

## **Allan MacRae, Isaiah 40-56, Lecture 2**

This is lecture 2 delivered by Dr. Allan MacRae at Biblical Theological Seminary on Isaiah 40-56:

I wanted to look at chapter 40 with you now. The one thing I think we should keep in mind is that it is very dangerous simply to take one verse of Scripture by itself and try to build a teaching solely on that verse. Now, there are cases like in the book of Proverbs, where there are a number of chapters where the verses stand by themselves, and there's very little discernable relation to the verses near by. In such a case, naturally, we are entitled to take the verse by itself, but some of them are quite difficult to interpret because of various possibilities of meanings of particular words in any verse taken by itself. Now, there are many cases in Scripture where a verse summarizes the meaning of a passage. In these places we find the teaching that we get out of this verse enlarged in the passage, or perhaps given in other places, so we're justified in using the verse alone. But generally, a verse by itself does not prove a great deal unless it relates to other things in the Scripture. The Scripture is given us to reveal ideas to us from God. These ideas are put into human words and there are always various possibilities of interpretation of human words.

Now, a verse may very often give us a precise statement of a fact, particularly if it's in a historical narrative. Hezekiah went into the temple. Isaiah brought him a message. There's a particular narrative fact that is given often. But there are great many cases, particularly in prophecy, where verses express an emotion, or convey a general attitude, which may be very important in connection with the idea that is central in the passage.

Now chapter 40 begins a section that relates to the work of the "Anointed One" or Messiah. Yet it does not mention Jesus Christ by name; it does not refer to him as the Son of God, it does not refer to the virgin birth. Additionally, it does not mention Babylon, it does not mention the exile; it does not have specific words

that would definitely tie this chapter into the Babylonian exile of 586B.C.

You can go through this chapter and you can find many relations not explicit, yet definite relations of ideas to the situation that relates to the coming of Christ are present. There are many such references, and there a number of verses from here quoted in the New Testament. And there are still a larger number that are used in Handel's *Messiah* because there is that impression that this chapter fits so well with Christ. On the other hand, there is much that fits very well with the return from exile. It is impossible to take the chapter and say we can prove that this chapter is dealing specifically with one of these two subjects. But it is very easy to show that it may be dealing with either one of the two.

I have made a suggestion, which I think is a good one: that chapters 40 to 56 might be compared to a symphony. In this symphony there is a progress of thought. The progress starts with certain definite problems, and then deals with various aspects of these problems, and then gives a definite solution to the problems. This progression traces through the passage. But the first chapter can be related to either of two important aspects. Some verses are easily related to one another, others one does not see quite as related, but one can always see a little relation, at least, to either of these two aspects: the Babylonian exile or the Messiah. So I have hit upon the idea of considering the whole thing like a symphony with chapter 40 as an overture, or prelude to the symphony. That is, chapter 40 strikes the tone for the whole section. It gives, in a way, a general summary. It suggests the emotions rather than specific events. Taking it that way, chapter 40 could be an introduction to a promise of return from exile, or it could be an introduction to a promise of deliverance from sin through the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. It strikes the emotions, the central feelings that are related to both of these two aspects.

So I'd like to go through the chapter fairly fast with you, first, definitely from the viewpoint of relation to the exile. That is quite a natural way to approach the chapter because of the chapter immediately before it. We have the declaration

that the people are going to be taken off into exile in Babylon. Now, that does not prove that this chapter will deal with the Babylonian exile, but it certainly suggests it as a strong possibility. As the chapter before ended, you had Hezekiah recognizing the fact that God declared that they would be taken into Babylonian captivity.

Now, in this chapter, we look ahead in our thoughts. We try to understand what is in the minds of the godly people in Israel—those who believed that Isaiah was a true prophet and that when Isaiah said the time will come when they will be taken into exile to Babylon, they knew that that was going to happen, and they felt terrible sorrow and grief looking forward to what would happen. It wasn't something they simply had to imagine. They knew what it was because right in their own time people of the Northern Kingdom had been taken off into exile to Assyria, and they had seen refugees from that and heard stories of how they were being treated, and how the people missed their homeland. And so these people now in Isaiah's time, in and around Jerusalem, realized that the same fate awaited them, so they may tend to give way to despair (Isa 39:7).

