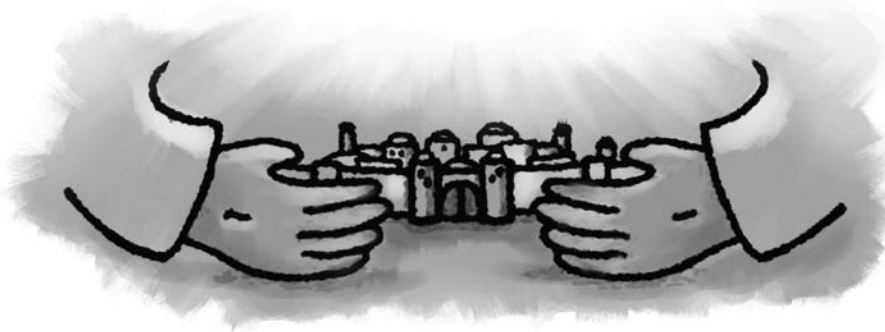


“Comfort My People”



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 13

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON: Isaiah 40:1, 2; Isaiah 40:3–8; Isaiah 40:9–11; Isaiah 40:12–31.

MEMORY VERSE: “Zion, you are bringing good news to your people. Go up on a high mountain and announce it. Jerusalem, you are bringing good news to them [the people of God]. Shout the message loudly. Shout it out loud. Don’t be afraid. Say to the towns of Judah. ‘Your God is coming!’ ” (Isaiah 40:9, NIV).



Yokoi thought the Americans were trying to trick him.

“**WORLD WAR TWO** ended in 1945. At that time, a Japanese soldier named Shoichi Yokoi hid in the jungle on the island of Guam. American planes dropped messages announcing peace. But Yokoi thought the Americans were trying to trick him. Yokoi was a loyal soldier. He made a promise to himself never to surrender to the enemy. Yokoi was not in communication with anyone. He lived on the food he found in the jungle. He had a hard life.

“In 1972, hunters found Yokoi fishing. Then Yokoi learned the truth. The message of peace had been real. This was 27 years after the end of World War Two. All those years, the Japanese people enjoyed peace. But poor Yokoi knew only suffering during that time.”—Roy Gane, *Altar Call* (Berrien Springs, MI: Diadem, 1999), page 304, adapted.

Many hundreds of years earlier, God announced that the time of suffering for His people was over: “ ‘Comfort my people. Speak kindly to Jerusalem and tell her, “Your time of service is finished. You have paid the price for your sins” ’ ” (Isaiah 40:1, 2, ERV). Let us see what this means.

COMFORT FOR THE FUTURE (Isaiah 40:1, 2)

In Isaiah 40:1, 2, God comforts His people. Their time of punishment is finished. What punishment is that?

God used Assyria to punish His people. But then God saved Judah from Assyria by destroying the army of Assyria in 701 B.C. (Isaiah 37). God used Babylon to punish His people too. The Babylonians carried away goods and people from Judah because of the sin of Hezekiah. Hezekiah showed off his riches to the messengers sent by Merodach-Baladan (Isaiah 39).

It is interesting to see that Isaiah writes the words “Assyria” and “Assyrian(s)” 43 times from Isaiah 7:17 to Isaiah 38:6. But we read about this kingdom only one more time in the rest of the book of Isaiah. In chapter 52:4, Isaiah talks about Egypt and Assyria. He says that these countries hurt the people of God. At the end of his book, Isaiah also talks about how God will make His people free from Babylon (Isaiah 43:14; Isaiah 47:1; Isaiah 48:14, 20). God chooses Cyrus the Persian to beat Babylon in 539 B.C. Cyrus makes the people of God free (Isaiah 44:28; Isaiah 45:1; Isaiah 45:13).

Isaiah 1–39 shows what happens leading up to the time when the people of God are made free from the Assyrians in 701 B.C. At the beginning of Isaiah chapter 40, the book jumps ahead in time 150 years. Isaiah shows us the Jews who come back home to Jerusalem at that time, shortly after 539 B.C.

Does Isaiah connect coming home from Babylon with anything you read about earlier in his book? If yes, what?

Isaiah 39 gets us ready for the information in the rest of the book. Chapter 39 shows us what will happen in the future to the Jews. The Babylonians will carry them away (Isaiah 39:6, 7). Isaiah 13; 14; and 21 talk about the fall of Babylon and the freedom that will come to the people of God (Isaiah 14:1–4). Look at these verses. Do you see the close connection with Isaiah 40:1, 2? In Isaiah 40:1, 2, God promises His people that He will end their suffering.

