

Isaiah's Book of Consolation (Isaiah 40-55)
(#4) The Great God Promises Comfort to His People (Isa. 40:12)

Outline of Isaiah 40-66

SECTION THREE: ORACLES OF REDEMPTION AND CONSUMMATION

- I. The Book of the Consolation of Israel (Chs. 40-55)
 - A. 40:1-11 The Prophet is to Announce God's Coming
 - B. 40:12-31 The Creator of the Universe
 - C. 41:1-29 God Promises to Deliver His People from Babylon

We have already given our attention to the historical context in which this "Book of Consolation" (Isaiah 40-55) was delivered to the people of God. Although Isaiah was a prophet of the 8th century B.C., the message of salvation, which is set forth in this section of God's Word and frequently described as the promise of God's comfort or consolation, was a prophecy to the Jewish exiles who were in Babylon during the sixth century B.C. These Jewish exiles were a remnant of Jews that God had preserved through His judgment that He had brought upon Israel and Judah. Their Babylonian conquerors had taken them into captivity. But God had revealed through Isaiah to this generation that He would deliver this remnant of Jews from bondage in Babylon, return them to their homeland of Judah, and there they would encounter the full promise of salvation through the Servant whom God would send to redeem them from their sin. Isaiah 40:1-11 opened this portion of Isaiah's prophesy of God's initial promise of salvation. We then considered Isaiah 40:12-31 last Lord's Day, which is the setting forth of the greatness of God who would bring salvation to His people. Now again, the realization of God bringing salvation to His people involved their release from captivity in Babylon and their return to Judah. The chapter before us today, which is Isaiah 41:1-29, is a prophecy of how God would effect the release of his people from Babylon, thereby enabling their return to Judah, where eventually the promised Messiah would come to them and restore them to new covenant relationship with their God.

Because of this historical context, we should understand that this entire chapter is a prophecy that was fulfilled in the 6th century B.C. It is not a prophecy that applies directly to us. It is certainly not a prophecy of the end times, as many have claimed. It was a prophecy fulfilled in the 500's B.C. when God enabled the return of Jewish people to Palestine under the leadership of Nehemiah, Ezra, and Zerubbabel. The Jews were set free from Babylon after God had caused the Babylonian Empire to be overthrown by the Media-Persian Empire. It was their king, King Cyrus, whom God raised up to both allow the release of the Jews, but also to enable the Jews to return in safety with sufficient means to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. This was all fulfilled in the latter 500's B.C.

Let us read the entire passage.

[Read **Isaiah 41:1-29**]

Now as we have seen before, this is a prophecy of events that were fulfilled in history when God brought the physical deliverance of His people from Babylon. However, the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon reveals to us how God generally relates to His people and it reveals the ways in which God works in history on behalf of His people. In other words, there are abiding spiritual principles before us, lessons for us about the ways of God in His world and with respect to His people. And so, it could be said that God's deliverance of Israel from Babylon serves to foreshadow for us the greater deliverance of God for His people

when He sent His Son, our Redeemer, to deliver His people from their sins. And so we might say this: If God's commitment to bring salvation from Babylon was a source of great consolation, or comfort, for His people, how much more should be the degree of our comfort because of God having brought salvation to us from all of our sins.

I. God summons His enemies (Isa. 41:1-4)

“Keep silence before Me, O coastlands,
And let the people renew their strength!
Let them come near, then let them speak;
Let us come near together for judgment.

²“Who raised up one from the east?
Who in righteousness called him to His feet?
Who gave the nations before him,
And made him rule over kings?
Who gave them as the dust to his sword,
As driven stubble to his bow?
³Who pursued them, and passed safely
By the way that he had not gone with his feet?
⁴Who has performed and done it,
Calling the generations from the beginning?
‘I, the LORD, am the first;
And with the last I am He.’”