So chapters 40 to 56 is Isaiah's book of comfort. He is speaking to the godly, but as representative of the nation as a whole. Now, the result is, of course, that this would give an answer to the emotional needs of the godly people living in Isaiah's day. But Isaiah's words could specifically meet the needs of people who lived 150 years later after the Babylonian exile had been in full swing for a time. So you can think of chapter 40, if you want, as people in Isaiah's time imagining the exile, which they know is coming, and thinking of how they would feel, or you can think of chapter 40 as the people 150 years later actually in the midst of the exile and the in longing that God's blessing would return to the land of Israel.

So, we start with Isaiah chapter 40 verse 1: "'Comfort, comfort, my people,' says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." This fits very well with the idea of a

return from exile. Here they are in misery in exile, and they need comfort. This hard thing they have to go through--the exile--has been finished. There is a note just barely touched upon that her sin has been paid for. They are there because of their sin. That thought of sin, however, is not stressed much in the first few chapters of this book of comfort. The theme of the book of this section is comfort, not rebuke. There is rebuke, but that's not the main theme. The theme of sin is lightly touched upon to suggest to the people's minds, "Why are you in exile?" You're in exile because of sin. This problem of sin must be dealt with or there will just be another exile. You go home but as long as you still have the sin, it's merely a temporary deliverance.

So we have people here in great grief and suffering, and you don't go to people in that condition and immediately give them a strong rebuke. You introduce rebuke gently and tactfully. Here there's this very gentle touch that Israel's sin has been paid for. Now, you might say, "Here is a summary of the whole section as it relates to Christ; that Christ has paid for the sins of all who put their trust in him." But this theme just lightly touched on here.

Now, the expression "double for all her sins" we should pause over for a second. "She has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. 40:2). Well, that, of course, suggests that God's going to punish far in excess of what they deserve, but that of course is a misunderstanding. The "double" is not twice as much, but it is the equivalent; it is the full payment of what is due and, of course, that could only be given through Christ on the cross.

"A voice of one calling in the desert 'Prepare the way for the Lord'" (Isa 40:3). There's no way to tell whether it should be "a voice of one calling in the desert 'Prepare the way for the Lord'" or "the voice of one calling 'In the desert, prepare the way for the Lord.'" Whether the voice is in the desert, or the way to be prepared is in the desert you cannot prove; but both are true, so it is nothing to become excited about. If both are true, you cannot prove one or the other, but both are true. The voice is calling "Prepare a way for the Lord, make straight in

the wilderness a highway for our God.” Here are the exiles, way off in Babylon. How are they going to get back? How are they going to break free from Babylonian captivity? How are they going to make the long trip across the desert? How are they going to get back to Jerusalem? A voice says, “Prepare a way in the desert for our God; make straight a highway in the wilderness for Him.” There is to be opened up the way for them to come, the way through which God will bring them.

And there are great difficulties in the way. These difficulties are to be ironed out. “Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain” (Isa. 40:4). You see everything thus far, while there’s no explicit mention of exile, can fit very easily with the comfort of people in exile by the assurance that God is going to deliver them from it. “And the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all mankind together will see it, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” God assures them this is going to happen. There’s the power of mighty Babylon. How can little Israel ever escape from it? How can they ever get back from exile? How can they make that long trip across the wilderness, way back to the land of Judah? It requires the power of God, and accomplishing all this will be a revelation of God’s glory.

Now, there’s a strange note there: “All mankind together will see it.” Is this sort of an exaggeration? Are all the nations going to see that little Israel has escaped from mighty Babylon? And are they all going to think how wonderful this is? Or is there a suggestion that God is going to do something beyond merely the deliverance of Israel from Babylon? Well, one might not notice that reading it simply, but it is there, nevertheless. The suggestion is that this phrase refers beyond, just like the reference to sin we discussed earlier today. But you can see that it’s still possibly a slight exaggeration to say “all mankind.” Someone might suggest that means all types of mankind, and that might be a possibility of interpretation. But this phrase can fit with the return from exile, even if it sounds slightly stronger than you would expect in that connection.

