

BIBLE STUDY
December 4 and 7, 2023

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11

Mark 1: 1-8

2 Peter 3: 8-14

1. Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11

- This selection is from the second Isaiah written while the people were still in exile. It is the beginning of the words of comfort to the exiles, assuring them that soon and very soon they will be returning to their homes.
- V. 1: The Lord gives comfort to his people. The words 'God' and 'people' evoke the covenant relationship between the two.
- V. 2: The language is one of tender concern and a reprieve from all the punishments they have received. Their servitude is over. They are forgiven and made whole. There is a recognition that the people have suffered even more than what their sins required.
- V. 3: It is unclear whose voice it is. It could be the voice of God or God's messengers, the angels. The Lord will clear a pathway from exile in Babylon to the city of Jerusalem. It will be a direct route without detours or winding roads.
- V. 4: Travel through the desert required following well-watered pathways that could be winding and circuitous. God will provide a direct route removing all obstacles in their way.
- V. 5: The return of the exiles will make known the glory of God. God reveals his glory by his mighty acts on behalf of his people. The whole world will see this and will see the power of God. This will happen because God has promised it.
- V. 9: The redemption of those who were once exiles is to be proclaimed. It is to be announced to the whole world. God's salvation is Good News=Gospel. This foreshadows the Good News of the Gospel to be proclaimed by Jesus. The Good News is that God is present. It should be proclaimed courageously and forthrightly without fear or hesitation.
- V. 10: The Lord comes like a conquering hero displaying awesome power. He brings reward and punishment with him.
- V. 11: As powerful as he is, God is still the gentle shepherd who care for his flock. The all-powerful God is gentle, and mother like with his people. He holds them to himself as a mother holds her baby.

2. Mark 1: 1-8

- The beginning of Mark's Gospel is full of hope, new beginnings, and expectations of even greater things to come.
- V. 1: This verse is really the title of Mark's Gospel: The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mark will relate the beginning of the Gospel. The Gospel will continue in the missionary efforts of the

disciples right up to our very day. In the tile, the identity of Jesus is proclaimed. He is the Son of God.

- V. 2-3: Mark applies the prophecy of Isaiah from Isaiah 40 (with a few edits) to John the Baptist. He is the messenger, the voice that will proclaim the saving work of God that is coming. The return of the exiles reminds us of Israel being set free from slavery in Egypt and marching to the Promised Land. The coming of Jesus to save his people is another Exodus—the greatest one of all.
- V. 4: John prepares the way of the Lord by calling the people to repent. They are to experience “metanoia,” a complete change of heart, a new way of thinking, a 180 degree turn to the Lord.
- V. 5: The people heard John’s call and responded by being baptized. John’s baptism was symbolic of purification and cleansing.
- V. 6: John the Baptist resembles Elijah in his dress and his behavior. There was a tradition that Elijah, who was carried off to heaven in a fiery chariot, would return just before the Messiah appeared. Mark sees John the Baptist as Elijah returned. John’s resembling Elijah increases the expectation and excitement of the people. Something big is about to happen!
- V. 7: John points to Jesus, who is greater than John. As exciting as John’s appearance and preaching are, something greater is coming. Jesus is so great that John is not even worthy to be his servant.
- V. 8: Jesus’ baptism will supersede John’s. John’s baptism is symbolic of the desire to change and repent. Jesus’ baptism which is of the Holy Spirit will bring about the conversion and the change. Jesus’ baptism has its origin in his death and resurrection which destroys the power of sin and death.

3. 2 Peter 3: 8-14

- 2 Peter was probably not written by the Apostle Peter but by a Jewish Christian who wrote under the name of Peter—a common literary device of the times. The author warns his readers about false teachers or “scoffers” deny that the Lord will return in glory—the Parousia. He insists that the teaching of the Parousia comes from the Lord and the Apostles and so it is certain.
- **V. 8:** The Lord has a different conception of time than we do. One day is the same as a thousand years. God is beyond space and time.
- V. 9: We experience the waiting for the Lord’s return as a negative experience of delay. God intends it as an act of patience, giving everyone the chance to repent.
- V. 10: However, we cannot grow lax or distracted by the time of waiting because the Lord will come unexpectedly and catch us unprepared. Now is the time to repent and get our lives in order. The destruction of the earth by fire is a symbol of the purification of the world and revelation of all deeds good and bad.

- V. 11: The reality that the world as we know it will come to an end should be enough impetus for us to act now to live as the Lord desires in holiness and devotion.
- V. 12: We spend our lives waiting in anticipation of the Lord's return and the purification of the earth.
- V. 13: The Lord will create a new heaven and a new earth in which we will be in right relationship with God.
- V. 14: Therefore, because these teachings are true and not to be doubted, we should dedicate ourselves to living a blameless life and be ready for the Lord when he returns.