

GOD'S PEOPLE SET FREE THROUGH THE PROCLAMATION OF HIS GREATNESS

ISAIAH 40:12-31

Introduction

All of us go through difficult times in our lives. For some of us the instances are few and far between, and the issues are not that serious. But for others the difficulties are almost constant and their nature is very serious, sometimes even life-threatening. When circumstances are overwhelming and the outlook is totally bleak, what can we do? To whom can we turn? Is there any hope? The resounding answer is “Yes!”

In God's Word we find the most wonderful and encouraging news: God promises to set His people free from their world of hardships and heavy burdens, from their captivity and enslavements by the wicked of this world. He also promises to walk with true believers through every trial and misfortune they experience. But He not only walks with His people through their trials, He also brings them through victoriously. So no matter what grips a person's life, he or she can be liberated by God's salvation. God will rescue or deliver His people from whatever forces hold them in bondage or hold them down. This is the wonderful message of the present Scripture.

At the time Isaiah wrote this wonderful message of salvation, he knew that the Jews were facing 160 plus very difficult years. For about 93 years they would witness a stream of unparalleled wickedness flow through their nation, a stream that would gain momentum and rush madly to its inevitable end, the fall of their nation to Babylon. They would then be deported and spend 70 long years scattered throughout the Babylon Empire. They were to suffer the unbearable discrimination and hardship of a subjected, enslaved people.

Thus, encouragement — a deep sense of God's care and comfort — would be desperately needed during these long, difficult years. The people needed to trust God, to believe in His glorious promise of deliverance. They needed to live righteously and godly as they looked forward to the day of their redemption by the Saviour. Within their hearts they needed to keep alive the hope of God's salvation, the hope that He would deliver them from their captivity and lead them back to Judah, the promised land of God. To keep their hope alive, the LORD stirred Isaiah to preach this much-needed message: this is, *Set Free Through God's Salvation and Greatness*, 40:1-31.

- I. God's salvation proclaimed (vv. 1-11).
 - II. God's greatness proclaimed (vv. 12-31).
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Isaiah 40:12–31 Freedom Through the Proclamation of His Greatness

God's people are set free through the proclamation of His greatness. How could the Jews know that God would set them free from oppressive enemies such as Assyria, Babylon and Persia? How could they know that God would fulfil His promise of restoration, freeing them from the Babylonian captivity and returning them to the promised land? How can any people know that God will rescue them from the bondages and enslavements of this life? from the captivity of sin, death, Satan and hell? Isaiah answered these questions. Remembering who God is — keeping in mind His *awesome greatness* — will give assurance. God is *omnipotent*, which means all-powerful. He is also *omniscient*, which means knowing all things, including the needs of His people and what must be done to meet those needs. And God is *omnipresent*, which means He is present everywhere. Possessing all power and knowledge and being present everywhere means that God can literally do anything, meeting every need of every person who truly follows Him. He can fulfil what He has promised. He can set His people free.

To assure God's people that God will fulfil His promises, Isaiah declares that God is greater than anything on earth or anything scattered throughout the universe or even beyond. Seven comparisons are made:

1. The Lord is greater than the universe He has created (v. 12). Note the descriptive pictures that show just how great God is:

=> all the waters of the earth are nothing more than a drop of water in the palm of God's hand

=> all the heavens — the stars, sun, moon, planets, the entire universe — measure no more than the width of God's hand

=> the weight of the earth — its dust, mountains, and hills — is known by the LORD and the LORD alone

The point being made is that God is the great Creator. He and He alone created the universe. He is *far greater* than the universe itself. The universe with its multiplied billions of heavenly bodies were created by the LORD. He is omniscient and omnipotent, possessing the knowledge and power to do anything. And He used His knowledge and power to create the entire universe. This fact means...