I am at present seeing how this scene can fit with the return from exile; then I want to show how the whole thing can fit with the coming of Christ. As mentioned before chapter 40 is an introduction to the symphony. Both theme appear more fully later. But this gives us an introduction to the whole thing and touches the emotions for both and there's very little in chapter 40 that could not apply to both themes. Chapter 40 can fit with both ways. Right now, though I want you to see how well it fits with the idea of return from exile.

We move on in this vein. A voice says, "cry out," and I said, "What shall I cry?" (Isa 40:6). Look at these people under Babylonian control. The great, powerful Babylonian army, holding them in subjection. How can they ever escape?

Well, he says, "All men are like grass and all their glory like the flowers of the field." Babylon is tremendous in its power in comparison with little Israel, yes, but God is so great in comparison with Babylon that in comparison with Him, they're all just like grass. "The grass withers and the flowers fall because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isa 40:7-8). And so we have here the thought brought in: You can be confident that you will be delivered from exile because God is so much greater than any human beings, he is so strong in comparison with them that they will all disappear. The Babylonian empire will someday be nothing but a memory. Its leaders will all die within the next few decades, if not sooner. Humanity's like grass, but God is eternal and God's power is so great, and here God has told you what He's going to do.

So I am taking this passage as referring to the return from the Babylonian exile; that would be certainly what it refers to. I don't say that's the only way you can take it, but it certainly makes sense that the theme here is the return from Babylonian exile.

Now, the next verse is an interesting one: "You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up

your voice with a shout, lift it up; do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, ‘Here is your God’” (Isa. 40:9). Here is a statement that we find about half the translations rendering it as: “O Zion who brings good tidings, go up on a high mountain. O Jerusalem who brings good tidings, lift up your voice with a shout.” There seems to be quite a difference. You cannot build a definite conclusion on one or the other translation because both are possible. Now, to the reader in English, it appears strange that both should be possible. How can it be possible that the same Hebrew can mean, “You who bring good tidings to Zion,” or it can mean, “Zion who brings good tidings”? Well, of course, the fact of the matter is that “bring good tidings to,” all those four words, can be expressed in English by the word “evangelize.” We cannot use that word here in our translation because “evangelize” has come to have a rather limited sense of bringing the good news of deliverance through the gospel. This does not in itself necessarily point to the gospel, but it does point to good news, and that’s what evangelism is. It is the bringing of good news. And so, the Hebrew literally is “the one evangelizing,” and it can be a vocative, addressing the one who is evangelizing. You can say, “O you, Zion, who are evangelizing” or “You who are evangelizing Zion.” You see, it’s a matter of where you put your emphasis. Either is possible as far as the simple statement of the words is concerned. That being the case, almost anyone would say it must mean the one who is evangelizing Zion, who is bringing good tidings to Zion.

But until recently, most of the translations have taken it as “Zion who brings good tidings,” and the reason for that is that the word “evangelizing” is in the feminine, and I do not recall any case in the Scripture where an angel is addressed with a feminine form. But it is quite common in the Scripture for places or nations to be personified as a woman. We say, “France is building up her army.” We wouldn’t say, “France is building up *his* army.” We’d say “its army” or “her army.” We personify places and nations in the feminine. This word “evangelize” is in the feminine. Consequently, many say the feminine there

strongly suggests that this is the city which is being addressed and told to evangelize. Now, if you take it in connection with Christ, that is certainly a very reasonable interpretation. For God's people, Zion often is a figure for God's people, and Jerusalem certainly here doesn't mean a group of houses. It here refers to the people of Jerusalem. The people who were thought of as God's people. So one could say, "God's people, you should evangelize, you should carry out the good news. You've got this wonderful message. Bring it out." The feminine form being used suggests very strongly that that is the case.

