



Holy Trinity  
Combe Down



St Andrew's  
Community Church

## Homegroup Material Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> January Isaiah 40

### Background/Intro to the series:

Isaiah the prophet ministered from the year King Uzziah died (c.740BC) to around 687BC (taking in the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah). The book seems to have 3 distinct sections: ch.1-39, sometimes dubbed the 'book of judgment'; ch.40-55, the 'book of comfort'; ch.56-66 which concerns the eternal dwelling place of God's people. Some scholars suggest the differences in these three sections point to three different authors (Isaiah; *deutero*-Isaiah; *trito*-Isaiah) as there are some differences in language and the timeframe they address seems radically different. There are also specific historical references (such as King Cyrus) which date from much later periods than Isaiah himself lived through. So, some would suggest ch.1-39 were composed around Isaiah of Jerusalem's time; 40-55 during the Babylonian exile (c.597-580BC); and 56-66 by a third author in Palestine even later.

There are, however, good reasons to suppose the whole book is from one prophet (even if edited and put into its final composition by later scribes). One might hope or even expect that a great prophet of God could be given insight by God to name future kings such as Cyrus. The differences in language between the three sections are often overstated and indeed there are some key terms which unify the three sections (such as Isaiah's description of the Lord as 'the holy one of Israel'). All of the ancient scrolls of Isaiah which we have (including some dating back to 200BC) do not divide the book up into the sections modern scholars have suggested. Jesus and other NT writers appear to quote from Isaiah as one author not three.

So 'the book of comfort' Isaiah 40-66, may well have been written by Isaiah himself as he, in the power of the Spirit, addresses the future exile of God's people. Due to God's judgment on his people, they will be cast out of the land and taken off into captivity in Babylon [it is difficult to overstate the devastation of the exile. God's people were without the *land* which God had promised them, they were without the *Temple* so lacked God's presence, they were without *security* as an essentially enslaved people]. Isaiah 40 begins a different note of comfort from God to his exiled people. As he reminds them of his loving, strong and faithful character they are given strength to rebuild hope in a certain future. This series will not go through each chapter and verse but takes in some highlights of the final sections of this 'evangelist of the OT'. We see God's astonishing

faithfulness and love as the gospel of Jesus is uncovered in greater depth than we might imagine from a dusty old prophet.

**Discussion:** How/where do you find comfort when life is hard? Try to share honestly and non-judgmentally with one another.

**Read Isaiah 40 (1-2;21-31 if you are in a hurry)**

What stands out to you as you read through this chapter?

**Re-read v.1-2; 9**

What is the nature of the good news Isaiah is to deliver to God's people?  
How would this have been of comfort to them?

**Re-read v.27**

How were the people of God feeling? What were their complaints?  
Why might they have had good reason to feel this way?

**APPLY** – have you ever felt as though God either doesn't know your life or doesn't care about it?

How does Isaiah (in the entire chapter) answer these concerns?

Take time to write down (individually or collectively) as many reasons as possible from Isaiah 40 that God is both powerful and trustworthy. List them here:

*As you reflect on God's nature and character take time to worship. You might like to pray prayers of adoration or sing together.*

**Re-read vv. 27-31**

When we are struggling, we must look at God closely (as you have done above). Now consider WHO it is that receives help from the Lord.

What attitude is essential if we are to receive God's strengthening and help?

Have you had experience of his power being made complete in your weakness (2Cor 12:9)? Share testimonies for encouragement of others.

**Take time to discuss this question:**

What would it look like if someone were 'waiting/trusting on the Lord'? What fruit and activity would you expect to see in their lives?

PRAY.