

ISAIAH 40:10, 11 GOD’S SHEPHERD

“Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
behold, his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
He will tend his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms;
he will carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young.”¹

During the Advent Season just passed, I focused attention on Isaiah’s prophecy provided in the fortieth chapter of the book that bears his name. The passage prophesies the ministry of the Baptist, encourages the people of God to look to the Word of the LORD, and cautions against growing depend upon the transience of the flesh. Following this, Isaiah points to the message that God will be with His people. In this final message from the series, we witness Isaiah speaking of God as the Shepherd of Israel, detailing the purpose of His coming.

When speaking of Christ’s return, we who stand in the sacred desk often focus on the comfort of His coming. To be certain, His return does mean comfort for the child of God. However, what is often neglected is the fact that the comfort we shall receive arises from the fact that He is mighty, and with strength He will scatter His enemies and those who oppose us.

Establish one essential truth—Isaiah anticipates the advent of God’s Shepherd! Isaiah’s language makes it clear that it is “the Lord GOD” who will come, and His coming will be with might! Some are startled to realise that Isaiah identifies the Shepherd that is coming as God Himself! Since we know Jesus as the Shepherd of God, this prophecy becomes a powerful statement extolling His deity. Before His birth, Mary was informed that His birth would herald “God with us” [see **MATTHEW 1:23**]. Those who anticipated Messiah’s presence would declare Him to be Immanuel, because they would know that He is “God with us.”

At His return, it will not be the gentle Jesus meek and mild, but the Judge of all the earth. Though the Master was humiliated and buried in weakness, He was raised in power. Now, He is the ascended Lord of Glory who will shortly come to Judge the earth. When He returns, He will repay with affliction those who afflict His people and to grant relief to those who are afflicted. He will come “with His mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who neither know God nor obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus” [see **1 THESSALONIANS 1:6-10**].

There is within the verses before us more than a suggestion that Isaiah anticipated both the First and the Second Advent of Jesus the Messiah. Careful exploration of the verses will reveal this truth. As we draw out this exciting aspect of God’s promise to His people, we will discover as well an important facet of Messiah our Saviour. Open your Bibles, then, to Isaiah’s prophecy concerning Messiah’s presence among His people.

GOD’S SHEPHERD COMES WITH MIGHT —

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

“Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
behold, his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.”

There was nothing particularly awe-inspiring in the First Advent of our Saviour. He was born in humble surroundings to a teenage couple of no particular significance in the eyes of the people of Israel or in the estimate of their Greek and Roman rulers. Go back in your mind to a night many years before this one.

In order to understand events of the particular night I want us to remember, it will be necessary to remind ourselves of the events that took place preceding that night. We begin by recalling an event in the life of a priest awaiting his turn to serve in the Temple. This is the account that we are provided. “In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years” [LUKE 1:5-7].

At last, a day came when he was chosen to serve. Those who decided the order of service cast lots, and it just so happened that the lot fell to Zechariah. At this point, we pick up the story. “The whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared” [LUKE 1:10-17].

Because he questioned the angelic messenger, Zechariah was struck dumb. He was unable to speak from that point forward. The angel had been correct in his pronouncement, however; Elizabeth became pregnant, and for five months, she remained in seclusion, not daring to believe God’s goodness to her. At the appointed time, a son was born. At the precise moment that Zechariah conferred on him the name “John,” the priest was able to speak. The first words from his now loosed tongue was a blessing of God’s grace and mercy [see LUKE 1:57-66].

Zechariah was not the only person who had difficulty believing the angel that was sent to prepare the way for God’s Anointed. The angel Gabriel also encountered a modicum of resistance when he approached Mary. “The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!’ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’

“And Mary said to the angel, ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’

“And the angel answered her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.’ And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her” [LUKE 1:26-38].

Joseph, also, struggled with all that was taking place. Of him, we read, “The birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel’

(which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus” [MATTHEW 1:18-25].

Events moved apace until we read, “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn” [LUKE 2:1-7].

God could not have chosen a more ignominious way to introduce His Son to this world. Born to a woman who would unjustly bear throughout her life the stigma of youthful passion, born into a peasant home, God’s Son would be a member of a despised race, a citizen of an occupied country. We begin to understand what was meant when Isaiah wrote of Him:

“He grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by men;
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

[ISAIAH 53:2, 3]

Had it not been for Persian magi, astronomers who studied the movements of the stars and planets, who wandered into Jerusalem in search of one who was born a king, the leaders of his nation would have remained unaware of His arrival. Think of that! God ignored the great and powerful of His own people, choosing to announce the birth of His Son to foreigners—worshippers of strange gods. They knew of the birth of the King of Israel because they were attuned to the handiwork of God; but God's chosen people were steeped in dark secularism to such a degree that they were unable to recognise His arrival.