God speaks, calling out to the “coastlands”, to keep silence before Him. This term is description of the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, the lands of the Babylonian Empire. God taunts this nation to come forward and take a stand in order to withstand what He intends to do. God warns them ahead of time what He would do and challenges His enemies to step forward and attempt to prevent Him from accomplishing His intention to deliver His people.

The metaphor of verses 1 through 4 is that of a court scene. This is a common depiction of God's dealings with His enemies in the prophetic literature. God calls forward His enemies that they may tell forth their futile attempts to prevent God from accomplishing His purpose. God says of them, “Let them come near, then let them speak.” Basically what God was doing was in effect saying, “I have purposed to deliver my people from your hands. What are you going to do about it?”

Similarly God deals with all of the enemies of our souls. The fallen world cannot prevent the deliverance that God brings to His people. Those whom the Father sets free, they are freed indeed. The devil is powerless to keep His people in bondage. God commands him to let His people go, let them go he must do. The Captain of our salvation has rendered his efforts to be futile against His people, for He “has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him” (1 Pet. 3:22). And even our own flesh, sin that dwells in us, cannot keep us from our God. Through our union with our Lord Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection, He separates us from the sin that is in us, giving us new life that is in Him. This is not to say that we do not have battles, for we most certainly do! But we who are in Christ are assured of our final and full victory. The devil's defeat is assured.

Now **verse 2** speaks of God raising up a foreign king in the east to come and conqueror Babylon, thereby securing the release of His people. God would raise up a deliverer to do for His people that which they could not do for themselves. Now again, this is a prophecy of the rise of King Cyrus of Persia, whom God raised up to overthrow Babylon and through whom He delivered his people from captivity.

The question is asked, “Who raised up one from the east?” God in His righteousness called this man and enabled him to come to kingly power in order to defeat the enemies of His people. The idea of God’s righteousness here is that God is righteous in fulfilling His promise to deliver His people. God gave this pagan king authority over kings. God enabled his kingdom to expand, encompass all other kingdoms before him, until eventually this king took Babylon also. We read, “Who in righteousness called him to His feet?” It was God who summoned this man to stand and receive his commission from God to go forth on His behalf.

In **verses 3 and 4** God declared that He was the One who had used this pagan king to accomplish all His will.

³Who pursued them, and passed safely
By the way that he had not gone with his feet?
⁴Who has performed and done it,
Calling the generations from the beginning?

God declared that it was He who had enabled this king to accomplish all of His purposes. God declared:

‘I, the LORD, am the first;
And with the last I am He.’”

II. God unsettles His enemies (Isa. 41:5-7)

The enemies of God are aware of their weakness and their inability to resist God’s resolve to deliver His people. They attempt to encourage themselves. And so, what do they do? They resort to their idols, making them bigger and better, foolishly thinking that their trust in them will deliver them from their certain overthrow and destruction.

⁵The coastlands saw it and feared,
The ends of the earth were afraid;
They drew near and came.
⁶Everyone helped his neighbor,
And said to his brother,
“Be of good courage!”
⁷So the craftsman encouraged the goldsmith;
He who smooths with the hammer inspired him who strikes the anvil,
Saying, “It is ready for the soldering”;
Then he fastened it with pegs,
That it might not totter.

Their efforts to resist or defeat the purpose of God are futile. God will accomplish what He has set out to do. He will deliver His people from their enemies.

III. God assures His people (Isa. 41:8-20)

This is a precious passage, one that can bring great comfort to God’s people. This is important. For the Lord’s people are in need of much comfort. They have trials without and temptations within. Wherein is the source of help for the people of God? It is in God Himself only.

Consider what God promises to His people in the verses before us:

-- “I have chosen you” (41:8)

- "I have not rejected you" (41:9)
- "I have called you" (41:9)
- "I have made you" (41:9)
- "I will strengthen you" (41:10)
- "I will help you" (41:10, 13, 14)
- "I will uphold you" (41:10)
- "I will not forsake you" (41:17)
- "I will (refresh) you" (41:18)

Furthermore, God promises His people:

- "I am with you" (41:10)
- "I am your God" (41:10)

God assures His people that He is for them and that He will deliver them from all that binds them, oppresses them, enslaves them, condemns them.

