

Isaiah 40.1-11 Analysis

Translation

- ¹ “Comfort, comfort my people,” says your God.
² “Speak upon the heart of Jerusalem, and announce to her that she has fulfilled her compulsory service,¹ that her punishment for sin is accepted,² that she has received from Yahweh’s hand double [punishment] because of all her sins.”
- ³ A voice is calling,³
“In the wilderness, clear a way for Yahweh; make straight in the desert a road for our God!
⁴ Each valley will be lifted up, and every mountain and hill will become low; the bumpy terrain will become level ground, and the uneven terrain [will become] a plain.
⁵ Then the glory of Yahweh will reveal itself⁴ and all flesh together will see [it], for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.”
- ⁶ A voice is saying, “Call!”
And I said,⁵ “What shall I call?
All flesh is grass and all their faithfulness⁶ is like blossoms in the field.
⁷ The grass has dried, the blossom has withered, for the wind of Yahweh has blown on it;⁷

¹ The Masoretic Text has a Qal perfect 3fs verb, while the only noun in the clause [הַצָּרְיָה] is masculine. The Septuagint supports the MT. The Dead Sea Scrolls have the same verb as 3ms. The BHS editors propose to amend to a Piel perfect 3fs form. If Jerusalem is the implied feminine subject and הַצָּרְיָה the object, there is no reason to amend the MT. I take from HALOT [1995] the gloss for הַצָּרְיָה.

² HALOT distinguishes two unique words with the same radicals [1280-1282]. They believe this verse belongs to the second, meaning “carried away” in the Niphal; but the Niphal gloss for the first is “accepted with pleasure” in the context of a sacrifice, and this agrees with BDB [953].

³ There is a *zaqef qaton* in the second word followed by a *zaqef gadol* in the third, which suggests this break in the verse, because when two similar accents occur like this, the first is always the stronger [Joüon-Muraoka 2006, 62]. This is supported by the parallel structure [Oswalt 1998, 51]. The Dead Sea Scrolls text has an extra ו before the verb, but otherwise supports the Masoretic Text. The Septuagint [and the unpunctuated New Testament quotations of the Septuagint] could be taken as consistent with the Masoretic Text.

⁴ I take the Niphal to be reflexive here.

⁵ The Dead Sea Scrolls read ו-consecutive [one assumes] imperfect [i.e. preterite], first person singular. The Septuagint [with some support from the Vulgate] reads, “καὶ εἶπα” which translates as, “and I said,” first person singular, aorist. The Masoretic text reads “And he said” [Qal ו-conjun. perfect 3ms]. If Isaiah is the source for this pericope, then the first person would be easier to understand, though it would be the only preterite in the passage; but neither option makes much difference, both work well enough for the sense of the passage.

⁶ The Masoretic Text reads הִיִּצְרִיָּה , meaning “his faithfulness.” The Dead Sea Scrolls read הִיִּצְרִיָּה [without the vowels], which would be plural of the MT word. The Septuagint [with some support from the Syriac and Vulgate, along with the quotation in 1 Peter 1.24] reads δόξα, which is “glory” or “splendor.” Since the Septuagint reads δόξα ἀνθρώπου [“glory of man”], we can see it is paraphrasing. BHS share the proposal of הדר, which means “splendor” [HALOT, 240]; another proposal is הדר, which means “beauty” [HALOT, 325]. Though the first proposal agrees in meaning with the Septuagint, it is hard to see how the mistake could have been made accidentally. The second proposal seems much more likely for a transcribed error [mistaking ה and ו], but it doesn’t support the Septuagint [hard to believe anyone would choose δόξα to represent “beauty”].

surely the people are grass.”

⁸ “The grass has dried, the blossom has withered,
but the word of our God will stand forever!”

⁹ Zion, herald of good news, you yourself must ascend on a high mountain;
Jerusalem, herald of good news, you must strongly lift your voice;
you must lift [it up], you should not fear;
you must say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God!”

¹⁰ Look! Lord Yahweh is coming in strength, with his arm ruling for him.

Look! His reward is with him and his award before him.

¹¹ Like a shepherd, he will tend his flock.

