



# Comfort, Comfort Ye My People

Quoting Isaiah 40:1–5 almost verbatim, this hymn speaks of the readiness necessary to prepare for the coming of Christ. The Prophet Isaiah addressed the people of Israel who suffered under the weighty burden of punishment, overwhelmed by their failures.

From the beginning, forgiveness is promised; reassurance is offered. Comfort—a word deliberately repeated twice—is given to those who have endured exile and seeming abandonment. The God of Comfort speaks peace to those dwelling in darkness and confusion, to those who grieve the events of the past caused by their own failure. Good news! The wrongdoing is covered by God and the resulting punishment is over; the sentence has already been served.

A voice cries out, to those nearby and those far away, urging the people to prepare for the coming of the King. Repentance is called for; a new Kingdom is nearing. Using imagery of the approaching of a significant dignitary—wherein the roads must be leveled and cleared, the pathways straightened and made ready—the prophet calls his listeners to anticipate One Greater. His glory is coming and appropriate measures must be taken.

The prophet initially spoke words of comfort and hope to the Israelites who suffered oppression at the hands of the Babylonians. Yet, when we view this scripture through the lenses of the New Testament, we recognize that Isaiah spoke of the coming Messiah. All four Gospels reference Isaiah's words by portraying John the Baptist as the "voice in the wilderness." Furthermore, this passage speaks of the second coming of Christ, with similar calls for preparation.

As 21st-century Christ-followers, we understand the need for forgiveness and comfort. Burdened by the chaos and misery of our own failures and wrongdoings, we need to hear of the peace and consolation offered us by God. Our sins are ultimately covered by the death and resurrection of Jesus. What hope!

The Holy Spirit calls us to repentance, urging us to turn from our own ways and seek obedience instead. When our hearts and lives are filled with sin and selfish desires, we cannot receive the fullness of the Messiah, the Savior. Humbleness and truth are foundational in the presence of a holy God.

As a hymn for Advent—preparing for the coming celebration of the birth of Jesus—or as a call to repent and seek forgiveness from God, this text reminds us that the God of Comfort finds us where we are, and leads us to where we need to be.

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