

### The Greatness of God Emphasized

#### Isaiah 40

Isaiah 40:1-11 - *“Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” says your God. <sup>2</sup>“Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.”*

<sup>3</sup> *The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth. <sup>5</sup> The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”*

<sup>6</sup> *The voice said, “Cry out!” and he said, “What shall I cry?” “All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. <sup>7</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it. Surely the people are grass.*

<sup>8</sup> *The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.”*

<sup>9</sup> *O Zion, you who bring good tidings, get up into the high mountain. O Jerusalem, you who bring good tidings, lift up your voice with strength! Lift it up, be not afraid; say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” <sup>10</sup> Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.*

<sup>11</sup> *He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.”*

#### Background Notes

Isaiah 40 begins the second main division of the book. Chapters 1-39 emphasized the **denunciation by God**. Chapters 40-46 will emphasize **consolation from God**.

In the last 27 chapters of Isaiah, there are three areas of God’s consolation:

- a. Consolation because of God’s greatness (chapters 40-48)
- b. Consolation because of God’s Servant (chapters 47-57)
- c. Consolation because of God’s program (chapters 58-66)

The first subdivision begins in chapter 40. It emphasized the consolation of God because of His greatness. Notice the emphasis on the comfort of God in verse 1: *“Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” says your God.* This is a fitting opening verse for the second main division of Isaiah, the consolation of God.

Chapter 40 is clearly divided into two sections: God’s greatness as the Deliverer of His people (v1-11), and God’s greatness as the Creator of this world (v12-31).

## **Doctrinal Points**

### **1. God is great in the deliverance of His people.**

In verses 1-11 Isaiah was looking ahead and speaking about the people of Judah's deliverance from their captivity in Babylon - so it's quite a prophecy!

In verse 2, did the phrase *"double for all her sins"* refer to "double punishment" or "double grace"? In view of the context of *"her warfare is ended"* and *"her iniquity is removed,"* I believe it refers to the idea of "double grace" - full and super-abundant grace to cover all of Judah's sins.

In the immediate or historical context, verses 3-5 referred to the Lord going before His people as they returned from Babylon. But there is a wider application. Verses 3-5 were quoted by the Gospel writers, referring John the Baptist as the forerunner of the Messiah – a voice crying in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord.

But these verses apply to the second coming of our Lord as well, when His glory will be fully revealed (v5). The idea in the leveling of the hills and filling up the valleys comes from the work of building roads or highways - preparing a wide and level road for the expected arrival of the King. John the Baptist applied it in a figurative way: the people must be ready morally and spiritually to meet the Lord who is coming.

How true this is today as well, especially in view of how short life is. The grass withers and the flowers fade. Only the word of the Lord remains alive and fresh forever (v6-8).

In verses 9-11, the return is seen as the Lord returning with His people to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity. This picture certainly anticipates the return of the Lord to Jerusalem at His second coming, when He will establish His earthly kingdom. His reward is with Him (v10) and He will not rule as a dictator. He will be a Shepherd King, tenderly caring for His delivered flock. God is great in the deliverance of His people.

### **2. God is great in the creation of His world.**

In verses 12-17, notice how much greater God is than His creation. As the Creator, God is transcendent over His vast and wonderful creation.

Isaiah 40:12-17 – *"Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, measured heaven with a span and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?"*

*<sup>13</sup> Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counselor has taught Him? <sup>14</sup> With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge and showed Him the way of understanding?"*

*<sup>15</sup> Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the scales. Look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing. <sup>16</sup> And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering. <sup>17</sup> All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless.*

Do you know how large a “span” is (v12)? It’s a “hand span” - the distance between the thumb and little finger, about nine inches. God can measure the heavens with the span of His hand, and He can hold all the waters of the earth in the hollow of His hand (v12). Do you see the emphasis on greatness of God? No one instructs the Lord because He is omniscient (v13-14). Compared to our great God, the nations are nothing but a drop in the bucket and a speck of dust on the scales (v15-17).

*Isaiah 40:18-20 - “To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him? <sup>19</sup> The workman molds an image, the goldsmith overspreads it with gold, and the silversmith casts silver chains. <sup>20</sup> Whoever is too impoverished for such a contribution chooses a tree that will not rot. He seeks for himself a skillful workman to prepare a carved image that will not totter.”*

In verses 18-20, the greatness of our God is contrasted with the smallest of dead and lifeless manmade idols. This is quite a scathing denunciation of all forms of idolatry, including our worship of financial success (idols of silver and gold) - isn't it? And notice – even the impoverished person has an idol. No one escapes the condemnation.

The description of the earth and heavens in verses 21-22 allows for the fact that the earth is spherical – a concept that was certainly unknown in Isaiah’s day!

*Isaiah 40:21-22 – “Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? <sup>22</sup> It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.”*

The emphasis of verses 23-26 was once again on **God as Creator – from the beginning – from the foundation of the earth**. He is above all other rulers and judges on earth – and He is infinitely righteous and holy as well.

*Isaiah 40:23-26 - “He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless. <sup>24</sup> Scarcely shall they be planted, scarcely shall they be sown, scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, when He will also blow on them, and they will wither, and the whirlwind will take them away like stubble.*

*<sup>25</sup> “To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?” says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number. He calls them all by name! By the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, not one is missing.”*

We can't even begin to number the billions and billions of stars, let alone name them, and God controls them all as well. This section of Isaiah 40 reminds us the description of God the Son in Colossians 1:16-17 - "*All things have been created through him and for him... and in him all things hold together.*" God is great in the creation of His world.

## Practical Application

### Make Isaiah 40:31 a pattern for your life

Isaiah 40:27-31 - "*Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God"? <sup>28</sup> Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable.*

*<sup>29</sup> He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. <sup>30</sup> Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, <sup>31</sup> but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."*

Our practical application comes from the last verse of the chapter, which is part of the section entitled "God is great as the Creator of this world."

The people of Judah were complaining that God didn't care about them (v27) because He was allowing them to be conquered by the Babylonians. The truth is that **God is too great not to care!** He never gets tired, and He understands everything (v28). Even young people get weary and tired - but the Lord has strength and power to spare (v2-30).

Are you discouraged because you think you don't have enough strength to get through your day? **The key is to "wait on the Lord"** (v31). Don't try to get through hard places in your own strength. Be willing to let the Lord call the shots for your day and for your situation. He will give you the strength to do whatever He has called you to do, and the strength to endure difficult circumstances. You will gain new strength. You will soar on wings like eagles. You will run and not be weary. You will walk and not faint. Isn't that a great pattern for life?

What stage of life are you in right now? Are you young, and you need strength to soar up on wings like eagles? Are you middle-aged, and you need strength to continue to run the race - and not get weary (Hebrews 12:1-2)? Or are you in your golden years, and need strength to continue a strong walk as a believer - and not faint (Colossians 2:6)? Wait upon the Lord! He will never grow weary, and He **will** provide the strength you need!

This text was preached at my grandfather's funeral. It was the pattern of his long life as a godly Christian. It's a great pattern for life.

Make Isaiah 40:31 a pattern for *your* life!