

# SET FREE THROUGH GOD'S SALVATION AND GREATNESS

## ISAIAH 40:01–11

### ***DIVISION OVERVIEW*** *Isaiah 40:01–48:22*

The prophecies and messages of Isaiah now shift many years into the future. Someday in the distant future, Judah and its beloved capital, Jerusalem, would fall to Babylon. Tragically, the citizens would suffer the horrors of defeat and slavery. Most of the survivors would be deported and exiled, scattered throughout the Babylonian Empire. The people of Judah would lose everything: their homes, property, wealth, communities, cities, nation, worship centres, and their beloved temple in Jerusalem. And they would be gripped by piercing grief, because many of their husbands and sons would be slaughtered by the invading army. Everyone would be destitute, and a spirit of hopelessness and despair would continually flood their hearts.

But in the midst of the Jews' hardship and sorrow, the LORD gave them a wonderful promise. The day was coming when they would be comforted and set free from their captivity to Babylon and from sin and death. In the nine messages of this division, the herald of God proclaims God's wonderful promise of comfort and freedom. And he proclaims this message just as loudly as he had the messages of condemnation and judgment. Judgment was coming upon Judah, but it is also coming upon all the other nations of the world. Nevertheless, God had made a promise to save His people, and He would keep it. Through His power and the promised Messiah, God's prophecy of comfort and freedom would be fulfilled. His people would be set free from their captivity to Babylon and from their enslavement to sin and death.

Several years passed since the reign of Hezekiah. The Jews were now in captivity in Babylon, but Isaiah was prophesying comfort and freedom to them. In these prophecies of Isaiah, God's great redeeming power is clearly pictured. If the exiles would repent of their idolatry and wicked ways, the Lord would deliver them from captivity in Babylon.

### ***Introduction*** *Isaiah 40:01–11*

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 of us 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

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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*, Isaiah 40:1-31.

- I. God's salvation proclaimed (vv. 1-11).
- II. God's greatness proclaimed (vv. 12-31).

### ***Isaiah 40:01–11 God's Salvation Proclaimed***

God's People are set free through the proclamation of His salvation. God will deliver His people from captivity. No matter what enemy holds them in bondage, He will set them free. Salvation is the wonderful message now being proclaimed by God Himself. And note this fact: four voices altogether proclaim the message of God's salvation. A wonderful hope is being offered to those who are facing terrible trials and who are being held captive by cruel enemies. Note the four voices and the message each proclaims:

1. The first voice is that of God. He cries out, "Comfort, comfort my people" (v. 1). As His people walked through the coming hardships and captivity, the LORD wanted them to be comforted. He loved them from the depths of His being, so He reached out to them in empathy, with intense compassion. He wanted His people aroused to trust Him, confessing their sins and casting their lives totally upon Him. He wanted them to worship, obey, and walk in fellowship with Him throughout their lives. True *comfort of soul* comes only from the LORD. This comfort includes deep spiritual rest, a rest of assurance that one's life is in God's hands. To the righteous believer God will give strength and courage to bear whatever lies ahead, working all things out for good (Rom 8:28). Even if the righteous believer dies due to the trial confronting him, he knows (has assurance) that God will immediately transfer him into His presence — quicker than the eye can blink.

The Jews would desperately need this deep-seated comfort of soul in the coming years. Their suffering would at times be almost unbearable. Every discouraging thought and emotion that a person could experience would hit them. Imagine what it would be like to see the military defences of one's nation wiped out and all the major cities and land utterly devastated, as well as multiplied thousands of citizens abused, raped, and slaughtered. In addition to this horrifying sight, the Jewish survivors were to be taken captive and deported to other nations throughout the Babylonian empire. This was the terrible trial Isaiah foresaw lying ahead for the Jews. Understandably, facing such a dismal future would cause many to become deeply distressed and discouraged. They would lose all hope for the future. Even some righteous believers would question God, wondering why He would allow them to suffer so much. Some would even be tempted to distrust the LORD's promises and give up their faith.

Thus, to prepare His people for the coming trials, God cried out, "Comfort, comfort my people." The double comfort stresses the importance and urgency of getting the message out, for the people would be desperate, suffering indescribable and terrifying trials.

In proclaiming the comfort of God, the prophets were to "speak tenderly to Jerusalem," demonstrating God's compassion and kindness. God's heart reached out with tender feelings for His people. *To speak tenderly* means to speak to the hearts of the people, to place God's comfort right next to the hearts of the people who suffer. Two words of *comfort* were to be shared with the people.