Let us be sure that we understand a very important point. God's promises contained here are not to all people everywhere indiscriminately. God is revealing through His prophet what He intended to be and do for His chosen people, a remnant of Israel who were in Babylon. By extension it is right to regard this as God's opinion of regard and intention for good for all His people that He redeems through Jesus Christ. But it is not to be regarded as God's Word to all without distinction.

Now in what specific ways does God encourage and comfort His people?

1. God assures His people that they belong to Him (41:8-10)

⁸"But you, Israel, are My servant,
Jacob whom I have chosen,
The descendants of Abraham My friend.

God addressed His people collectively as "Israel" and "Jacob", the people He had chosen for Himself. They are ones who are the "descendants of Abraham", the "friend of God." Now to whom is God addressing directly? It would be those elect Jews whom God purposed to deliver from Babylon through His servant Cyrus, the king of Persia. But the term "Israel" encompasses a people larger than just that generation of ethnic Jewish people who would escape captivity in Babylon.

The term "Israel" is used in Scripture to designate various groups of people, depending on the context in which the term is found. And so, it is not always an easy thing to distinguish between the different sets of people that a biblical writer might be designating as "Israel." Here are some various peoples designated as "Israel" in Scripture:

1. "Israel" is the individual, Jacob, renamed by God -- Genesis 35:10
2. "Israel" is a reference to the extended physical family of the Patriarchs prior to becoming a nation -- Genesis 34:7
3. "Israel" is the "land" that God had promised to Abraham and his physical descendants -- 2 Chron. 2:17
4. "Israel" is the collective twelve tribes prior to becoming a formal nation -- Exodus 3:1
5. "Israel" as a nation formed in Egypt and constituted at Mount Sinai -- Deuteronomy 26:5
6. "Israel" as the name of the northern nation of Israel, comprised of 10 tribes -- 1 Kings 12:18
7. "Israel" as "The Israel of God"; i.e. all of the elect, whether Jewish or Gentile -- Gal. 6:6, 168.
8. "Israel" is a personal reference to the Promised Messiah, i.e. Jesus Christ -- Isaiah 49:3;
9. "Israel" is a reference to ethnic Jewish people under the law of Moses; "Israel after the flesh" -- 1 Corinthians 10:18
10. "Israel" as the elect Jews within the larger community of Jewish people -- "Not all Israel is of Israel" --

Rom. 9:6; 11:26

11. "Israel" as non-elect Jews who failed to believe on the Messiah -- Rom. 11:7
12. "Israel" as the remnant of Jews that God would deliver from Babylon, whom He regarded in covenant relationship with Himself.

It can be affirmed that the promises of God here in Isaiah 41 had particular application for the remnant of Jews in Babylon whom God intended to bring back to their homeland. But the language of the care, concern, and commitment of God for their well-being may be understood to be the same for all that are within the covenant of grace with God. All of the elect of God may be assured of the sentiment of God depicted here and the commitment of God declared here in our passage.

Here in Isaiah 41 we read of God's people depicted by God as "as the descendants of Abraham My friend." Some may argue that this must refer only to physical descendants of Abraham; only Jewish people may apply this designation to themselves. But the New Testament is quite clear that all who have the same kind of saving faith that Abraham had, are his spiritual offspring to whom God's promises belong. All true believers may count themselves among them whom God called, "the descendants of Abraham My friend."

This truth is supported in **Romans 4:9-12**.

⁹Does this blessedness (of salvation) then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. ¹⁰How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. ¹¹And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, ¹²and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.

We might also look to **Galatians 3:7-9**.

⁷Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. ⁸And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." ⁹So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

Here in Isaiah 41:9-10 God assured His people that they belonged to Him and would care for them. This is a promise of eternal security. God will keep His own for Himself forever.