With his arm he will gather together lambs, and at his breast he will carry [them].

Suckling ewes he will escort.

Exegetical Outline

After allowing Judah to suffer sufficiently through devastation and exile for her sins, God now brought a message of comforting hope, that he would return to deliver them and bless them.

I. It is time to prepare for Yahweh’s promised resumption of blessing, as Judah’s time of punishment is over [1-5].

A. Yahweh commands someone to announce the end of Judah’s punishment [1-2].

1. Yahweh commands someone to comfort his people [1].

2. Yahweh commands someone to announce to Jerusalem that the time of punishment is over [2].

B. Someone says it is time to prepare for the promised resumption of Yahweh’s blessing [3-5].

1. Someone says to make a way for Yahweh [3].

2. To make the way for Yahweh, the terrain must be flattened [4].

3. Then the glory of Yahweh will reveal itself and all the people will see it, as promised [5].

II. Despite the faithlessness of his people, Yahweh is resuming his blessing to protect and care for them [6-11].

A. Though the people and their faithfulness have not proved reliable, Yahweh’s word will prove so [6-8].

1. Someone says to call [6a].

2. Someone else questions what to call, for the people and their faithfulness have not proved reliable [6b-7].

3. The first voice says that while the people and their faithfulness have not proved reliable, Yahweh’s word will prove so [8].

B. Zion and Jerusalem must bring to Judah the good news of God’s returning affections [9].

C. Yahweh is returning in power to protect and care for his people [10-11].

⁷ Translating the Hebrew perfect as past perfective in English works fine for this Psalm.

1. Yahweh is returning in power [10].
2. Yahweh will protect and care for his people [11].

Theological Outline

God allows his people to go through suffering as discipline, but he remains committed to his covenants and will deliver his people in the end, so they should prepare themselves for blessing.

- I. God never abandons his covenant with people, even when disciplining them [1-2, 6-8].
- II. God is deliverer, both as victorious warrior and as gentle comforter [10-11].
- III. God's people should prepare themselves for God's blessing [3-5, 9].

Homiletical Outline

We must trust that God will deliver us through our struggles and prepare for God's blessing by turning to him in faith and obedience.

- I. We must obey God to enjoy the blessings of our covenant.
- II. We must prepare ourselves for God's blessing, by turning to him in faith.
- III. We must trust God has not abandoned the covenant he made with us, even when we suffer.
- IV. We must trust God will deliver us through our struggles, even if not out of them, and especially that God will deliver us from death.

Introduction and Context

In chapter 39 – the culmination of Isaiah's warning prophecies – Isaiah prophesied about the upcoming victory of Babylon and the exile which Judah would face. In chapter 40, Isaiah began his message of comfort for those in exile. When Isaiah was writing, many Judeans were already in exile, some even in Babylon [such as King Manasseh; see 2 Chronicles 33.11], because of Assyrian raids into Judah. This passage begins Isaiah's words to those already in exile and to those who were the subjects of his prophecy in chapter 39 and would become exiles because of Babylon's future victories.

This passage feeds into important revelations about Yahweh, followed by multiple pictures of consolation.⁸ Isaiah will remind the exiles that Yahweh is the almighty creator, who is in total control, and who will empower and sustain them if they wait on him [40.12-31]. This is important, because the people might wonder whether Yahweh had forsaken them or had failed in protecting them.⁹ Just as judgment extended from Zion [Isaiah 1-12] to the nations [13-23] and ultimately all creation [24-27], so now deliverance by grace will come to Zion [40-59], the nations [60-64], and the heavens and the earth [65-66].¹⁰ The restoration by grace of the Jews in exile [a previously unheard of phenomenon] and the humbling of Babylon would testify to Yahweh's sovereignty.¹¹

⁸ Motyer 1993, 298.

⁹ Oswalt 1998, 45.

¹⁰ DBI, 427.

¹¹ Oswalt 1998, 46.