But if you think only of the exile, it seems more natural to think those being addressed as "you" as a collective noun in the feminine form, "You who are evangelizing Zion, you are bringing good tidings to Zion, lift up your voice. Go up to a high mountain; make it possible that this will be heard all over. That the people who were scattered over the parts of Babylonia will hear the message. That they'll learn that God is delivering them. Bring them good tidings. Lift up your voice. Don't keep quiet about it. Make it known. You're not going to sneak out of Babylon. You're not going to escape without their knowing you're going. You are going to be able to go with no one able to stop you. Lift up your voice."

Now, when it says, "Say to the towns of Judah, here is your God," that certainly suggests that it is "say to Zion," "say to Jerusalem." Zion and Jerusalem are the most important towns of Judah. This is natural then that if you're saying it to them, say it to Judah also. But that does not rule out it being Jerusalem and Zion who are to do the evangelizing because you can think of them as going to the other towns of Judah and carrying them the message that deliverance from exile has come.

"'Here is your God.' See the sovereign God comes with power" (Isa 40:10). How can you escape from Babylonian captivity? God can deliver you. "See the sovereign Lord comes with power." Think of how great his power is compared to the power of the Babylonians, tremendous as that is. "And his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him." And then



God is going to do this--not by a great war, not by a big fight that you are going to be given the strength to defeat the Babylonians and fight your way out. God is going to deal gently and with love toward you. "He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them close to his heart. He gently leads those that have young" (Isa. 40:11). You think how wonderful it is that God is going to make it possible that we get away from this Babylonian captivity and that we make the long trip across the desert back to our homeland.

And then you think, "Yes, that is wonderful to say that God is going to care for his flock like a shepherd, He is going to gather lambs in his arms, He's going to do all this. That's marvelous. But you must still remember this Babylonian force there. It's nice to say that God's going to treat you so gently and sweetly and take you this way, but think of the force that he's got to meet to do it! How can He do it so immediately?" Your thought goes back to God's power.

"Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens. Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance" (Isa. 40:12). You think of the tremendous power of God, so much greater than the power of the Babylonians. You think of his mightiness, of his creative power. There is more about the creative power of God in these next chapters than in any other section of the Bible except certain sections of Job. There are more verses here on God's power, because it is stressed in these chapters, because it is necessary to assure people who are under that tremendous force of the Babylonians, that God is far greater. You can't see God, but you can see the Babylonian soldiers around. You can see their arsenals and their fortresses. You can see their strength, you can see people from many other nations whom they have conquered and are holding in subjection. But God's power, Isaiah says, is far greater than any of them. So he keeps stressing this more than any other section of the Bible, except certain parts of Job. He stresses the tremendous creative power of God.

“Who has understood the mind of the Lord or instructed him as his counselor? Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?” (Isa. 40:14). These, of course, are rhetorical questions. Nobody taught the Lord how to create the world. Nobody taught him the path of understanding. But it is expressed as a rhetorical question to show the fact that not only is God’s power far beyond that of any human force that could hold them in subjection, his wisdom is far greater, and he’s beginning to bring them to the idea of his greatness. In effect Isaiah is saying, “You have not just been the victim of circumstances in having this suffering to go through; you have not gotten into this because there was nothing that happened to prevent it. You are here because the great, powerful God has willed for his own reasons you are in this situation, and he who brought you into this situation can get you out of it. He has wisdom in it all, he has a purpose; and he has a plan.” So, they are reminded of the great wisdom of God as well as the power of God.

You see how these different emotions are touched upon in the symphony. The thought of comfort, the thought of definite deliverance from Babylon, the thought of the power of God who can deliver you; the thought of the weakness of all mankind in relation to the power of God; and the thought, not only of the power of God, but of the wisdom of God. These different emotions, these different elements, are touched upon, all of which can relate to the return from Babylon.