⁹You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth,
And called from its farthest regions,
And said to you,
'You are My servant,
I have chosen you and have not cast you away:
¹⁰Fear not, for I am with you;
Be not dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you,
Yes, I will help you,
I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'

To know that one is the object of God's favor is a source of great consolation and is a cause for great joy. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people He has chosen as His own inheritance. (Psa. 33:12). The only nation that God has truly chosen as His own inheritance is spiritual Israel, the nation comprised of all the redeemed of history.

In this portion of Scripture, verses 8-10, God has given His people *the promise of eternal security*. The prophet then revealed a second specific way that God encourages and comforts His people:

2. God assures His people that their enemies will not prevail against them (41:11-13)

This is God's promise that His people may feel secured because God watches over them. If verses 8 through 10 contained the promise of God's eternal security, here we have the basis of God's peace that will guard the hearts of His people. We read Isaiah 41:11-13:

¹¹“Behold, all those who were incensed against you
Shall be ashamed and disgraced;
They shall be as nothing,
And those who strive with you shall perish.

¹²You shall seek them and not find them—
Those who contended with you.
Those who war against you
Shall be as nothing,
As a nonexistent thing.

¹³For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand,
Saying to you, ‘Fear not, I will help you.’

No enemy of the Lord's people will succeed in frustrating God's purpose to save them unto Himself. This does not mean that His people do not experience hardship, for the passage itself suggests that they do. Take note of the increasing hostility that they encounter:

- 1) First they are “incensed” with His people (41:11a).
- 2) Then they “strive” with His people (41:11b).
- 3) Then they “contend” with His people (41:12a).
- 4) Then they “war” with them (41:12b).

But in each case their efforts prove ineffective, even futile. Opposition will exist, even increase for the people of God as they live in this fallen world, but take heart, “no weapon formed against you will prosper” (Isa. 54:7). This knowledge of your enemies' ultimate failure should settle your soul. Again, God declared, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God” (Isa. 41:10). He will sustain you in your conflicts; therefore you may rest in Him.

In this portion of Scripture, verses 11-13, God has given His people *the promise of certain tranquility*. The prophet then revealed a third specific way that God encourages and comforts His people:

3. God assures His people that He will strengthen them (41:14-16)

Here is God's promise of certain victory. God told “Israel”:

¹⁴“Fear not, you worm Jacob,
You men of Israel!
I will help you,” says the LORD
And your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

¹⁵“Behold, I will make you into a new threshing sledge with sharp teeth;
You shall thresh the mountains and beat them small,
And make the hills like chaff.

¹⁶You shall winnow them, the wind shall carry them away,
And the whirlwind shall scatter them;
You shall rejoice in the LORD,

And glory in the Holy One of Israel.

¹⁷“The poor and needy seek water, but there is none,
Their tongues fail for thirst.

I, the LORD, will hear them;

I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.

¹⁸I will open rivers in desolate heights,

And fountains in the midst of the valleys;

I will make the wilderness a pool of water,

And the dry land springs of water.

¹⁹I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree,

The myrtle and the oil tree;

I will set in the desert the cypress tree and the pine

And the box tree together,

²⁰That they may see and know,

And consider and understand together,

That the hand of the LORD has done this,

And the Holy One of Israel has created it.

The Futility of Idols

In Isaiah 41:14 we read of the helplessness of the Lord’s people to affect their own release from bondage. They must, therefore, place their entire trust in the Lord to do for them what they are unable to do. We read in **verse 14**, “Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel!” We may look at this description and see quite a degrading image of the elect of God. But here the metaphor of Israel as a “worm” is not intended to convey the value of His people, but rather it is a description of their power and capability. They are as weak and helpless as a worm is weak and helpless. We see this is clearly the intention by the statement that God gives in conjunction with this statement.

“Fear not, you worm Jacob,

You men of Israel!

I will help you,” says the LORD

And your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

Because they are as weak as a worm, God Himself will help them, that is, deliver them from bondage.

