

Isaiah 51:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass;

Analysis

I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass? God's self-identification employs the emphatic doubled pronoun anochi anochi (I, even I) - asserting His unique role as comforter. The Hebrew nacham (comfort) appears throughout Isaiah 40-55, marking this section's theme. God Himself provides comfort; no substitute suffices.

The rhetorical question "who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid" challenges the incongruity of fearing mortals while knowing the eternal God. The parallel descriptions "man that shall die" (adam yamut) and "son of man which shall be made as grass" (ben-adam ke-chatsir yinaten) emphasize human frailty and transience. Grass withers quickly (40:6-8); humans share this mortality. Fearing the fleeting while neglecting the eternal reveals theological confusion.

From a Reformed perspective, this verse addresses the fear of man versus fear of God. Human threats appear immediate and tangible; God's presence seems distant. Yet logic demands we fear the eternal Judge who controls ultimate outcomes, not temporary oppressors who cannot touch the soul (Matthew 10:28). Trusting God's comfort displaces fear of human adversaries. This truth liberates believers from intimidation by hostile powers - tyrants fade like grass while God's promises endure forever.

Historical Context

This oracle addressed exiles terrorized by Babylonian power. The empire's military might, brutal suppressions, and apparent permanence bred fear among captive communities. Yet Isaiah reminds them that Babylon, however formidable, consists of mortals who will die. Within decades of this prophecy, Babylonian kings fell in succession, and Persia absorbed the empire. The grass metaphor proved literal - Nebuchadnezzar's dynasty ended swiftly (Daniel 4:30-33). God's comfort proved more substantial than Babylon's threats.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What mortal threats or human adversaries currently intimidate you, causing you to forget that they 'shall die' and 'be made as grass'?
2. How does meditating on God's self-identification 'I, even I, am he that comforteth you' redirect fear from humans to confidence in divine presence?
3. In what practical ways can you cultivate fear of God that displaces fear of man in daily decisions and relationships?

Interlinear Text

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H595

H595

H1931

I even I am he that comforteth

H5162

אָתָּה מִ

H4310

H859

תִּתְּרִאֵי

you who art thou that thou shouldest be afraid

H3372

מִן־אָנָּשׁ

of a man

H582

יְמִתְּהָ

that shall die

H4191

וּמִבֵּן

and of the son

H1121

אֲנָשׁוֹן כְּאֶחָד כְּאֶחָד

of man as grass which shall be made

H120

H2682

אֶחָד

H5414

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 118:6 (Parallel theme): The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?

1 Peter 1:24 (Parallel theme): For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:

Isaiah 2:22 (Parallel theme): Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?

John 14:18 (Parallel theme): I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

Isaiah 66:13 (Parallel theme): As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

Matthew 10:28 (Parallel theme): And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Isaiah 51:3 (Parallel theme): For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

Isaiah 43:25 (Parallel theme): I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.

Psalms 146:4 (Parallel theme): His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.

Psalms 92:7 (Parallel theme): When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever: