

A Message of Comfort (Isaiah 57:14–21)

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Introduction

1. Isaiah prophesied to Judah as the nation fell into great apostasy. His message was one of judgment but also of great hope. Both Israel and Judah would face defeat by foreign enemies and be carried away into captivity. Only Judah would return and rebuild Jerusalem and its temple.
2. The reason for the return was not due to Judah's repentance or reformation but in order to prepare for the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah announced this event in the clearest terms (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6, 7). Isaiah also warned the nation that their sin would be judged severely (Isaiah 9:8, 12–16). However, Israel's response to the Lord's threats was arrogance and defiance (Isaiah 9:10). Nevertheless, the Lord was determined to carry out the threats (v. 11).
3. In the passage before us, we must distinguish between the comfort the Lord promises to "my people" and the resolve of judgment against the "wicked" for whom there is "no peace." The righteous remnant are the "my people" whom Emmanuel was commissioned to save. It is to this remnant that these words of comfort are directed because they too will suffer in the judgment coming. However, the result will be gloriously different for God's people when Emmanuel returns.

I. Yahweh's pledge of comfort is announced (v. 14).

1. His preparing the way evidenced God's determination to secure peace for His people.
 - a. What was begun in the Savior's first coming will be finished only in His second coming.
 - b. The same pattern is employed with both comings: "*Build up, build up, prepare the way.*" The prophet predicted the work of John the Baptist at Christ's first coming (the already) in Isaiah 40:3–5. The second coming is also announced (the not yet) in Isaiah 40:3–5.
2. Verse 14 is specifically aimed at "*my people.*"
 - a. The preparation of the way illustrates the procedure used for welcoming kings, and Jesus is the greatest of all Kings—King of kings and Lord of lords.
 - b. Everything in the Old Testament points to God's plan to restore all things through Christ (as seen in the example recorded in Hebrews 11:24–27).

II. Yahweh's goal was to dwell forever with His image bearers (v. 18).

1. *Sin* destroyed the intention for God to dwell with His image bearers as seen in two facts:
 - a. Making the Lord's *person* inaccessible
 - b. Putting His *dwelling place* off limits.

However, Isaiah 2:2, 3 reveals His plan to change that status. Isaiah reveals that "*in the latter days*" (when Jesus returns) the Lord and His dwelling place will be fully accessible to

the redeemed. Jesus' work in His first coming makes this all possible. Jesus' continuing work as exalted King is defeating the enemy in order fully to restore the highest mountains as the unique dwelling place of God (Psalm 68:1–3, 15, 16, 19–22).

2. To make this restoration possible, God must first restore the spiritual life in His people. The identifying mark of God's redeemed children is that they are of a contrite and humble spirit (Matthew 5:3–5). Only those who are thus characterized can dwell with the Lord.

III. Comfort for the people of God comes through spiritual healing (vv. 16–19).

1. In these verses (16–19) God tells us why He must and will do what is necessary to save His people.
 - a. They are too feeble to endure God's righteous anger (v. 16).
 - b. They are also incorrigibly wicked and cannot change (v. 17).
 - c. Thus, God must do the work of spiritual healing through grace, reviving the spirit of the contrite (v. 15b).
2. The prophet shows that the iniquity of "*my people*" rightly provoked God's righteous anger.
 - a. There was no repentance, and each persisted in backsliding "*in the way of his own heart.*" Nevertheless, Yahweh declares, "*I have seen his way, but I will heal him.*" How can He do this? He is holy and righteous; yet two times He declares, "*I will heal him.*"
 - b. This work of spiritual restoration is made possible by the redemption of Christ and the renewal of the Holy Spirit through the new covenant of grace. Verse 18 reveals the process: "*I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners.*" Healing is the work of Christ as set forth in the gospel. *Leading* and *restoring* is the work of the Spirit in sanctification. Paul cites Isaiah 57:19 in Ephesians 2:15–18:
3. A contrast closes the chapter:
 - a. The contrast proves God's sovereign grace in salvation as two equally guilty peoples—"my people" and the "*wicked*"—receive very different ends.
 - b. Those designated as "my people" receive healing and peace, but for the "*wicked*" there is no healing or peace.

What Can We Take Away?

1. Would you characterize your spiritual self as lowly and contrite?
2. Is there a longing in your heart to see and dwell with the living God eternally?
3. Do you know the peace that is spoken of here?
4. Are you being led by the Spirit?