What do the promises about the end of suffering mean to you? What value does our faith have without these promises?



God promises His people that He will end their suffering.

THE GIFTS OF GOD (Isaiah 40:3–8)

How do the people of God get comfort? For the answer, read Isaiah 40:1–8?

A messenger announces that God is coming to show His glory (Isaiah 40:3–5). Another messenger announces that humans are much the same as leaves. They do not live very long. “‘But the word of our God lasts forever’ ” (Isaiah 40:8, ERV).

The Jews turned away from the gifts God gave His people at Mount Sinai. So, God punished them by sending them away to another country. After the Jews come back home, God gives back to them His gifts. What are His gifts? Himself and His Word. These gifts are parts of God’s special agreement with His people (read Exodus 25:8, 16). The Jews broke the commandments of God. So, God left His temple (Ezekiel 9–11). But God will come back. He and His words bring comfort, freedom, and hope.



The “roadwork” the people do to get ready for Jesus is to turn from sin.

What must the people do to get ready for the coming of the Lord?

In Bible times, roads must be made smooth for kings. The bumps and rocks must be removed. So, the people must repair the road before the king comes. In the same way, the Jews must get the way ready for the Lord to come back. He will come from the east where He has been with His people in a strange land. The Lord has been a safe place for them in that strange land (Ezekiel 11:16). The hills east of Jerusalem are very rough. No bulldozer on earth is strong enough to smooth out those hills! Only God is powerful enough to “‘make the rough ground smooth’ ” (Isaiah 42:16, ERV). But God does not need a real road. He has a flying throne and many angels (Ezekiel 1; Ezekiel 9–11).

The New Testament says that John the Baptist does spiritual “roadwork” to get the people ready for Jesus (Matthew 3:3). John tells the people to turn from sin and be baptized (Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:4). So, the “roadwork” the people do to get ready for Jesus is to turn from sin. Then God can comfort them and forgive them. He can be with them.

Jeremiah 31:31–34 announces the same spiritual message to the Jews. He tells them what spiritual “roadwork” they need to do to invite God into their hearts. God promises to put His law in their hearts. He promises to be their God.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS (Isaiah 40:9–11)

What is happening in Isaiah 40:9–11?

In Isaiah 41:27 and Isaiah 52:7, a male messenger announces good news for Jerusalem. In Isaiah 40:9, ERV, a messenger on a mountain announces: “ ‘Look, here is your God!’ ” The Hebrew language shows us that this messenger is a woman.

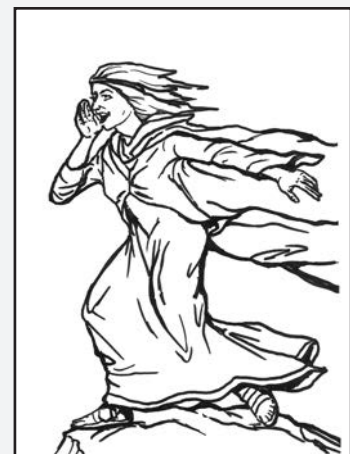
In Psalm 68, David praises God. “God provides [gives] homes for those [people] who are lonely. He frees people from prison and makes them happy” (Psalm 68:6, ERV). David is talking about what God did to save His people from slavery in Egypt. But Isaiah uses these same ideas to show how God frees His people from being prisoners in Babylon.

The New Testament shows how Isaiah 40:3–5 helps us see the work John the Baptist does. He makes the way ready for Jesus to come.

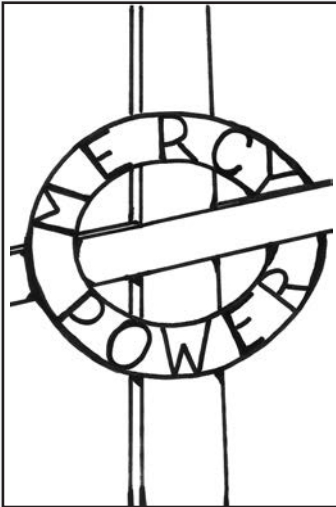
Before John, other people talk about the coming of Jesus. Two of these people are Simeon and Anna. They meet Baby Jesus at the temple (Luke 2:25–38). Simeon and Anna help us remember the two messengers in Isaiah who also are a man and a woman. God promises Simeon that before he dies, he will meet Jesus. Jesus is the comfort and hope that God will send His people (Luke 2:25, 26).

