

exile was already upon them. They knew that it was absolutely inevitable and they tended to despair and to think that the nation was absolutely finished. They might even be tempted to question God's power and even His existence, as they saw more and more of the nation turning away from Him to wicked acts and deeds and thoughts. Their frame of mind would thus be very similar to that of the true believers a century later, after they had gone into captivity. Those people would see the land in ruins, the temple destroyed, nearly everything in Judah a desolation, and themselves enslaved, impoverished, and transported to a distant land. In the distant land they would wonder whether there was any future for their people and would be tempted to despair even of the existence of God and of His power. Thus the message of Isaiah, that God was going to deliver His people -- the message which would comfort the true people of God, sorrowing in exile a century later -- was also needed to comfort the true people of God in the days of increasing apostasy.

It would have been possible for God to dictate to Isaiah a message containing many elements of historic fact which were not known in his day, but this would be unusual. God does give the prophets glimpses of particular truths of future days, but the messages as a whole generally bear relation to their own times. We find this also to be true in Isaiah 40 and the chapters which follow. Aside from the one marvelous revelation of the name of Cyrus, the great king whom God would send to deliver the Israelites from their bondage, there is hardly anything in these chapters of factual background which might not already have been known to Isaiah.

We must not forget that in Isaiah's day the northern kingdom had already gone into exile. Doubtless he had talked with refugees who had told him of the terrible sufferings of the people of the kingdom of Ephraim as they were carried off into cruel bondage by the Assyrians. Occasionally someone would come from the land to which the Assyrians had taken them, bringing to Jerusalem news about their suffering and misery. As Isaiah heard these stories of the fate of the people of the northern kingdom and knew that a similar fate awaited the people of his own land, he could not but have looked to God for comfort and consolation in the face of this inevitable catastrophe. As the increasing wickedness