Now, you say when a person is in some great difficulty, some great problem, it is very hard to comfort them. You would talk to them and you may have to repeat the same ideas over and over in order to get the impression into their mind. They’d say “Yes, but...” and then they’ve got some objection, some difficulty. It’s very easy for the person on the sidelines to see what ought to be done. But for the person who is himself experiencing the trouble, the problem for him is very hard to get, not simply the intellectual apprehension, but to get the

emotional realization that God is present in whatever is happening, that God has a plan, that God has a purpose, and that God is so strong that he can and will fulfill his purpose. So we have these different emotional subjects touched upon in order to drive them into the hearts of people suffering anguish on account of their condition in exile.

So he says, "You question God's power to do this? Look at these Babylonian forces! Or Look at all these other nations greater than ours that are subject to their control here! How can we possibly think that we can go back way across the desert over there to Jerusalem?" But he says in verse 15: Surely, the nations are like a drop in the bucket. They're regarded as dust on the scales in comparison with God. Even the distant great nations of Greece and Rome, which they didn't know anything about as yet, but they knew there were lands beyond the sea and great countries over there, great regions and occasionally they had some contact with them. He says, "Even they are regarded as dust on the balances compared to God. Lebanon," that whole great mountain of Lebanon, with its many trees "would not be sufficient for altar fire, nor would its animals be enough for burnt offerings" to really impress God, if you were going to impress him by making offerings (Isa. 40:16). "Before him, the nations are nothing, they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. To whom then will you compare God? What image will you compare him to?" And here are these people, subject to the Babylonians. The Babylonians say, "Yes, you say you have a God, but what's He ever done?" There you are in subjection, there you are in misery, but what does your God look like? Well, nobody's ever seen our God. Our God is a Spirit. He does not have a physical form. Then you see the great procession coming through the street of Babylon. You see the great idols that the Babylonians carry, the idols of the Babylonian gods with their sumptuous garments on them and their jewels, and the people bowing down before them. You see them come by and you say, "That's what their gods are. They're strong, they've conquered most of the world. What can our God do in comparison with

them?"

Isaiah answers, "Why, to whom will you compare God? What image will you compare Him to? What?" he says, "An idol? A craftsman casts it, a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it." It's something that human beings have made. It's not anything real. "A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot; he looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple" (Isa. 40:20). This is one of the themes we find a great deal in this section of Isaiah. The people surrounded by idolaters are tempted to say, "Oh well, that was just imaginary, that idea of a God that you couldn't see that had his temple on Zion. Look at these great idols here that the people are worshiping, and they've had the power to conquer most of the world as we know it." The theme of the folly of idolatry is stressed perhaps as much in these next few chapters as anywhere in the Scripture.

"Do you not know, have you not heard, has it not been told you from the beginning, haven't you understood since the earth was founded that God sits enthroned above the circle of the earth and its people are like grasshoppers? He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, spreads them out like a tent to live in" (Isa. 40:22). Compared to God's power, the whole earth, the whole sky, everything you can see, is small compared to him. He's up above it all. Of course, he's everywhere, but he can be thought of as above it looking down on it as a small thing in comparison with his tremendous power. Verse 23, "He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing." Now, verse 23 perhaps the listeners may think of more as a prophecy, as a hope perhaps. They perhaps have not known as yet cases where God has brought princes to naught. But the prophet declares that that is what God has done in the past, and they have been told that is how God defeated Pharaoh, how He brought Pharaoh's power to nothing and brought the people out safely from him. He is stressing again the power of God.

"He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

No sooner they planted, no sooner they're sown, no sooner they take root in the ground then he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff" (Isa. 40:23-24). I look back in my life, in just this short period, I look back to when the great armies of Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany seemed about to sweep over Europe, and instead he was just swept away. Hardly anybody even remembers now. But back then there were people who thought he might be the antichrist and counted the numbers of letters in his name in order to prove perhaps that Kaiser Wilhelm was the antichrist. There was the great Czar of Russia then who was able to send millions of people out to fight against Germany. These people had no idea about anything they were fighting for, but they knew they were fighting for their homeland. A great army swept down on the Germans and they kept half of the forces of Germany occupied in those four years of fighting against them. Now the Czar has disappeared. Nothing today but a memory. Then Lenin took over in Russia. Today he is revered in Russia and practically forgotten in most of the rest of the world. Stalin, for a time, was the great force over a tremendous area of the world. Both of these killed millions who are all but forgotten today. Hitler was able raise an army that seemed as if it would conquer the whole world, and many thought he would. Today he's just a name, just a memory. "God," Isaiah says, "brings the rulers of this world to nothing." He makes them just like a dream. "No sooner they are planted, then he blows on them and they wither and the whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff."

