

“Reliance on the word of God is not fatalistic or superstitious. It is not trust in something impersonal like the stars or a good-luck charm. It is trust in a person who is committed to us and has all the resources necessary to care for us” (Webb 1996: 163).

#### D. THE SOVEREIGN LORD IS COMING TO JERUSALEM (40:9-11)

“The essence of the message is: “Look, it’s God.” As in vv. 3–5, salvation is neither more nor less than the divine presence. God does not save his people with programs sent from afar. Neither does he save them with theological conceptions coolly administered from on high. He comes! This was the good news then and is still today. The only difference is the tense of the verb: today we shout to the world, “He has come!”” (Oswalt 1998: 54).

“His compassionate care is illustrated in the way he tenderly holds his people and gently leads those who are weak. He is the good shepherd (Ps 23:1; Ezek 34) who will take responsibility for his sheep, especially those that are vulnerable among the flock. The metaphors of gathering, feeding, carrying, and leading represents a full-orbed presentation of the various roles of a shepherd. This picture presents the intimate positive relationship God will have with his own people” (Smith 2009: 100).

#### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How can you apply verse 2 to your life, your thinking, your prayers?

If verse 8 is true, how should that be reflected in your life?

Which verse from this section should you meditate on or memorize?

How does understanding the Old Testament affect your understanding and appreciation of the New Testament?

#### SOURCES CITED

John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, NICOT, 1998.  
Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, New American Commentary, 2009.  
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## ISAIAH 40:1-11: COMFORT IN THE LORD’S COMING

### OUTLINE OF ISAIAH 40

- I. Be comforted because the Lord is coming (40:1-11)
  - A. The Lord will forgive his people (40:1-2)
  - B. The Lord is coming to his people (40:3-5)
  - C. The Lord’s word endures (40:6-8)
  - D. The Sovereign Lord is coming to Jerusalem (40:9-11)
- II. Be comforted because the Lord is sovereign (40:12-26)
- III. Be comforted because the Lord cares for Israel (40:27-31)

### INTRODUCTION

“Will God ever forgive the people for their sinful rebellion and be compassionate toward them again? Are God’s earlier promises about the restoration of a remnant to Zion still true (2:1–4; 4:2–6; 10:20–22; 11:1–16; 14:1–3)? Will these new events prevent or delay the exalted son of Jesse from reigning on the throne of David forever (9:1–7)?” (Smith 2009: 83).

The message of this chapter would be very relevant to people in exile who may wonder (1) if God has forgotten them; (2) if God is stronger than the gods of the nation that has conquered them; (3) if God still cares for his people.

“The opening part of chapter 40 is like the overture to a great musical composition. All the major themes which the following chapters will develop so powerfully get their first exploratory treatment here: *comfort* (1), *atonement* (2), *the way of the Lord* (3), *the glory of the Lord* (5), and the power of *the word of . . . God* (8), the city of God (9), and the might and tenderness of Zion’s saviour (10-11). It leaves us full of expectation that a whole new movement in God’s dealings with his people is about to unfold” (Webb 1996: 161).

### A. THE LORD WILL FORGIVE HIS PEOPLE (40:1-2)

“In other passages in Isaiah (12:1; 30:18; 49:13; 51:3,12; 52:9; 61:2; 66:13) God’s comfort is closely associated with a time of great joy, the restoration of the land, and the redemption of his people. These are events that mark the eschatological establishment of his kingdom on earth” (Smith 2009: 92).

“What was the explanation for it? Could fifty, sixty, or seventy years of exile pay for rebellion that had gone on for scores of generations? Could it atone even for the sins of those directly affected, let alone for those of their ancestors? The fact of the matter is that there is far more to this announcement of pardon than first meets the eye. There is a mystery here that will not be explained fully until chapter 53. But for now the simple announcement is allowed to stand alone in all its stark and bold splendour. You are forgiven!” (Webb 1996: 162-63).

“God sweeps away their sins because he is the one who redeems them (44:22) through the servant of Isaiah 52–53. Isa 1:18–20 as well as Isaiah’s experience of having his own sins forgiven (6:5–7) demonstrate that only God’s grace brings forgiveness of sins. Human suffering is sometimes a punishment for sin, but no salvation or merit is gained just because people justly suffer for their own iniquity” (Smith 2009: 94-95).

Of “*double* for all her sins: “‘large and abundant’ seems to fit best here. All three phrases suggest completeness: service—fulfilled; iniquity—atoned for; sin—paid in full” (Oswalt 1998: 43n5).

### B. THE LORD IS COMING TO HIS PEOPLE (40:3-5)

The command is to prepare, and the reason is that God is coming. This coming is guaranteed because God’s word has announced it. Is God’s word certain? Verses 6-8 give the answer. Though at present it seems that man is all-powerful, he and his kingdoms will fade away at God’s mere breath, but God’s word will outlast them and he will accomplish what he has declared.

“The one thing the people can do is to prepare the way for the coming King. Elliger may be right in seeing this as a reflection of the kind of road building engaged in prior to the triumphal tour of a conquering king. But in any case it speaks of an act of faith on the part of the people. They do not yet see the King, but they dare to believe that he is coming” (Oswalt 1998: 52).

“Isaiah 40:5 develops the ideas found in 35:2,4 that ‘they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God.’ This is the day that will bring divine comfort to all people; it is a day all believers look forward to (cf. Matt 16:27; 24:30; Mark 8:38; John 17:22–24)” (Smith 2009: 97).

“There may be many other mysterious factors about these eschatological events that people then and today do not fully understand, but one thing every person can be absolutely certain about is that ‘the mouth of the LORD’ has promised that God’s glory will appear on earth some day” (Smith 2009: 97).

### C. THE LORD’S WORD ENDURES (40:6-8)

“When God comes all flesh will bow in reverence at the sight of his glory. Some will wither away like the grass while others will be gently protected in God’s almighty arms. The challenge is for Isaiah’s audience, and everyone who hears the prophet’s words today, to prepare their hearts to meet the Lord face to face. He offers comfort, forgiveness of sins, his holy presence, protection, gentle care, and an appropriate blessing of salvation” (Smith 2009: 101).

“These thoughts probably arise as the prophet realizes how his hearers are responding to his announcement of salvation. They are thinking, “Those are fine words, but how can God deliver us from the great powers of the world?” Such thoughts would be especially prominent for those who would see Jerusalem destroyed by mighty Babylon. But they would also be prevalent in Isaiah’s own day. The glory of God does not look like much compared to the glory of the nations” (Oswalt 1998: 53).