I. It is time to prepare for Yahweh's promised resumption of blessing, as Judah's time of punishment is over [1-5].

40.1-2: Perhaps the most comforting aspect of this sentence is evidence that the people still belong to Yahweh,¹² with the implication that there still exists a covenant relationship between the people and Yahweh.¹³ The word for “comfort” here [Piel of נָחַם] usually means to encourage with words.¹⁴ This is supported by v.2, where “speak upon the heart of Jerusalem” means to give encouragement to Jerusalem, to help the people to take heart and believe.¹⁵ In several contexts, including some elsewhere in Isaiah, the focus of the comfort is on deliverance.¹⁶ Of particular interest is Isaiah 12.1, which seems to foreshadow 40.1-2, speaking of Yahweh's comfort in deliverance after the nation has endured punishment due to Yahweh's wrath, which punishment extends from the destruction and deportations of Assyria to those of Babylon.¹⁷ This comfort is spoken to Jerusalem, not directly to the exiles,¹⁸ though ultimately it will speak of their return as part of the deliverance.

There are three parts to the comforting message for Jerusalem: “that she has fulfilled her compulsory service; that her punishment for sin is accepted; [and] that she has received from Yahweh's hand double [punishment] because of all her sins.” All of this reminds them that it was Yahweh who brought them punishment for their sins, that their suffering was for their breaches of the covenant with Yahweh, not because of the Assyrians and Babylonians.¹⁹ In Deuteronomy 28, Moses predicted destruction, desolation, and loss of autonomy if the people broke the covenant, which they repeatedly did;²⁰ now Yahweh is announcing the end of this chastisement.

English translations vary greatly on v.2. What seems in view is the punishment of destruction and exile, but even if this is thought of as a time of “warfare” [NASB, NET, ESV] or “hard service” [TNIV], the point is the same: Yahweh is declaring the time of suffering to be ended. Another question is whether Judah's sin is paid for [TNIV], pardoned [ESV], removed [NASB], or their punishment for sin is complete [NET]. The word for sin [עֲוֹן] can also mean the punishment for sin.²¹ The root for this verb [רָצַח] can mean something is accepted [like a sacrifice; this is the basis for the NET translation] or that it is carried away [the basis for the

¹² Motyer 1993, 298.

¹³ Oswalt 1998, 49; Childs 2001, 297.

¹⁴ HALOT, 689.

¹⁵ Oswalt 1998, 49.

¹⁶ Deliverance from the effects of the Fall [Genesis 5.29]; deliverance from adversaries [Psalms 71.21; 86.12; 119.82]; deliverance from exile [Isaiah 12.1; 49.13; Jeremiah 31.13]; deliverance from destruction or lack of provision [Isaiah 51.3; 52.9; 66.13; Zechariah 1.17].

¹⁷ Childs 2001, 297-298.

¹⁸ Oswalt 1998, 49.

¹⁹ Oswalt 1998, 50.

²⁰ Martin 1985, 1091.

²¹ HALOT, 800.

NASB translation].²² Essentially, Judah had to endure the punishment for her sins, but now Yahweh says that punishment is complete, and he has accepted it. This would be good news for those in Judah and for those in exile,²³ though they would have to wait some time before the actual deliverance came.

One challenge with reading prophets like Isaiah, is that their prophecies sometimes blended elements of one deliverance with elements of another deliverance farther in the future, blended elements of a physical deliverance with elements of a spiritual one. Because of language in this verse, some see a connection to Yahweh's acceptance of Levitical blood sacrifices, and so see this extension of Yahweh's grace to be based on the sacrifice of the Servant of the Lord as revealed later in Isaiah.²⁴ While all individual spiritual redemption in the Old Testament was tied to the future sacrifice of Christ, it is not clear that Israel's national forgiveness and physical deliverance from exile was paid for by Christ's future sacrifice on the cross.

Another question is what is meant by receiving double. This does not suggest Israel suffered more than what was deserved. Some believe it refers to the language of Exodus 22, in which a thief paid double restitution.²⁵ Others point to Isaiah 51.19, which says, "These double disasters confronted you. But who feels sorry for you? Destruction and devastation, famine and sword. But who consoles you?" [NET]. This would imply the "double" punishment was two types of wrath Yahweh showed for the people's sins.²⁶ Note the verb the NET translated as "consoles" in Isaiah 51.19 is the same as translated "comfort" here in 40.1 [נָחַם].