Isaiah 40:9–11 helps us understand Anna too. Anna is a special messenger from God, the same as the woman in Isaiah 40:9. Anna is the very first person to announce in public at the temple mountain to the people of Jerusalem that Jesus has come. “Anna was there when Joseph and Mary came to the Temple. She praised God and talked about Jesus to all those [people] who were waiting for God to free [save] Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38, ERV). The work of announcing the good news about Jesus starts with Simeon and Anna. Jesus comes to save us. Later, Jesus gives another woman, Mary Magdalene, the first message about the Resurrection. The Resurrection is the good news about waking up from the dead (John 20:17, 18). Mary helped to share this message with His followers. They shared this message everywhere on the earth. Their work helped the good news to become a success.

Look at Isaiah 40:11. What word pictures do you see in this verse? Talk about how Jesus has been the same as a Shepherd to you. Write a paragraph about how He has led you and cared for you. Why is it good to remember these things?



A messenger announces, “ ‘Look, here is your God!’ ” (Isaiah 40:9, ERV).

JESUS: THE LORD OF MERCY (Isaiah 40:12–31)

The mercy and power of God are often blended together as if they are one idea.

What does Isaiah 40 teach us about the mercy and power of God?

In Isaiah 40, the mercy and power of God are often blended together as if they are one idea. Why does Isaiah do that? Both of these things are important. God must have both so that He can save His people. God wants to save them because His heart is filled with mercy. He can save His people because He is powerful.

Isaiah starts by talking about the power of God. He is full of glory. He lives forever (Isaiah 40:3–8). Isaiah talks some more about the power of God and His wisdom (Isaiah 40:12–17). The writing style of Isaiah in these verses helps us remember the words of God to Job (Job 38–41). Both Isaiah and Job ask questions and use beautiful word pictures. They also talk about the earth and its parts.

What is the answer to Isaiah’s questions: “Can you compare God to anything? Can you make a picture of God?” (Isaiah 40:18, ERV).

For both Isaiah and Job the answer is no. God cannot be compared to anything. Then Isaiah talks about how many people in his time make idols or statues of gods. These statues show that they think God is the same as an idol (Isaiah 40:19, 20).

Isaiah says this is a foolish idea. No idol can show us who God is. Isaiah wants to be sure that people understand that this idea is very silly. So, he talks about how no one is the same as God. Why? Because God made us.

How does Isaiah 40:27 show the thoughts and feelings of the people that Isaiah talks to? In what ways are we guilty of having the same thoughts and feelings?

The message of God is a message of comfort. He gives it to Isaiah to bring comfort to the people who need it. Sometimes when we suffer, we get confused ideas about God and His love. Then we get discouraged the same as Job. That is why God gives us messages of comfort and hope.

**THE PROBLEM WITH WORSHIPPING FALSE GODS
(Isaiah 40:19, 20)**

Our worship of false gods destroys our friendship with God. When we worship false gods, we replace God with something else (Exodus 20:4, 5; Isaiah 42:8). Special messengers from God say that worshipping false gods is the same as spiritual “adultery” (Jeremiah 3:6–9; Ezekiel 16:15–19). When people cheat on their husbands or wives, that is adultery. Spiritual adultery is our “cheating” on God.

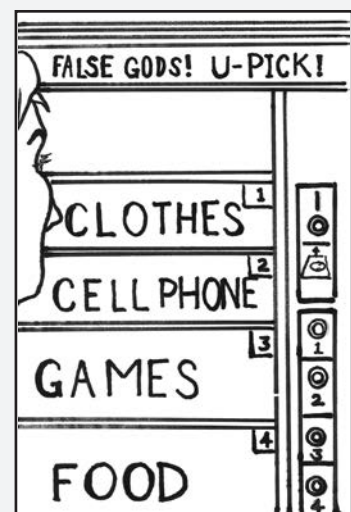
Read Isaiah 41:28, 29. What does Isaiah say about statues of false gods? What do his words mean to you personally? Why does this message about false gods show us the truth about any false god?

People in Bible times believed they worshiped real gods when they worshiped carved statues of them. But this worship breaks the first commandment: “ ‘You must not worship any other gods except me’ ” (Exodus 20:3, ERV). What if someone made a carved statue to show God Himself? This is what the Israelites did with the gold calf (Exodus 32:4, 5). Then the Lord refuses to accept the carved statue. This carved statue will not show who the Lord is. No one knows how to make something that shows God (Deuteronomy 4:15–19). Nothing can show the glory of God and His power. So, a carved statue is really another god. When people worship it, they break the first and second commandments.