- that God is *far greater* than the universe He has created
- that atheism and agnosticism are baseless beliefs upon which to build one's life
- that unbelief is a dangerous position to take against the Creator of the universe

Heb 1:3 *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*

Gen 1:1 *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

Neh 9:6 *You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.*

Psa 102:25 *In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.*

2. The Lord is greater than any counsellor or teacher (vv. 13-14). God's knowledge, understanding and justice are infinite. Therefore, He has no need for a counsellor or advisor, since there is no being anywhere in the entire universe who can add to His knowledge, understanding or spirit of justice. God is totally self-sufficient:

=> He needs no counsellor to advise or instruct Him about what to do (v. 13).

=> He needs no one to enlighten Him or to teach Him the path of justice or to show Him what to do (v. 14).

=> He needs no one to impart knowledge or understanding to Him.

The LORD is greater than all counsellors or teachers combined throughout all generations of human history. The LORD is totally self-sufficient, knowing exactly what to do, how to do it, and when to do it.

Rom 11:33-36 *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?" "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

1 Cor 1:25 *For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.*

1 Cor 2:16 *"For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.*

Dan 2:22 *He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.*

3. The Lord is greater than all the nations of the earth in all their power and glory (vv. 15-17). In comparison to God, the power and glory of all nations throughout history are nothing more than a drop of water in a bucket or a piece of dust on a set of scales (v. 15). Of course, the nations of the earth are important to God. What nations do — how they rule and exercise their power and care for their citizens — matters to God. But when the power and glory of nations are matched against the omnipotent glory of God, the nations fade into insignificance. If a person were to search the earth for

something valuable enough to offer God, the individual would find nothing. Even the forests and animals of Lebanon would not be enough to make a sacrificial offering worthy of Him. Nothing among the nations could ever be offered to God that would be worthy of His glory. God's greatness — His power and glory — supercedes all the power and glory of all nations for all of time. There is nothing in heaven or earth worthy of His greatness. In comparison to God's significance, the importance of nations is worthless, less than nothing before Him, total vanity.

Acts 17:25-27 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone — an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

1 Chr 29:12 Wealth and honour come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.

Job 26:12 By his power he churned up the sea; by his wisdom he cut Rahab to pieces.

Job 42:02 "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted."

Psa 103:146 For he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

4. The Lord is greater than all the images and false gods of this world (vv. 18-21). No idol or false god can even be compared to the Lord. Comparisons are ridiculous. Idols and false gods are nothing more than man-made objects, the creation of people's imagination. A skilled craftsman using metal, gold, silver or wood creates these gods from images he pictures in his mind.

Note the four questions asked in verse 21. Scripture clearly says that a people — an individual, a family, a tribe, a community, a nation — should know the truth, for they have heard the truth from the beginning of human history, ever since creation.

Therefore, a person is without excuse if he or she worships a false god rather than the LORD Himself, Who is the Truth. The truth is twofold: there is only one living and true God, the LORD Himself (Jehovah, Yahweh). And God alone is the Creator of the universe. He is *far greater* than all the images and false gods of this world.

Acts 14:15 “Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.”

Acts 17:29 “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone — an image made by man’s design and skill.

Rom 1:18-25 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen.

Psa 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Psa 97:6 The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory.

5. The LORD is greater than all the people of the earth (vv. 22-24). When the LORD sits enthroned above the earth, looking down upon the people, they appear as nothing more than grasshoppers in His sight. The Lord is so great that He can stretch out the heavens that He created and spread them out like a tent in which He lives and demonstrates His presence and glory. In comparison to the rulers and judges of this earth God is far greater. He alone judges the great, the powerful of this earth. If their works have been evil, He erases and makes their works useless. They are nothing more than plants that are sown in the ground. As soon as they take root and appear, their lives and positions of power are snuffed out. Blasting them with the fury of His breath, the Lord causes the great and powerful to wither away like a plant or to be swept away like chaff by a whirlwind (vv. 23-24).

John 3:27 To this John replied, “A man can receive only what is given him from heaven.”