God announced the birth of His Son to men engaged in the most humble of all occupations—shepherds. The birth announcement was dazzling, though it was witnessed neither by the political leaders nor by the religious leaders of the nation. That divine announcement was accompanied by angels speaking in chorus,

“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!”

[LUKE 2:14]

It is painfully obvious that God acted quite deliberately in rejecting the trappings of power when He presented His Son. In the same way, God does not call us because we are good, because we are worthy, because we deserve to be saved or because we will do some mighty deed for Him. He saves us because He is merciful, just as it is written. “Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:20-25].

Based on this, the Apostle continues by challenging each Christian to pause and reflect. “Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-31].

We see no mighty display in Messiah's presentation to earth. Therefore, when Isaiah prophesies of the coming Shepherd whom God will send, he sees Him as the one who associates with the weak and lowly, only to raise them to reign with Him at His return.

I have often quoted the words of the ancient writer of the letter to the Hebrew Diaspora: “Just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” [HEBREWS 9:27, 28]. I cite these words because they remind me that our Master “was crucified in weakness, but [He] lives by the power of God.” Because the power of God works powerfully in Him, it is also true that at this present time “We also are weak in Him”: however, we are promised that “we will live with Him by the power of God” [see 2 CORINTHIANS 13:4].

With a heart of love, I warn all who are outside of the grace of God that the Master shall come again to judge wickedness and to reveal His glorious power. Isaiah, looking forward to that day, has written:

“The LORD has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.”

[ISAIAH 52:10]

Take heed and turn to the refuge that He now provides. With the Psalmist, I urge you:

“Kiss the Son,
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,
for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”

[PSALM 2:12]

GOD'S SHEPHERD COMES TO REIGN —

“Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him.”

One must be struck with the manner in which the Master continually lifted the gaze of those who followed Him to look in anticipation to His return. For instance, once, after He had urged His disciples to die to self, He spoke of His return to reign in power. “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done” [MATTHEW 16:24-27].

The disciples witnessed this testimony repeatedly from the lips of the Master Himself. When speak of His coming to judge and to reign in what we have received as “the Olivet Discourse, Jesus testified, “Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” [MATTHEW 24:30]. Later, in that same timeframe, while instructing the disciples, Jesus said, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne” [MATTHEW 25:31]. Before Caiaphas the High Priest, Jesus again testified, “I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” [MATTHEW 26:64].

Whatever else may be said concerning Jesus and the teaching He delivered to His disciples, they came away anticipating that He was the promised Anointed One of God and that He would reign on earth. Moreover, they understand that when He returned, they would reign with Him! Jesus promised, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” [MATTHEW 19:28].

We who believe have received a wonderful promise—a promise that the Apostle iterates when he writes his final letter to Timothy.

“If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him;
if we endure, we will also reign with Him;
if we deny Him, He also will deny us;
if we are faithless, He remains faithful—

for He cannot deny Himself” [2 TIMOTHY 2:11-13].

Whatever else may be true, the disciples understood that they were destined to reign with Jesus; and that is the hope of all who are born from above and who bear the imprimatur of Heaven on their life. In the Apocalypse, the Revelator saw the curtain that divides time from eternity drawn back permitting him to see what was yet future. He was obedient to the command of the Living Jesus to record faithfully all that he witnessed. After describing the course of this present age in the second and third chapters of the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, John was permitted to peer into Heaven itself.

This is the description of what he saw. “After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.’ At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads” [REVELATION 4:1-4].

John saw the throne of God; and arrayed before and around the throne of the True and Living God were people whom John identifies as “elders.” These elders—each a preacher of righteousness—represent the redeemed of God who are raptured out of the earth. They are the saints called out before the Great Tribulation is unleashed on earth dwellers; these are the saints of God who are transformed at the Rapture when they are caught up to God. We know they are the redeemed because they are clothed in white garments, representing the purity that is conferred through the sacrifice of the Master.

When John witnessed the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, he wrote what he heard and saw. “Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

‘Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure’—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints” [REVELATION 19:6-8].

Notice in particular that the clothing represents the righteous deeds of the saints. Notice, also, that these elders have golden crowns— *stéphanos*. This is the victor's crown, earned through successful completion of the assigned course, and not the *diadema*, or crown of a ruler. The saints will reign with Christ, but they will not reign because it is their right to reign; we will reign by His grace and at His invitation to share in the rule over the nations.