- a. Their *warfare* — hardship and demanding circumstances — was complete (v. 2). The Hebrew literally reads warfare, which refers to the difficult trials the Jews suffered during their captivity. In predicting that the *warfare* was over, the LORD was promising the release of the Jews and their return to the promised land of Judah. Through Isaiah the LORD predicted that the harsh rigours of the Jews' captivity would soon be over. Just imagine what comfort this would be to the righteous believers who lived during the Babylonian captivity. Their struggle against the cruel Babylonians would come to an end. The day of their deliverance was at hand. God Himself gave them this assurance. They could rest in His Word, be comforted in this wonderful promise.
- b. Their sins were pardoned, forgiven. What a glorious assurance for God's people! Down through the centuries the Israelites had committed terrible sins against the LORD. The *cup of their iniquity* was full, overflowing with horrible evil, the evil of...
  - immorality      • lawlessness      • empty formal worship (1:11-15)
  - drunkenness    • violence          • unbelief and distrust
  - pride            • idolatry          • ridicule of God's Word
  - abuse            • hypocrisy        • mockery and persecution of God's people

Since the days of Moses, God's prophets had warned the people: if they turned against the LORD and walked in unrighteousness, they would face His judgment (see

notes, Lev 26:14-39, esp. 31-39; Deu 28:15-68). God allowed the collapse of Judah and the Babylonian captivity as a means of judgment to *arouse* the Jews to repent. Isaiah was predicting that their suffering would stir some of the people to turn back to God, to cry out for His help. These would repent of their sins, and God would forgive them.

In the future, when the Jews found themselves in the midst of the captivity, they could remember the prophecy of Isaiah. They could take great hope in the promise of God: their captivity — warfare, hard service in Babylon — would end, and their sins would be forgiven. Of course, it was understood that repentance, turning back to God, was the prerequisite for forgiveness (Lev 26:40-42; Is.55:7; Eze 18:21).

**John 8:34-36** *Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."*

**Rom 6:16-18** *Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*

**Rom 6:20-23** *When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**Rom 7:23-25** *But I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.*

**Eph 1:7** *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.*

**2 Tim 2:24-26** *And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.*

**1 John 1:9** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

**Isa 43:25** *“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”*

**Isa 44:22** *“I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.”*

**Micah 7:18** *Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.*

2. The second voice is human, probably the prophet Isaiah himself (vv. 3-5). The cry of this voice is wonderful news: prepare the way for the LORD, for He is soon coming. This is a picture of the Near East custom of sending ambassadors ahead of a king to announce His coming. A king's visit to an area was a cause for great celebration. Enormous preparations would be made. Either a special road would be built or an existing roadway upgraded and readied for the monarch's appearance. Preparations always included levelling the roadway by filling in the valleys, lowering the hills, and straightening out the crooked sections. All obstacles that lay in the roadway would be removed.

With the LORD's announced coming, the people were to make the most careful preparations. Specifically what?

- ⇒ They were to straighten out their lives and remove all crooked, unrighteous behaviour.

**Titus 2:12-13** *It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

- ⇒ They were to level out the paths of their lives: be faithful and consistent, riding smoothly over all the valleys and mountains, the ups and downs of life, with confident and righteous behaviour.

**Heb 12:12-17** *Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. “Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.*

A wonderful promise was given to those who prepared for the LORD's coming: God's glory would be revealed to them (v. 5). All mankind would see His glory. Scripture applies this passage to the ministry of John the Baptist, saying that he is the *forerunner* of the Lord Jesus Christ. John is the one who prepared the way for the

Messiah's coming to earth (Jn. 1:19-34). But in reality, the prophecy applies to every human being of every generation. We all must prepare for the coming of the LORD. In Isaiah's day the Jews needed to prepare for the LORD's coming to deliver them from Babylonian captivity. Whereas in John's day the people needed to prepare by doing exactly what he preached: repent and be baptised, for the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world was soon coming. Today, people need to prepare by staying alert and watching for the Lord's return. We must be thoughtful, living righteous, godly lives, looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ (Tit 2:12-13).

