from sin and turn to this God.

Depressing Reality #3 - Israel is living in a prison exile out of the land. **51:14a**

Back in the days of Isaiah, Israel was about to be routed by the Babylonians and literally taken into captivity and removed from her land. There is no question that this is a depressing reality. Today it is almost like Israel is in prison in her land.

Depressing Reality #4 - Israel has lacked food. **51:14b**

It would seem logical to me that someone from Israel would ask this question - since we are the nation of God, why is it that we have to pray “give us this day our daily bread”? This, of course, will be a specific prayer she will pray in the Tribulation. However, one must wonder why the nation of God has to scrimp and ration out anything.

Depressing Reality #5 - Israel has experienced the negative chastisement of God. **51:17, 20**

Oftentimes Scripture uses the “cup” metaphor to symbolize the fact that when God’s anger reaches a certain point, He pours out His destructive wrath. Don’t kid yourself; God can cause His own people’s worlds to cave in when they do not turn from their sin to Him. It is possible for a child of God to make God so angry that He brings devastation into their world. Israel had drunk from the cup of God’s anger and she has been drained to the point she is staggering. The Hebrew is a little tricky here, but **verse 17** basically is saying, Israel has gulped down the anger of God.

In **verse 17**, God addresses Jerusalem and says I am targeting My people in My capital city and both are experiencing My wrath and anger. God is angry with Israel and He is still reeling and why shouldn’t He be. She will not listen to Him or His Word. She will not turn to Him no matter how threatened she is, and she rejected and killed His Son. She pursues a life of sin, iniquity, and transgression and God is mad (50:1). Israel is being rebuked right now by Almighty God.

J. Vernon McGee said, “All you have to do is look at Jerusalem today. It is a city of turmoil.” He went on to say that he didn’t even like staying in Jerusalem because of the constant turmoil (*Isaiah, Thru The Bible, Vol. 3, p. 307*).

But don’t forget this point - what God can do to a nation, He can also do to an individual. There are several New Testament, Grace Age passages that challenge believers to “fear God” (Romans 11:20; Colossians 3:22; Hebrews 4:1; I Peter 2:17; Revelation 14:7). Why? Because it is possible to make God angry to the point that He does some very negative things against His own people. He can make our lives miserable and He can remove His blessings. If you are a child of God and you pursue a life of sin, your life will be in the same degraded state as Jerusalem.

Depressing Reality #6 - Israel has no one to guide her. **51:18**

That Hebrew word “guide” (nahal) is one that refers to one who actually knows the right direction and can lead people in it (*Ibid.*, p. 536). This is the same word in Psalm 23:2, “He **leads** Me beside still waters.” As a judgment of God, God sees to it that His own people do not have anyone who can actually take them by the hand and lead them and guide them into His Word, ways, and will. Think about this. This is the nation of the prophets and the Scriptures and there is no one who knows the Word of God enough to lead Israel in the right way. This wasn’t just a problem in Isaiah’s day but also in our day. One Jewish man said to me that no rabbi would ever take them straight through any book of the Bible, including a book like Isaiah.

I believe the Church is under the same judgment of God right now. Churches that actually know the written Word of God and can rightly divide are far and few between. I just saw on Christian television a guy by the name of Rod Parsley who said he was having on his program a real Biblical scholar. As I sat there and listened to these two, neither one accurately interpreted anything. As they were talking, both were trying to make themselves look to be scholars, but they were both Biblical idiots. They are not leading people into truth and neither are most religious leaders. Most churches have no one to guide them just like Israel.

Our guide is God and our guidebook is the Bible. If we are going to be guided to still waters, we must carefully and prayerfully and accurately understand God's Word.

Depressing Reality #7 - They had been devastated and destroyed by famine and sword. **51:19**

Israel is a land that has been ravaged by war and during the Tribulation, famine and sword will sweep through her faster than a wildfire. Look at Israel today. Is she flourishing? Why not? Because of the judgment of God.

Depressing Reality #8 - Their own sons could not defend them and they were helpless. **51:20**

Every high school male in Israel serves in the military after graduation from high school. But the reality of it is these sons have not been able to deliver Israel and give Israel all her land. What is predicted here is that there will come a day when all of the sons and all of Israel's military will be helpless. They will be trapped like an antelope in a net because of the rebuke and wrath of God.