"To whom will you compare me? Or who's my equal?" says the Holy One." In verse 25 he asks, "Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all these?" Look at the great stars that are in the heavens. Look at the mighty planets. Who created these? "He who brings out the starry hosts one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. Why do you say O Jacob and complain O Israel 'My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God.' Do you not know, have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator

to the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom" (Isa. 40:25-27). Do you know how many times Isaiah emphasizes God's understanding, God's wisdom, God's knowledge, God's purpose in it all?

He gives strength to the weary. "How are we going to make it way across that long desert stretch back to Jerusalem? How will we ever make it?" He gives strength to the weary. He increases the power of the weak. "Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall. But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary" (Isa 40:28-31). Think of them starting out to go home again, leaving Babylon, where they were held in exile for 70 years. They start out with enthusiasm and with vigor and they start to go, they soar on wings like eagles, you might say, they run and are not weary. But yet there's a long, long way, but they will walk and not faint. It does, in a way seem anticlimactic that they will run and soar on wings like eagles. They'll run and not grow weary, they'll walk and not faint. It seems anticlimactic if you think of a brief distance, but if you think of the long stretch, most of which you can't run, you'll have to walk, the long tiring walk, but God will give them strength. God will enable them to make it through. God will bring them safely back. The exile will come to an end.

So you see how everything in the chapter can be related to the emotions and the situations of those in exile and those suffering under oppression far from their homeland, longing to go back and no possible human way they can do it, but God says, "I'm going to provide a way; I'm going to enable you to go; I'm going to give you the strength to make the whole journey. I'm going to make it possible that the great hills or the great canyons on the way will not be an obstacle that will hinder the accomplishment of the purpose of delivering you from exile." So you see, every verse in the chapter can be neatly fitted into the idea of assurance to the people in exile that they can be delivered.

Yet there is no specific statement in the verse that necessarily ties it to that.

It is not a part of the movement of the symphony, it is the introduction to the symphony. It lays down the emotions, the feelings, the general emphases of the symphony; and all these can relate to the return from exile, or they can relate equally well to the far greater thing that God will do when he brings us deliverance from the power of sin through the coming of Jesus Christ.

We have no doubt of the latter, but I don't think we have any proof of it. The fact that the Israelites at the time of Christ had these books, which they considered to have been God's revelation shows they must have preserved them. They must have been preserved by them, but just how or by whom, my guess would be that there were quite a number of copies of them available to different individuals.

Student Question: Often times we hear the expression that there is only one interpretation of a passage, though many applications. What are your thoughts on this?

MacRae's response: I never heard that particular phrase before and I am a bit skeptical. I would say that any word in any language is capable of a certain breadth of interpretation, but when you put two words together, one word reduces the possible interpretation of the other. When you make a whole sentence, the interpretation is an individual word may be so reduced by the relation of context that there's only one way it could be taken, but there may be another. Now, take verse 9 we looked at before: "O Zion that brings good tidings, go up into the mountains" or "O you who bring good tidings to Zion, go up to the high mountains." I don't think there's any way we can tell which of the two translations is correct. Therefore, I would say that there are two interpretations here that are equally possible, and each of them can fit with the general idea of context. When you have two possible interpretations of a passage, you cannot dogmatically build on one of them, but you can fit it in with what you find elsewhere. But I think the statement you made is a little bit too oversimplified.