There is a recurring theme in Isaiah that is conveyed in the passage before us. If you are to receive assistance from the Lord, you must first recognize and acknowledge your weakness and inability to help yourself before you will receive your help from the Lord. We are incapable of accomplishing any good thing apart from His grace. We must be brought low before He will lift us up. We must think little of ourselves and rather think greatly of Him and His willingness and ability to assist us, before He comes to our aid. Since this is the case, let us readily own up to our weakness, admit our failure if left to ourselves, see our need for His enabling power to effect our deliverance. And then let us trust Him to come to our aid to rescue us and strengthen us to do what He has called us to do.

This is why our Lord must keep us humble and in a needy state. “For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives” (Heb. 12:6). Our Lord Jesus taught, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. (John 15:1-2). Let us therefore not resent or resist His hard dealings with us, rather recognize that it is when we are weakest, that He manifests to us and through us as the One who has most strength, able His people to achieve whatever He sets before them.

What God was teaching Israel in history, God had taught the apostle Paul in experience. We read in 2 Corinthians 9:7ff.

⁷And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. ⁸Concerning

this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:7-10)

And so, let us humble ourselves, resolving, “I am going to remain in a needy position so that the power of God might lift me up. I will, by His grace, humble myself, that He might lift me up.” May that be the attitude of each of us who know and love our God.

Now notice that God’s help will come to them as He is their “Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.” The idea of God as the Redeemer is that He is one who purchases a slave out of his slavery, out of his bondage. God had “sold” Israel into slavery to Babylon; God will purchase them out of their slavery, effecting their release and return to their homeland.

Now the consequences of Israel’s failure to keep God’s covenant, to order its national life according to the Ten Commandments, was the forfeiture of the wealth of the nation, the health of its people, its security as a nation in a hostile world, and the people’s freedom. It might seem that the great need was for them to be delivered from these terrible conditions, which they had come to experience. But actually that was not the case. All of those “curses” of God were the manifestation of His just dealings with His rebellious people. What His people were in true need of was deliverance from their sin, which had resulted in their misery. Through the unfolding of the story of the Bible, particularly through the history of redemption as the Old Testament prophets conveyed their message, and then through the unfolding of the message of salvation in the Gospel accounts of the New Testament, not the consequences of sin, but salvation from sin itself was shown to be the great need of mankind. That God is set forth here as Redeemer serves well to shift the focal message of deliverance from the consequences of sin to redemption from sin itself, the cause of all of our misery.

But although these exiles of Israel are weak as a worm is weak, and God will affect their release from Babylon. He will strengthen them to do what will result in their release. **Verses 15 and 16** describe God strengthening His people. God used the metaphor of Israel as a great farming instrument that is able to prepare great amounts of land, even hills and mountains, into productive farmland that may be harvested. The hills and the mountains are emblems of Israel’s enemies. God would enable His people to ascend over them. He would see to it that those that afflicted them would be brought to nothing.

¹⁵“Behold, I will make you into a new threshing sledge with sharp teeth;
You shall thresh the mountains and beat them small,
And make the hills like chaff.

¹⁶You shall winnow them; the wind shall carry them away,
And the whirlwind shall scatter them;
You shall rejoice in the LORD,
And glory in the Holy One of Israel.

When we have a low view of ourselves but a very high view of our God, we may see God do great things through us. **Charles Spurgeon** wrote on this matter, making application to the spiritual battles from which our Lord Jesus enables us to come forth as victors.

Let the powers of darkness consult and plot as they may, they can never destroy the Lord’s redeemed. Lo! I see councils of evil spirits: they sit down in Pandemonium, and conspire to ruin a soul redeemed by blood. They lay their heads together, they use a cunning, deep as hell: they are eager to destroy the soul that rests in Jesus. In vain are their devices, for the incarnate God is embodied wisdom. Now see them: they rise from the council table, they put on their battle gear, their arrows are dipped in