While it is not important for understanding the meaning of this passage, another question is to whom Yahweh is speaking in these two verses. The verb is a second person plural form, so it seems to be a group Yahweh is addressing, not a single prophet. Several scholars believe Yahweh is addressing his heavenly court of angels, sending them with his message.²⁷ Others think Yahweh was speaking to any people who might speak for Yahweh in Jerusalem.²⁸ However, the very lack of specification makes clear that it is the message itself that is important here, not the messenger.²⁹

40.3-5: Here we have another voice speaking. Some have sought to interpret the identity of those speaking in this whole passage consistently, and concluded this must be an angelic herald who was hearing the commands in vv.1-2³⁰ or Isaiah himself who had heard the command of

²² HALOT, 1280-1282.

²³ Motyer 1993, 299.

²⁴ Motyer 1993, 299.

²⁵ Childs 2001, 297.

²⁶ Martin 1985, 1091.

²⁷ Motyer 1993, 299; Childs 2001, 296-297; DBI, 51.

²⁸ Oswalt 1998, 50.

²⁹ Oswalt 1998, 50.

³⁰ Childs 2001, 298; DBI, 51.

Yahweh,³¹ while others have been content at pointing out again that the identity of the messenger is not important.³²

Some have proposed that this clearing of the way in the wilderness is for a second exodus for the exiles in Babylon.³³ This confuses Yahweh making a way for people with people making a way for Yahweh: It is Yahweh who is on the move here,³⁴ the people would not prepare their own way,³⁵ and when the people did return from Babylon, they did not go through the wilderness.³⁶ The connection to the second exodus is that here Yahweh would return as a divine warrior in order to liberate Judah from oppression, which would include returning the exiles to the land.³⁷ The people would rejoice at the idea of Yahweh's return, both because it was obvious he had not been blessing them for some time and because Ezekiel had indicated Yahweh had left the former Temple in Jerusalem [10.18].³⁸

Obviously, Yahweh does not need the people to make roads. The imagery associated with clearing a way illustrates Yahweh's return to deliver his people using the imagery of constructing processional ways for visiting dignitaries or for idols which were carried in procession.³⁹ Since the people [figuratively] were to do this work, it is best to take the verbs as jussives [NASB, NET] rather than as certain futures [TNIV, ESV]. The symbolism of the people making a way were for them to get ready to honor Yahweh's return. They should look forward in anticipating it, they should take comfort in the promise of it.⁴⁰ Perhaps also they should make themselves spiritually ready for it.⁴¹

In English Bibles, it seems like the New Testament gospel writers misunderstood this verse, thinking it was the voice that was in the wilderness, not the action of clearing the way. However, the Greek of the New Testament parallels that of the Septuagint, which closely follows the Hebrew. The difference in the English translations comes from punctuation which editors have added to the Greek text, apparently incorrectly. In the gospels, there is a voice, which is John the Baptist,⁴² and he describes the coming of Jesus to Jerusalem.⁴³

³¹ Martin 1995, 1091.

³² Oswalt 1998, 51.

³³ Childs 2001, 299; DBI, 463, 644, 735.

³⁴ Oswalt 1998, 51-52.

³⁵ Motyer 1993, 300.

³⁶ Oswalt 1998, 51.

³⁷ DBI, 897.

³⁸ DBI, 712-713.

³⁹ Motyer 1993, 300; Martin 1995, 1092.

⁴⁰ Oswalt 1998, 52.

⁴¹ Martin 1995, 1092.

⁴² Martin 1995, 1091-1092; DBI, 543, 950.

⁴³ DBI, 897.