Now, let me say something about double fulfillment. When Samuel says to Saul, “When you come down the mountain, you are going to meet a group of prophets who will be singing and will pass you there and somebody’s going to come up to you and say ‘Don’t worry about your father’s donkeys that you’ve been looking for. They’ve been found’” (1 Samuel 10:2). Well, there is a prediction of a definite thing. It was fulfilled. I wouldn’t say that there is any reason that we have a right to look for another fulfillment. But if somebody says at the beginning of the history of this country, “The time will come in which great armies from this country are going to fight in Europe,” you might say that has a double fulfillment because there were two great World Wars in which American forces fought in Europe, but there might not be any way to say there wouldn’t be a third or a fourth or a fifth. A general statement can have many fulfillments, but a specific prediction will have one specific fulfillment. Some people, when they’re not sure what fulfillment to apply something to, say it’s double, it applies to both. I think that’s very dangerous. I am very leery of that sort of interpretation.

Specifically, let’s look at verse 3 of chapter 40, which I don’t think you can take as a specific statement. There’s going to be one coming who is going to prepare the message, prepare the way for Christ. I think you can take it to say that God is going to send messengers to prepare the way, and John the Baptist says the greatest messenger of God is coming, and John is the one to prepare the way for him. You see, there’s very little of specific designation in this chapter. The whole thing fits with return from exile, and the whole thing fits with the coming of Christ. I want to go on; I’d like to get through talking about the coming of Christ and this chapter. I was figuring I could go through the whole thing again looking at that, but I see we can’t do that today. If there are a lot of questions that occur to you whose answers aren’t immediately apparent, don’t forget to keep them in mind, maybe even write them down.

But the thing I wanted to bring out was that you can interpret the whole chapter as relating to the return from exile. But you have the little suggestions in



the chapter like, “She’s received double for all her sins.” There are a few, slight references to sins; a few statements that seem to go beyond what this simple return from exile would be. And the suggestion is that this chapter is not a specific prediction of one particular thing, but it is the introduction to the symphony to the laying the emotions that fit both situations, the emotions that fit the situation immediately before the return from exile, and the emotions that fit the far greater and more important situation that is ahead. It is not specific prediction, the chapter as a whole.

Now, in the chapter, this one phrase is brought out so strongly right there in order to prepare the way for John the Baptist; to show that John the Baptist fulfills that part of the prelude, but it can apply to the general situation as well. See, it’s not the specific prediction of which there are many, but it is that it finds its outworking in a general sense in a return from exile, but in the specific theme of John the Baptist coming.

It is altogether legitimate for us who believe in Christ to apply parts of this chapter as showing what God has delivered us from and what blessings he gives us now, what blessings we can look forward to. It is altogether legitimate to apply it that way. But in its immediate application, it is the prelude to the symphony rather than a part of the main section. As a prelude to the symphony, it pictures the immediate situation of return from exile, but it suggests the fact that what the returning from exile was going to do for the people if the sin question isn’t dealt with. If you still have the sin question, you’re going to have other exiles. Your problem is not going to be solved until the sin question is dealt with by the power of God, which is giving you the wonderful things in return from exile. It is merely suggested as far as the wording of this chapter goes, but he is going to deal with the far greater problem than the exile: the sin that caused the exile and will cause future exiles. Of course, that lays the basis for your Christian life. So I would say that that is a very proper application to us of certain verses in this chapter.

When you get to the next chapter, you have a specific progress of events,

and there it deals more with specific and individual situations. But this is the prelude to the symphony. Now, I puzzled over this a long time before I reached that conclusion, but to prove that it's one or the other of these two, the exile or the Messiah, you just can't say. It does not specifically say. But you can't find anything in it that rules out either one of them. It brings the emotions and the principle thoughts that are needed in that connection.

Now, next time I wish that you would turn in a paper in which you just glance over the next four chapters, Isaiah 41-44. Just glance over them and notice whether it is all comfort or whether there is also rebuke for sin. Is there any rebuke for sin in it, and how does it fit with the context? I think you can, in less than an hour probably, run through these four chapters with this in mind. It will be mostly comfort; it will mostly be the themes we've already been dealing with. What do you find about sin in it? What do you find about rebuke for sin in the next four chapters?

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