The people of God do not need carved statues. They have the light of His glory with them in the temple. So, when the people of God worship a carved statue, they turn away from the real God.

What false gods do we as Christians often worship today? Are these false gods hard to see in the church at times? Why do you think that is so?

“Many who say they are Christians serve other gods and not the Lord. Jesus made us. He asks that we love Him only. He asks that we put Him first in everything. Anything that reduces our love for God becomes an idol. Anything that gets in the way of our serving Him also is an idol.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 2, pages 1011, 1012, adapted.



Spiritual adultery is our “cheating” on God.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “Behold Your God!” in *Prophets and Kings*, pages 311–321.

“In the time of Isaiah, humans do not understand God. Their ideas about God are wrong. Satan works for a long time to cause people to think that the Lord who made them also is the One who causes sin, suffering, and death. Satan fools some people. They think God is mean and not fair. These people think God waits for them to make mistakes so that He can blame and scold them. These people believe that God does not want to accept sinners. They believe God will use any excuse He can to get out of helping people in need. Satan lies about the law of love. This is the law of heaven. Satan says that the law of love limits human freedom. Satan says the law of love is a heavy load. Men should be glad to escape from it. Satan says that humans cannot obey the law of love or any of its important rules. Satan also says that God punishes anyone who breaks His law. And His punishments are not fair.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 311, adapted.



“Satan says the law of love is a heavy load.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Explain in your own words the message of Isaiah 40:12–31. Write down your words. Use modern word pictures that show the power of our God. (Hint: you may want to include examples of discoveries from science that show that our God is wonderful!) Share your paragraph with the class.
- ② Isaiah says that the Word of God continues forever. But human life is very short (Isaiah 40:6–8). How does this message help you not to be afraid of dying? How does it give you hope in the resurrection (Job 19:25–27; Daniel 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15:51–57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18)? The resurrection is the time when God will wake up the dead at the Second Coming.

Summary: God sends Isaiah messages of comfort to give to His suffering people. Their time of trouble ends. Now God will come back to them. So, they should not be confused or sad. They can trust God to use His power to help them.

SEVEN LITTLE FISHERS OF MEN

How powerful do you think a small group can be? Samuel Alvarado is an Adventist Pastor in Mexico. His church has 60 members. Pastor Alvarado asks his members to start small groups and meet each week. Each group should have a name and a reason for meeting. Each group should make a plan that will help them do their work for Jesus. Each group should choose a song that shows what their group is all about.

Right away, several adults start a small group named Joseph. They say, "Let us be the same as Joseph. God gave Joseph dreams. Let our dream be to save other people." Other church members start groups named "Planters of Faith," "the Rock," "Friends of Jesus," and "Joined With Jesus." The leader of children also wants to start a group. Her name is Elsa Galvin. Elsa invites the seven children from the church to get together to talk about the idea. One of the seven children is 8-year-old Manuel. His mother offers her house for the meetings each week.

15 children come to the first meeting. 8 of these children are from non-Adventist homes. They come to the meetings because Elsa Galvin invites them. The name of the group for children is the "Fishers of Men." The children take turns reading a Bible story. They sing songs and pray. At the end of the meetings, the children have something special to eat and drink.

The "Fishers of Men" group starts to meet each week. The children also visit a hospital every month. They pray with patients and give them Adventist books. The children also give hot drinks to the patients and special bread filled with beans.

Soon, the "Fishers of Men" decide to start an Adventurer Club. Later, the older children in the group start a Pathfinder Club. After a while, the children start giving Bible studies to their family members, friends, and neighbors. Manuel, with the help of his mother, gives Bible studies to his grandfather and aunt. Not long after, his grandfather and aunt announce that they want to go to the hospital with the children. Shortly after that, they are baptized. Manuel and his mother now give Bible studies to an 8-year-old cousin. Many other children in the small group are giving Bible studies. One of those children is 12-year-old Victor. Victor and his mother study the Bible with an 8-year-old friend and two cousins who are 7 years old and 9 years old.

That first year, 12 people decide to get baptized because of "Fishers of Men." That is more than half of the 20 people baptized in the church for that year. "Small groups can be very powerful," says Pastor Alvarado, who is in the picture with Manuel on his left and Victor on his right. "Jesus started His work with a small group of 12 followers. Our church is doing the same for the glory of God."

INSIDE *Story*

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



The children start giving Bible studies to their family members, friends, and neighbors.