Obviously there was a voice in Isaiah's day, calling for the people to prepare, so the question is what it means that John echoed this call over seven hundred years later. Isaiah prophesied about the return of Yahweh's blessing to Jerusalem, which would lead to deliverance and thus the return of the exiles to Judah. But what happened was only a partial deliverance: In Jesus' day, the Jews were still under Gentile rule, and those who rebuilt Jerusalem and other places in Judah after the Babylonian empire fell were still not in unity with Yahweh and thus were indicted by Malachi and left without Yahweh's voice for hundreds of years. In Deuteronomy 30, Yahweh had made clear he required full obedience from the heart for a full restoration.⁴⁴ John the Baptist offered a baptism of repentance, a chance to turn back to Yahweh in faith and receive forgiveness. This was in preparation for the coming to Jerusalem of Jesus, who would offer deliverance of a complete reconciliation with Yahweh. In this, he is identified both with Yahweh as the divine bringer of blessing and with Isaiah's Suffering Servant [52.13-53.12].⁴⁵

When the people have prepared, then the glory of Yahweh will reveal itself. Sometimes the phrase "glory of Yahweh" seems to indicate Yahweh's rightful praise or honor.⁴⁶ More often, it refers to a physical manifestation of Yahweh's local presence, often described as a cloud.⁴⁷ Elsewhere, it refers to Yahweh's power and sovereignty, sufficient for deliverance.⁴⁸ This seems to be the primary meaning here. Yahweh's people might be anticipating a physical manifestation when they would rebuild the temple, but what is paramount in this passage is Yahweh's willingness and ability to deliver them from exile. This was their only hope, one reiterated later in Isaiah.⁴⁹ It is presented as a sure thing, because Yahweh has spoken.

The reference to all flesh seeing the glory of Yahweh hints at a later deliverance, at the end of time when Christ will return to rule.⁵⁰ At that time, Yahweh's saving purpose for the whole world [though not every person in it] will be more fully revealed,⁵¹ and all flesh will not only see Yahweh's glory, but experience its power.⁵²

II. Despite the faithlessness of his people, Yahweh is resuming his blessing to protect and care for them [6-11].

40.6-7: Again we have an unidentified voice, most likely an angelic messenger.⁵³ Now we have someone responding, probably Isaiah himself.⁵⁴ In the Hebrew, there are never any quotation

⁴⁴ Pentecost 1981, 84.

⁴⁵ Carson 1991, 144.

⁴⁶ E.g. Isaiah 24.23; 42.8; 48.11; Psalms 104.31; 138.5.

⁴⁷ E.g. Exodus 16.10; 24.16-17; Leviticus 9.6, 23; Numbers 16.9, 42; 20.6; 1 Kings 8.11; 2 Chronicles 5.14; 7.1-2; Ezekiel 1.28; 3.12, 23; 10.4, 18; 11.23; 43.5; 44.4.

⁴⁸ See Isaiah 35.2; 58.8; 59.19; 66.18; Habakkuk 2.14; Exodus 16.7.

⁴⁹ Oswalt 1998, 51.

⁵⁰ Oswalt 1998, 52; Martin 1995, 1092.

⁵¹ Oswalt 1998, 52; Motyer 1993, 300.

⁵² Motyer 1993, 300.

⁵³ Martin 1995, 1092, thought it was God.

marks, so we have to figure out when one entity stops speaking and another starts. Some see the first voice speaking all of vv.6-8 except for the question of what to call.⁵⁵ More likely, the prophet answers with a longer objection, not only asking what he should call, but expressing his pessimism about his anticipated audience.⁵⁶

The prophet does not want to proclaim the word of salvation, because he sees the ugliness of the people. People, like grass, quickly wither. While some scholars consider the implication for the inadequacy of Yahweh's adversaries to oppose him and the inadequacy of Yahweh's people to save themselves,⁵⁷ the thrust of the prophet's objection is that the people are not worthy of being given this message of hope for deliverance. There is a textual question about whether it is mankind's beauty [NASB, ESV] or faithfulness [TNIV, NET] that fades. "Faithfulness" brings much more clearly that the problem is mankind's unworthiness: in both physical endurance and moral character, people are a failure by Yahweh's standards.⁵⁸

The word in Hebrew for breath [רוּחַ] can also mean wind or spirit.⁵⁹ The phrase translated here "wind of Yahweh" [רוּחַ יְהוָה] occurs in the Old Testament twenty-three times. Twenty-one of those clearly mean Spirit of Yahweh, and one of the remaining two might be taken that way [though it usually is not].⁶⁰ However, the remaining use is in Hosea 13.15, where the prophet speaks about the coming east wind from Yahweh which will wither the reed plant of the northern kingdom of Israel. That similar example lends weight to taking the meaning here as "wind." However, if that does not satisfy the reader, he can consider that Yahweh causes wind by his breath or his Spirit. As one scholar put it, figuratively, the prophet is speaking of a wind that blights vegetation, but he is using that to represent Yahweh's Spirit affecting people.⁶¹