malice, their bows are strong to shoot afar. Each foul spirit takes his sword, his sharp sword, that will cut a soul to the centre, and kill it with despair; but their weapons shall all fail. If we fly to Jesus, who is God with us, no weapon that is formed against us shall prosper. His name Immanuel is the terror of the hosts of hell. God with us means confusion to our foes. As the death of death, and hell's destruction, our Immanuel cries to the legions of the pit, "Gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces!" Let us take courage and defy the legions of darkness. Let us charge them with this war-cry, "God is with us." Immanuel, who has espoused our cause, is God himself, almighty to save: the enemies of our souls shall be trodden under his feet and he shall bruise Satan even under our feet shortly... The Lord Jesus is as the star Wormwood to our spiritual adversaries, rousing their fiercest hate, and foreboding their sure overthrow.

And most importantly, when we humble ourselves before our God, trusting Him to do for us and in us that which we are powerless to do, when we come forth in victory, we give glory to God alone for what He has done. And this is the end, the purpose for which God works in us in this way. As verse 16 records God's promise:

You shall rejoice in the LORD,
And glory in the Holy One of Israel.

In this portion of Scripture, verses 14-16, God has given His people *the promise of certain victory*. The prophet then revealed a fourth specific way that God encourages and comforts His people:

4. God assures His people that He will yet comfort them fully (41:17-20)

Upon the release of God's people from slavery in Babylon, they had a great distance to travel home, which was about 800 miles distance to the west. God promised that He would strengthen them for their journey and provide for them on their journey in order to assure their safe return to their homeland. In verses 17ff the Lord assures His people that He will enable them, once He affects their release from bondage, to make the journey to their homeland. We have seen this theme of pilgrimage before, in Romans and in portions of the prophets. Here we see it again. God declares of His returning people:

¹⁷"The poor and needy seek water, but there is none,
Their tongues fail for thirst.

I, the LORD, will hear them;
I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.

¹⁸I will open rivers in desolate heights,
And fountains in the midst of the valleys;
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,
And the dry land springs of water.

¹⁹I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree,
The myrtle and the oil tree;
I will set in the desert the cypress tree and the pine
And the box tree together,

God promised full recovery for His people, enabling them to return to their homeland. Here we read of a thirsty, desperately thirsty people, in need of refreshment, and it comes in abundance from the hand of the Lord. Rivers spring forth from barren mountains. Springs gush forth from dry gullies and valleys. There are pools of water in formerly parched places. There are wells discovered where there had been just dry dust. And as a result of all of this water that God provides His people life springs forth in barren places. Trees grow tall—cedar trees, acacia trees, myrtle trees, olive trees, even junipers and cedars. What do the people conclude when they see what was a desert wilderness transformed before them to ease their return?

²⁰That they may see and know,
And consider and understand together,
That the hand of the LORD has done this,
And the Holy One of Israel has created it.

God alone could have wrought these things. This would be the conclusion of the people when they were refreshed and comforted, even as they travelled to their homeland. The language here is that of a second exodus. As Israel once travelled through the desert wilderness to their promised homeland, so again the people travel through a wilderness, but a wilderness actually made pleasant by God who was leading them and helping them.

J. C. Philpot (19th c.) once wrote a small book entitled *“Winter Afore (Before) the Harvest; or, The Soul’s Growth in Grace.”* His thesis was that whereas the harvest time in the agricultural world takes place after a growing summer season, followed by the harvest in the autumn, in the spiritual world “winter” first comes upon the soul, and then following is the time of fruitful harvest. The text that he chose was 18:5 and 6, which reads,

“For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, He shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches.

They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth: and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them.”

Here are a few of Philpot’s words regarding the spiritual growth that takes place through enduring hardship:

The Christian thus learns that if he stands, God must hold him up; if he knows anything aright, God must teach him; if he walks in the way to heaven, God must first put, and afterwards keep him in it; if he has anything, God must give it to him; and that if he does anything, God must work it in him. He now “through the law”—that is, through his experience of its killing sentence—“is become dead to the law, that he may live unto God”. He can no longer take a killing letter for a living rule, but is deeply conscious that it is only by being “married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that he can bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom. 7:4). Thus by the presence of God going with him, he becomes separated “from all the people that are on the face of the earth” (Exodus 33:16).

