

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

MAY 2025 | ISAIAH 40, 42, 53, & 56

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

Isaiah 40:1-2 (ESV)

THE TEMPLE MOVED

The story of the Bible moves toward the fulfillment of all the hopes of the Old Testament saints. The climax of the story is the Jesus-event. After His death, resurrection, and ascension, He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell those who received Jesus as Lord and Christ. Each member of this new body of Christ was endowed by the Spirit to do the work of Christ on earth. Each became a living stone in the new temple, the body of Christ. Jesus had lived a simple but supernatural life during His days in the flesh. Upon His ascension, the disciples were released to carry on His mission of reclaiming all that the blood of Jesus had purchased in redemption. The new community began to grow

and spread. Some ordinary men were chosen to administer the distribution to the widows in the group. They were not apostles, priests, or prophets. In fact, they were Greeks. Yet the movement of the church was through these men.

Stephen was one of these men. He was stoned because he exposed the fallacy of the Jewish system centered around the temple. This was a serious matter as it emboldened the angry Jewish leaders. They began to increase their persecution of believers, who scattered to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. Remember Jesus told them that they would do this. They

probably didn't think that it would be because of persecution. Wherever these ordinary men went, supernatural ministry and various signs accompanied them. Crowds gathered. People believed and were baptized. The temple of God had moved from Jerusalem. Even though the apostles stayed there for a while, the action was outside Jerusalem.

While Philip was seeing the gospel gathering and changing people in grand fashion, the angel of the Lord told him to go down to the road leading from Jerusalem to Ethiopia. When he obeyed, he came upon a eunuch who was a finance official for the nation. He was riding in a chariot reading the scroll of Isaiah. This man had been to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel. He was not Jewish and would be considered an outsider by Jewish custom. Yet God has always been eager to give more light to anyone who is responding to the light that he or she has already received, even if it means miraculously sending Philip down to one man riding a chariot. And so, the temple moved to Africa.

The text the eunuch was reading in Isaiah describes the "suffering servant." Note the context. Isaiah has two parts. The first 39 chapters are oracles

of Isaiah warning Israel of the dangers of violating covenant or explaining why judgment has come upon them at the hands of a godless kingdom. Chapters 40-66 declare God's intention and strategy to restore His people according to His promise. In chapters 49-53, Isaiah prophesies that a special servant will be sent to bring about the restoration of Israel as well as the world. Israel was assigned to bless:

*Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God. Speak tenderly
to Jerusalem, and cry to her
that her warfare is ended,
that her iniquity is pardoned,
that she has received from the
Lord's hand double for all her
sins.*

A voice cries:

*"In the wilderness prepare the
way of the Lord; make straight
in the desert a highway for our
God. Every valley shall be lifted
up, and every mountain and
hill be made low; the uneven
ground shall become level, and
the rough places a plain. And
the glory of the Lord shall be
revealed, and all flesh shall see
it together, for the mouth of the
Lord has spoken."*

Isaiah 40:1-5, ESV

There is hope for an exiled people simply because their God is full of mercy. In keeping with His promise to restore through human instrumentality, He will send a Servant who will bring about restoration:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.

Isaiah 42:1-3, ESV

Through the next few chapters, Isaiah speaks of the mysterious Servant who is sometimes identified as Israel and sometimes as rescuing Israel. The eunuch was reading this entire section of Isaiah. The specific text that Luke mentions is found in chapter 53:4-6:

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we

esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53:4-6, ESV

Chapter 54 is about the new covenant that God will make that will bring a kind of peace that humans can't create. Chapter 55 describes the new creation that will come into existence when God's word declares it. Chapter 56 describes the good news that includes those whom the religious world has rejected. Surely this text got the Ethiopian's attention:

*Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely separate me from his people"; and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree." For thus says the Lord:
"To the eunuchs who keep*

my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

Isaiah 56:3-5, ESV

As he read this biblical promise that included him, the eunuch wanted to know who this servant might be. Was it Israel? Was it Isaiah? When Philip heard his question, he told him that Jesus is the one who fulfilled Israel in that He is the only Israelite who obeyed the covenant. So the Servant is Israel in a singular person. This Servant came to reconcile without distinction all people to God. He restored Israel, and as the new Israel blessed all creation. When the Ethiopian understood, he wanted to believe and be baptized. There just happened to be a pool by the road, and so he was baptized by Philip with water and by the Spirit into the body of Christ. The temple was going to Africa. Philip suddenly disappeared and found himself back on the coast of Israel where he continued to be the witness that Jesus had promised.

Like Stephen, Philip knew the story of the Bible was about Jesus. He knew

that the story so cherished by the Jewish leaders was wrong. They were still stuck on land, law, lineage, and the temple. God had moved on from those shadows to substance.

Each of us as believers in Christ Jesus is a witness of the invasion of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ. We don't need credentials to preach the gospel and to see God accompany the message with miracles from heaven. We are partners with God in reconciliation and restoration. We are living stones in God's final temple. What a privilege.

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