God is mad at His own people and He has permitted these terrible things, but in amazing grace, He wants to comfort Israel. He wants His people to know that even though they have really blown it, He eventually will do amazing things for His own.

Now it was in this context that God said to His people, I want you to be intensely comforted.

THEME #2 – God's comfort is presently given to God's depressed nation. **51:12-23**

How do you comfort people who are in such a depressing condition? God presents seven comforting realities that His people need to know:

Comforting Reality #1 - God's people may be comforted knowing comfort comes from God. **51:12a**

If Israel's own sons cannot deliver her, who can? The answer is seen in **verse 12** - the great "I AM." F. C. Jennings said in this section God "places a strong emphasis on it being Himself who will intervene" (*Studies in Isaiah*, p. 595). God wants His people to know I am the One who can comfort you and I am the One who can deliver you.

This is a tough lesson for us to learn. The fact is the One who can actually comfort us in any situation and deliver us from any situation and sin is God and He typically is the last Person His own people look to for comfort and deliverance. I talked recently to someone who was experiencing negative things they knew came from God because of sin and they said a doctor tried to get them to take an antidepressant pill. This will not bring comfort to a sinner, God will.

Comforting Reality #2 - God's people may be comforted knowing God is our Maker. **51:13**

The Hebrew word "Maker" (asah) is a word that means God is the One who planned, formed and designed His people for His purposes (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 657). Why does God remind Israel of this? Because when a child of God starts realizing that God is the One who planned us and has a purpose for us, it promotes the comforting reality that He cares for me and has a plan for my life.

This is a comforting thought to have when things aren't going too well. God is the One who chose us, designed us, and made us for His purposes and that is something very comforting to know when things don't seem to be positive. The best thing any child of God can do is to say, God, You made me, here is my life and I want You to fulfill Your will in it.

Now I believe totally and completely in the sovereignty of God in our salvation. God chose us and God saved us. He did it of His will not our will. The reason why this theology is so important is that when you have reached a low point because of your own sin as a believer, one of the most comforting thoughts you can have is "God is our Maker."

Comforting Reality #3 - God's people may be comforted knowing that they will soon be delivered and finally home and flourishing. **51:14**

There is great hope in knowing that we will soon be delivered from this sin-cursed world and be free from sin and guilt and finally be home with the Lord experiencing all of the wonderful blessings of God.

Comforting Reality #4 - God's people may be comforted knowing God is an all-powerful God. **51:15**

God is the LORD of hosts, which means He is sovereign over everything. He is in charge of the seas and the angels and the humans. When we are depressed, let our minds remember just how powerful and just how sovereign God truly is. When you want help in life, turn to the all-powerful and almighty God.

Comforting Reality #5 - God's people may be comforted by knowing that God has established His Word in His people and His people on the earth. **51:16**

Israel is God's nation. One day the Word of God will flow from her and through her. She will be in Zion and God will say to Israel, "You are My people," and so will the rest of the world. One of the most comforting things we have to bring us out of any depression is the Word of God. The Word of God can get you out of sin and it can keep you from sin.

Now God asks the question in **verse 19**, “How shall I comfort you?”

Verses 21-23 present two more comforting realities:

Comforting Reality #6 - God’s people may be comforted by knowing that God will eventually stop being angry with Israel and will never be angry again. **51:22**

What God describes in these final two verses is a complete role reversal. Sin and punishment are never the final word for God’s people. God may punish His people, but in the end His people will flourish and all the rest of the world will fall under the judgment of God.

Comforting Reality #7 - God’s people may be comforted by knowing that God will wipe out all their tormentors. **51:23**

God will turn His anger and wrath against the tormentors of His people. Israel has seen God do that a time or two. She saw Him do that with Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Persia, Greece, and Rome. She saw God literally do this in Germany and in more recent times, Iraq. God eventually targets those who have tormented His people and there will come a day when they will all be gone. Israel will be seen as the nation of God and they will trample down their tormentors. It is comforting to know that God settles the scores.

The point of this text was to get Israel to turn from her sin and turn to God. If any person will do that, they will experience the comfort and blessings of God.