Then the Revelator saw the Son of God as He comes to reign for a thousand years on the earth. "I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords" [REVELATION 19:11-16].

The Master shall judge the nations, just as He has promised [see MATTHEW 25:31-46]. He shall purge the earth of wickedness and usher in a period marked by perfect peace, for He shall reign in righteousness. Then, when evil has been put down and righteousness rules over the earth, the saints of God shall reign with Him. Again, of that day when throughout the Millennial reign of the Master the believers of this Church Age reign with Him, John has written, "I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years" [REVELATION 20:4-6].

May I say that if this were the extent of God's promise, it would be glorious. However, as the Apostle has testified,

"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man imagined,
what God has prepared for those who love Him'—

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit" [1 CORINTHIANS 2:9b-10a].

Thus it is that we are destined to reign with the Master throughout eternity. As John was drawing the Apocalypse to a conclusion, an angel of God showed him eternity. This is his description. "The angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever" [REVELATION 22:1-5].

GOD'S SHEPHERD COMES TO REWARD —

“Behold, his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.”

We serve God because He is worthy. However, He has promised to reward those who look for Him. Perhaps we don't speak often enough of the rewards that are promised; however, we know that God has promised to remember His holy people. We truly cannot know what the divine rewards might be. We do know that God speaks of crowns, indicating through His Word that they are granted in recognition of faithful obedience to Him and to His Name.

There is the *Crown of Life* that marks victorious living. James spoke of this crown when he wrote, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised those who love Him” [JAMES 1:12]. We have no idea what the crown is, but we know that for those who stand firm, resisting temptation and pursuing righteousness, God takes note and has pledged that He will reward them.

There is also the *Crown of Righteousness* given for concluding the race. Writing in his final correspondence with the theologian he had tutored, the Apostle wrote, “I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing” [2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8].

Let me ask you: do you long for His appearing? Do you live in anticipation of His return? Can you honestly say that you love the prospect of the Second Advent? According to the promise of God, there is a reward promised for you if you long for His appearing.

Elders are especially urged by Peter to conduct their service in light of the Lord's return. “I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory” [1 PETER 5:1-4].

We who receive appointment to this holy office are responsible to fulfil our duties. We are charged to guard the flock, faithfully preaching the Word and carefully dividing the Word. When we slip into the mode of seeing our labour as a job, or when we preach to make people feel good about themselves, or when we fail to deliver the whole counsel of God because we fear the reaction of some, we sacrifice honour and we must know that we have also forfeited the reward that has been promised—the unfading *Crown of Glory*.

No minister of Christ can say that he has been faithful if he has not taken to heart the divine charge delivered by the Apostle. “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” [2 TIMOTHY 4:1, 2]. The servant of Christ must fulfil this charge knowing that “The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” [2 TIMOTHY 4:3, 4].

God has also promised the *Soul-Winner's Crown* for those who turn others to righteousness. Paul alludes to this reward in passing when he wrote to the Thesslonian Christians, "What is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy" [1 THESSALONIANS 2:19, 20]. I long to do you good, not evil. Therefore, I caution you that this crown may be taken from one through indolence or through inattention. Jesus warned the saints in the Church in Philadelphia, "I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown" [REVELATION 3:11].

Finally, there is *the Martyr's Crown*. The Church in Smyrna was horribly persecuted. This church represented the believers who followed immediately after the apostolic era when believers were horribly persecuted. The Jewish persecutions had passed, but now government sponsored persecution was unleashed against the Faith. Many died, and most suffered horribly. In the midst of suffering, the voice of the Master echoed in the ears of all who believe, saying, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" [REVELATION 2:10].

Yes, we look for Jesus; and we know that when He comes, His reward shall be with Him. We who have looked for His return will rejoice in His presence. But what of those who have never received Him? How shall they fare when they must confess that they have rejected the Son of God to pursue their own tawdry interests? How awful is the description we are provided. "We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

"This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" [2 THESSALONIANS 1:3-12].

When God's Shepherd comes, will you welcome His coming? Or will that coming mean terror for you? You can have confidence at His coming if you receive the forgiveness of sin and the life that He now offers. Now is the time to receive the reign of Christ the Lord. He gave His life as a sacrifice because of your sin, and He rose from the dead to assure you that you can have a right standing before the Father. This is the reason we are told, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with God; it is with the mouth that one confesses and is set free." The passage concludes by testifying in the words of the Prophet Joel, "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved" [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].²

Believe this message and be saved, even today. Amen.

² Author's free translation