A more important question is what it means that people wither when the wind of Yahweh comes. If the reason for the prophet's reluctance is the faithlessness of the people, then it would not seem to make sense that this wind represented Yahweh's punishment. Maybe the wind represents a test of strength [of faithfulness] from Yahweh or something akin to a refining fire since it would be a hot desert wind.

40.8: The angelic voice answers the prophet, saying in effect, "Yes, people are faithless and unworthy, *but... but* that is not the point! *but in contrast* the word of Yahweh will stand forever, and he has promised deliverance. In the Hebrew, there is a disjunctive clause to give emphasis to the contrast: what is in focus here is not the quality of the people but quality of the word of

⁵⁴ Motyer 1993, 300; Martin 1995, 1092.

⁵⁵ Oswalt 1998, 44; Martin 1995, 1092; probably Motyer 1993, 300-301.

⁵⁶ Childs 2001, 300, though he does not use quotation marks consistent with that view [293].

⁵⁷ Oswalt 1998, 53.

⁵⁸ Motyer 1993, 301.

⁵⁹ HALOT, 1197-1201.

⁶⁰ See Judges 3.10; 11.29; 13.25; 14.6; 14.19; 15.14; 1 Samuel 10.6; 16.13; 2 Samuel 23.2; 1 Kings 22.24; 2 Kings 2.16; 2 Chronicles 18.23; 20.14; Isaiah 11.2; 40.13; 63.14; Ezekiel 11.5; Micah 2.7; 3.8; and maybe Isaiah 59.19.

⁶¹ Motyer 1993, 301. See also Oswalt 1998, 53.

Yahweh. That word of Yahweh just proclaimed deliverance, and how here is the assertion that this is completely reliable and will stand forever.⁶²

In the New Testament, Peter used this verse to good effect in exhorting early believers. In 1 Peter 1.23-25, he wrote, “²³ You have been born anew, not from perishable but from imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of Yahweh. ²⁴ For all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of the grass; the grass withers and the flower falls off, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word that was proclaimed to you” [NET]. Today, we know we need not rely on our own efforts to be saved, for we have Yahweh’s word of deliverance.⁶³

40:9: Once again we have some confusion as to who is talking. Some scholars believe this is another anonymous voice instructing a “herald to Jerusalem” [TNIV] what to speak both in the city and in the surrounding towns.⁶⁴ It seems better to take the substantival participles in this verse as appositional to Zion and Jerusalem [NASB, NET], so this might be the prophet of vv.6-7 fulfilling his call, exhorting Jerusalem [also called Zion] to share the good news with all of Judah.⁶⁵ Figuratively, the mountain would provide the proper height for proclamation.⁶⁶ The prophet exhorts Jerusalem not to fear, she can confidently proclaim Yahweh’s good news now even though the evidence is still future, because she knows Yahweh’s word does not fail.⁶⁷ The message Jerusalem is to proclaim is simple in summary: “Here is your God!” Salvation is simply Yahweh’s presence.⁶⁸ If he is with them, they will prevail. Today, we can say the same as to the ultimate deliverance, because Christ came and the Spirit dwells within us.⁶⁹

40:10-11: The question here is whether this is still part of the message Jerusalem should proclaim⁷⁰ or is yet another voice speaking a new [though related] message. We have translated it as not being a part of Jerusalem’s message, but it really does not matter either way. The message itself begins with, “Look!” a Hebrew word [הִנֵּה] placed there to convey emphasis and excitement over the coming of Yahweh. This excitement seems out of place with the verbs translated as future tense [NASB], so we have translated them as progressive present.

Yahweh first is portrayed coming as the victorious warrior. Yahweh’s arm is his strength,⁷¹ his military might that will allow him to win the victory over those oppressing his people.⁷² Some

⁶² Childs 2001, 300.

