

Christ in the Carols ***LIFE GROUP NOTES***

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Isaiah 40:1-11

There may be more material here than you can use in the time. Feel free to select.

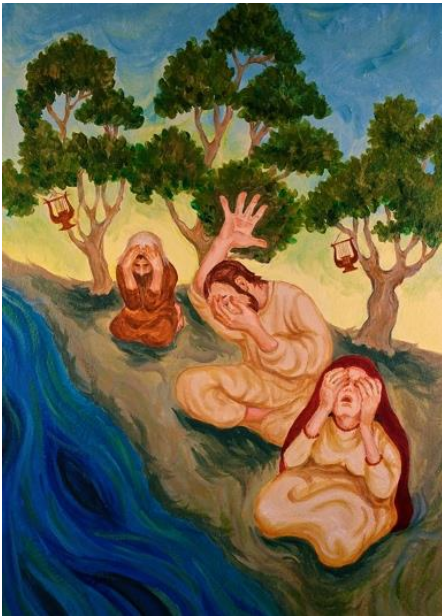
Introduction

This week we consider Isaiah's great chapter on God's promise of comfort to the exiles, who were "mourning in lonely exile" in Babylon. Many Christians can identify with their situation because many of us have experienced times when it felt like we also 'mourn in lonely exile'.

What is comfort?

Read **Isa 40:1-2**.

Spend 5 minutes jotting down what the word "comfort" means to you, and then share your thoughts.



To feel the full impact of Isaiah's words we need to recognise the depth of the dislocation which the exiles experienced.

Read Psalm 137:1-4 and Lamentations 5:15-21

Their sense of dislocation was more than just physical. It was more than being taken away from their homeland.

What were the other causes of their sorrow?

Can we relate to the feelings being expressed here?

Can we still be comforted when our situation looks hopeless?

Can you think of a point in your life when, although circumstances remained difficult, things began to feel better, and you began to turn a corner? What happened to enable this to take place?

Stepping out

Read **Isaiah 40:3-5**

- What is a wilderness like?
- What does it have in it? What doesn't it have in it?
- Is it a positive or negative word in your mind?

- Can you think of examples in the Bible where being in the wilderness proved to be a positive experience?

Isaiah tells the exiles to get ready for the Lord is coming to meet them **in the wilderness**.

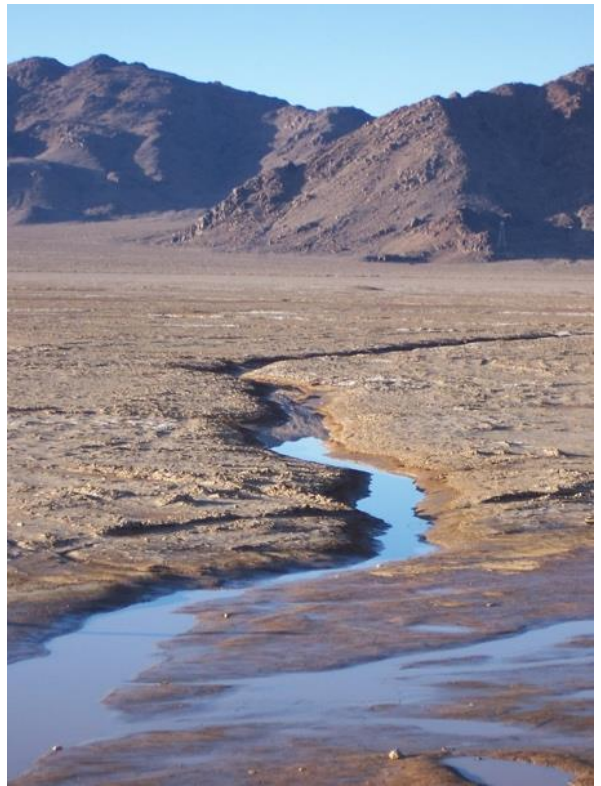
What will happen there?

Read Isaiah 35 together and ask each member of the group to select one phrase or verse from Isaiah 35 that speaks to them about what God can do in the wilderness.

Isaiah 43:1, & 16 – 21 repeats the promise of future renewal.

Why do you think it is sometimes necessary for us to have a wilderness experience in order to grow spiritually?

Read **Isaiah 40:6-8** These verses contrast the weakness of humans with the strength of God’s word. How does this bring comfort to us?



Passing it on

Read **Isaiah 40:9-11**. Here is a call to the exiles to tell others who are equally distressed that the Lord is coming to comfort them. In what ways does giving reassurance to others help us to feel reassured?

Now and not yet

There is an ambiguity in the first verse of the Christmas Carol associated with the words of Isaiah that we have been considering:

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
 And ransom captive Israel,
 That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
 Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
 Shall come to thee, O Israel.

To what extent are God’s promises of renewal in Isaiah fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus and to what extent can they only be fulfilled when Jesus comes again.

Some of the material in this study is taken from: “A Way Through The Wilderness” by Paula Gooder.