

**Title** – Comfort, Comfort: Reexamining the Historical Context of Isaiah 40:1-11

**Program of Study** – Religious Studies

**Presentation Type** – Oral Presentation

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**Category** – Textual/Investigative Rubric

**Abstract:** The authorship and historical context of the book of Isaiah are some of the most disputed topics in Old Testament scholarship and include wide-ranging views from evangelical and critical scholars alike. This paper examines the arguments for both a Babylonian (sixth-century) and Assyrian (eighth-century) context of Isaiah 40, compares the evidence, and concludes with an assessment of the information. Many scholars—both critical and confessional—understand there to be a literary or thematic divide between Isaiah 1-39 and 40-66; the former section addresses an eighth-century Judean community living under the threat of Assyrian invasion while the latter section is directed toward a sixth-century audience living in Babylonian captivity. This study argues against the assumption that a shift in audience and historical context occurs in Isaiah 40 and instead that the second half of Isaiah maintains an eighth-century context. This paper proposes the possibility that Isaiah 40:1-11 is a reflection on Jerusalem's deliverance from Sennacherib in 701 BC by examining textual similarities between this pericope and earlier sections of Isaiah 1-39. Isaiah 40:1-11 follows the literary paradigm established in Isaiah 2 for the Lord's arrival and reflects on the overall message of trust in the Holy One of Israel present in Isaiah 1-39. An Assyrian context for this pericope necessitates interpretive adjustments due to a different historical context than if the passage originated in a

Babylonian context. An eighth-century context for Isaiah 40:1-11 may help resolve certain areas of conflict on authorship without denying the supernatural element in predictive prophecy or ignoring the literary uniqueness of the passage.

**Christian Worldview Integration:** My Christian worldview affects my research in several important areas. The most prominent effect of a Christian worldview seen in this paper is a high view of Scripture, inerrancy, and inspiration—ultimately advocating that the Bible is the Word of God. As the Word of God, the Old and New Testaments have theological authority and importance for modern believers, motivating one to continue to study its content and message. This high view of Scripture will also be evident in my presentation as the implications of this paper support the Lord's ability to accomplish what He says and deliver His people from the most difficult situations. The message of deliverance in Isaiah 40:1-11 continues to bring comfort to modern readers as it motivates one to maintain faith in God in difficult times by reflecting on His previous acts of deliverance. For those outside of the Christian culture it reveals the reliability of God and His Word against modern doubts and concerns, echoing the message of Isaiah that God alone is to be trusted. A second prominent way that my worldview affects my research is in the context of evangelism, in the hope that the theological message derived from this research will help reach those who otherwise might not hear. The theology of Isaiah 40:1-11 accurately portrays God as an able protector of His people, one who can bring comfort, the King over all of history, and the one who is reliable to accomplish what he sets out to complete. If not directly through this research, perhaps those training for ministry are able to glean further

theological insight from this study to inform their message to the people God has made them accountable for.