⁶³ Oswalt 1998, 54.

⁶⁴ Motyer 1993, 301; Martin 1995, 1092; DBI, 919.

⁶⁵ Support for Jerusalem being the herald from Oswalt 1998, 54; Childs 2001, 300.

⁶⁶ Motyer 1993, 301; DBI, 573.

⁶⁷ Oswalt 1998, 54.

⁶⁸ Oswalt 1998, 54.

⁶⁹ See Oswalt 1998, 54, for a similar thought.

⁷⁰ Oswalt 1998, 54, said it was part of Jerusalem’s message, but he did not include it within quotation marks [44-45].

⁷¹ Motyer 1993, 302; Martin 1995, 1092.

⁷² Oswalt 1998, 54.

scholars believe the reward Yahweh is bringing before him are the sheep, his people whom he has freed with his victory.⁷³ Others protest that this passage portrays Yahweh coming to his people, having won victory elsewhere,⁷⁴ or at least still coming to deliver them. Some scholars think the reward is the spoils of his victory which he will then disperse to his people.⁷⁵ Perhaps, as Oswalt said, it is best not to speculate on specifics, but just take this as part of the military victory metaphor.⁷⁶

Yahweh next is portrayed coming as the caring shepherd, who gives general care to his flock,⁷⁷ holds the helpless and needy,⁷⁸ and guides the pregnant ewes needing extra attentive care.⁷⁹ The arm that was Yahweh's military strength against his enemies, allowing him to deliver his people, is also the arm of loving care for his people.⁸⁰ Yahweh's strength is evidenced as he carries and cares for his helpless people.⁸¹ That he takes lambs to his breast shows Yahweh's intimate loving care.⁸² This loving care is for those who turn to and depend on him.⁸³

Conclusion and Application

Israel enjoyed a covenant relationship with Yahweh, but they had not remained obedient to their obligations in that covenant, and so Yahweh had allowed disaster to come upon them. Despite the faithlessness of the people, Yahweh did not abandon the covenant. He had given his word of promise, so here he gave his word of comfort in the form of another promise: deliverance. Yahweh would restore Jerusalem, return the exiles to Judah, and renew his covenant with his people.

Historically, this deliverance has been realized only partially. The Jews who were restored to Jerusalem and Judah also struggled with obedience and faithlessness, and soon were indicted by the prophet Malachi, after which they went hundreds of years without hearing from Yahweh. When they did hear from Yahweh it was in an unexpected way: Yahweh returned, but in the form of Jesus Christ, who came to represent humanity on the cross. Jesus died for the rest of Yahweh's people, to pay the ultimate penalty for our sins.

Today, we also enjoy a covenant relationship with Yahweh. It is a different, new covenant, but just as binding. We too are commanded to obey, and we too face chastisement and discipline if we do not. But while our character has not changed much, Yahweh's nature also has not

⁷³ Motyer 1993, 302.

⁷⁴ Oswalt 1998, 55.

⁷⁵ Martin 1995, 1092; Oswalt 1998, 55.

⁷⁶ Oswalt 1998, 55.

⁷⁷ Motyer 1993, 302.

⁷⁸ Motyer 1993, 302; DBI, 484.

⁷⁹ Motyer 1993, 302; Martin 1995, 1092; DBI, 784.

⁸⁰ Oswalt 1998, 55; Motyer 1993, 302.

⁸¹ Childs 2001, 302.

⁸² Motyer 1993, 302.

⁸³ Oswalt 1998, 55.

changed: he will honor his covenant despite our faithlessness. One implication of this is assurance of our salvation, if we have put our faith in Yahweh's deliverance through Christ. We always are unworthy of that salvation, but it depends on the reliability of Yahweh's word and on Christ's righteousness, not ours.

As Yahweh's people today, we must get ourselves ready for his blessing, turning to him in faith and receiving his forgiveness, looking for him eagerly, taking comfort in his promises even when we are suffering. Yahweh can deliver us out of anything. Usually he chooses to deliver us through something, sustaining us and allowing the experience to strengthen us, if we turn to him in our time of need. In any case, we enjoy the ultimate deliverance, from death.

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