Whilst others boast of what they have done for God, he is glad to feel that God has done something for him; whilst others are handling the shell, he is eating the kernel; whilst others are talking *of* Christ, he is talking *with* Him; whilst others are looking through the park palings, he is enjoying the estate; and whilst others are haranguing about the treasure of the Bank of England, he is pleased to find a few coins in his own pocket, stamped with the king’s image and superscription...

Through the inner conflicts, secret workings, mysterious changes, and ever-varying exercises of his soul, he becomes *established* in a deep feeling of his own folly and God’s wisdom, of his own weakness and Christ’s strength, of his own sinfulness and the Lord’s goodness, of his own backslidings and the Spirit’s recoveries, of his own base ingratitude and Jehovah’s longsuffering, of the aboundings of sin and the super-aboundings of grace. He thus becomes daily more and more confirmed in the vanity of the creature, the utter helplessness of man, the deceitfulness and hypocrisy of the human heart, the sovereignty of distinguishing grace, the fewness of heaven-taught ministers, the scanty number of living souls, and the rareness of true religion. Nor are these convictions borrowed ideas, floating opinions, crude, half-digested sentiments or articles of a creed, which may be right or may be wrong; but they are things known to him as certainly, and felt as evidently as any material object that his eye sees, or his hand touches.¹

¹ J. C. Philpot, *“Winter Afore the Harvest; or, The Soul’s Growth in Grace”* (Gospel Standard Strict Baptist Trust, pp. 42f, 46).

These words describe the convictions held by one whom God has strengthened and comforted through affliction.

IV. God challenges His enemies (Isa. 41:21-24)

²¹“Present your case,” says the LORD.

“Bring forth your strong reasons,” says the King of Jacob.

²²“Let them bring forth and show us what will happen;

Let them show the former things, what they were,

That we may consider them,

And know the latter end of them;

Or declare to us things to come.

²³Show the things that are to come hereafter,

That we may know that you are gods;

Yes, do good or do evil,

That we may be dismayed and see it together.

²⁴Indeed you are nothing,

And your work is nothing;

He who chooses you is an abomination.

The court scene is again set before the readers. The Lord challenges the enemies of His people, even their false gods, to step forward and defend themselves. God challenges them to give testimony of what they have been able to accomplish in the past and what they hope to accomplish in the future. Of course the Babylonians presumed that the of their own might had seen all the successes of the past and that it was by their gods they had conquered other lands and subjugated peoples. But in reality they do not exist. They cannot prevent God from accomplishing all of His desire and efforts to set His people free from Babylonian bondage.

IV. God denounces His enemies (Isa. 41:25-29)

God again speaks of Cyrus, the king of Persia, that He will bring from the east to conquer Babylon and affect the freedom of His people. His power will not be withstood. With ease he will conquer his enemies, as one mixes mortar by stepping upon it, so he will destroy the enemies of God’s people.

²⁵“I have raised up one from the north,

And he shall come;

From the rising of the sun he shall call on My name;

And he shall come against princes as though mortar,

As the potter treads clay.

God then challenges the gods of His enemies if they had predicted what they would do. God taunts the false gods, that is, the people of Babylon respecting their false gods.

²⁶Who has declared from the beginning, that we may know?

And former times, that we may say, ‘He is righteous’?

Surely there is no one who shows,

Surely there is no one who declares,

Surely there is no one who hears your words.

But when God determined that He would act, it was with His initial decree that things began to happen.

²⁷The first time I said to Zion,
‘Look, there they are!’
And I will give to Jerusalem one who brings good tidings.
²⁸For I looked, and there was no man;
I looked among them, but there was no counselor,
Who, when I asked of them, could answer a word.
²⁹Indeed they are all worthless;
Their works are nothing;
Their molded images are wind and confusion.

God found no one with power to oppose Him or frustrate His purposes to accomplish the deliverance of His people.