2 Cor 3:5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.

Job 4:17-21 ‘Can mortal man be more righteous than God? Can even a strong man be more pure than his Maker? If God places no trust in his servants, if he charges his

angels with error; how much more those who live in houses of clay, whose foundations are in the dust, who are crushed more readily than a moth! Between dawn and dusk they are broken to pieces; unnoticed, they perish forever. Are not the chords of their tent pulled up, so that they die without wisdom.'

Job 7:17 "What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention?"

Psa 8:3-4 *When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?*

Psa 49:12 *But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish.*

Psa 115:3 *Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.*

6. The Lord is greater than any being in the entire universe (vv. 25-26). To whom can the Lord be compared? Who is His equal? No one. The Lord alone is the *Holy One*. He alone created all the heavens of the starry sky (v. 26). No one else is great enough nor has the power to create such a vast universe. Note that the Lord Himself is speaking. He challenges the reader: "Lift up your eyes and look at the heavens above and ask yourself: 'who created all these?'" Certainly not some little god, a piece of wood or metal created by the imagination of a corrupt human being, the *Holy One*, the Lord Himself who created everything. He is so great that He not only created the stars of the heavens, but He also named them and calls them by their names. It is His power and His power alone that established the laws of the universe that keep the stars functioning according to those laws. Again the Lord is *far greater* than any being in the entire universe. He alone is the *Holy One*, totally set apart and distinct from all other beings. Any person should be able to stand out under the starry sky at night and understand this fact: the universe did not happen by chance. It has been created by the *Holy One*, the Supreme Being who is totally set apart from all other beings in the universe.

Mark 12:32 "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him."

Acts 14:15-17 "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: he has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."

2 Sam 7:22 "How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears."

1 Kng 8:23 *And said, "LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below — you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way."*

Psa 89:6 *For who in the skies above can compare with the LORD? Who is like the LORD among the heavenly beings?*

7. The Lord is greater than any trial or temptation (vv. 27-31). Due to the Jews' oppressive enemies as well as their hardships and sufferings, they were complaining and accusing God of forgetting them. They felt as though God were far away, unconcerned about their welfare or else unaware of their hardships. But the Lord knew, and His heart reached out in compassion to His people. Stirring Isaiah to encourage them, the Lord gave four assurances to His people:
- => He is the everlasting God, the Creator of the whole earth (v. 28). Thus He oversees the earth and knows everything that is happening. Because He is everlasting — no beginning and no end — He is able to oversee and control all events of human history.
 - => He never faints or becomes weary in overseeing the earth and His people. Again, being everlasting, God is always available to help those who truly trust and obey Him.
 - => He strengthens both the weary and the weak who trust Him (v. 29).
 - => He will renew the strength of all who wait on the Lord (vv. 30-31). No matter their chronological age, the LORD will strengthen them with more energy and vigour than even young men have. Note this fact: the word *wait* does not mean sitting around doing nothing. Rather it means to *hope* in the Lord, praying and trusting the Lord to meet one's need (Isa. 26:3-4; 30:15). Also, the word *renew* means to exchange, such as exchanging old clothes for new. (Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Comforted*. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), pp. 111-112.) The believer who truly places his hope in the Lord will renew his strength, exchange his weaknesses for the Lord's strength (2 Cor. 12:9). The Lord will build up the believer, empower his spirit to soar above the trials and temptations that afflict him, to soar just like an eagle above the earth. A believer who truly hopes in the LORD will be strengthened so that he can run through the problems, hardships, trials and temptations of life. And he will not grow weary. He will walk victoriously, triumphantly and not faint (v. 31).

Mat 6:7-8 *"And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."*

Mat 6:33 *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*

2 Cor 12:9-10 *But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Eph 3:20 *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.*

2 Tim 1:7 *For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

Heb 11:33-34 *Who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned into strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.*

Psa 40: 17 *Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer: O my God, do not delay.*

Isa 41:10 *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Isa 43:1-2 *But now, this is what the LORD says he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze." ■*