***Luke 3:3** He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*

***Luke 13:3** "I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."*

***Luke 24:46-47** He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

***Acts 2:38** Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

***Acts 3:19** Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

***2 Chr 7:14** If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

***Isa 55:7** Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*

***Ezek 18:21** "But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die.*

3. The third voice is God speaking to Isaiah directly, instructing the prophet to simply cry out (vv. 6-8). Somewhat puzzled, Isaiah asked what message he was to proclaim. In response the LORD instructed him to contrast the difference between people and God. Isaiah was to proclaim...
  - that people and their glory, like grass and beautiful flowers, wither and fade away quickly
  - that God and His Word are eternal, strong and unfailing

With so many problems confronting the people of Isaiah's day, the future looked bleak and hopeless. No person or body of leaders had the strength to save them from their enemies. But God could. All He had to do was speak the word of judgment and the very breath of His Word would blow away His people's oppressive enemies.

Whereas human life is ever so short compared to eternity, God and His Word stand forever (vv. 7-8). People age, deteriorate, fail, and die, but God's promises are eternal: sure, enduring, lasting forever. God's Word is imperishable, never withering. God's Word will be fulfilled, proven, verified through all the years of time, and also of eternity. Consequently, God's people can trust God's Word. Far from being hopeless, they can have great hope in the future, for God will fulfil His wonderful promises. He will deliver His people from their captivity, their oppressors, and their hardships. The great day is coming when God's people will be set free. No matter what they are facing, God's people — those who truly trust Him and His Word — will be set free to return and live in the promised land of God.

***Mat 5:18** I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter; not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.*

***Luke 21:33** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*

***1 Cor 1:9** God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.*

***James 1:10** But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower.*

***1 Pet 1:24** "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall."*

***Deu 7:9** Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.*

***1 Kng 8:56** Praise be to the Lord, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses.*

***Psa 78:39** He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.*

***Psa 90:5-6** Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death — they are like the new grass of the morning: In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered.*

***Psa 93:5** Your statutes, Lord, stand firm; holiness adorns your house for endless days.*

***Psa 103:14-16** For he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.*

***Psa 111:7** The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy.*

***Isa 51:12** I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men, the sons of men, who are but grass.*

**Isa 64:66** *All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*

**Ezek 12:25** *But I the Lord will speak what I will, and it shall be fulfilled without delay. For in your days, you rebellious house, I will fulfil whatever I say, declares the Sovereign Lord. ’’*

4. The fourth voice is that of righteous believers, all within Jerusalem (Zion) who truly believe and follow the LORD. They are to proclaim the *good news* of God's salvation, His deliverance (vv. 9-11). The message is so important that it must be shared with everyone. True believers must climb the mountains so their voices will be carried far and wide as they proclaim the *good news*. And they must not fear rejection of the message or persecution.

=> They must not be cowardly by shrinking back from proclaiming the *good news*.

=> They must not tone down or soften the demand of God for true belief and repentance in order to be saved and rescued by Him.

The *good news* is not to be twisted into a lie, making everyone acceptable to God. God declares that only those who genuinely believe and follow Him will be saved. Three facts about God are to be loudly proclaimed.

- a. The righteous believer is to fearlessly proclaim the coming of God to save His people from their captivity (v. 9). In Isaiah's day the LORD had come to His people in a marvellous way, rescuing them from the terrifying threat of the Assyrians (36:1 — 37:38). But here Isaiah is giving a wonderful promise to all of God's people. In the future, when they are held captive by oppressive enemies, the LORD will come to the rescue. He will step forth, appear in their midst, and deliver them. Based upon Scripture, Isaiah's prophecy has a fourfold application.

First, the LORD was promising to come to deliver the Jewish believers from the Babylonian captivity. Although this event lay out in the future, Isaiah foresaw God's wonderful deliverance of His people from their bondage (Isa 52:7-11; 2 Cor 6:17-18).

Second, the LORD was promising to come in the person of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Through Christ, God promised to rescue His people from Satan, setting them free from sin, death, and hell. Isaiah foresaw the salvation of God coming in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ (Isa 9:6-7).

Third, the coming of the Lord also refers to the second coming of Christ, the time when He will return to set up God's kingdom on earth. In that day the Lord will establish righteousness and justice on the earth. He will deliver His people from all the wickedness and injustices of evil people and nations (Isa 11:1-5; 16:5; Psa 67:4).

Fourth, the LORD was promising to come to rescue His people when they face a trial or threat from any enemy. His presence will guide His people through the trial, and



His strength will empower them to withstand all hardships. God also assures His people of victory. He will make them *more than conquerors*. They will be triumphant, even over death itself (Psa 44:5; Rom 8:35; 8:37; 1 Jn. 5:4-5; Heb 2:14-15).

- b. The righteous believer is to be fearless in proclaiming not only that the LORD is coming, but also that the LORD is coming in power. The LORD will raise His arm in a symbol of glorious power and strike down all the enemies who defy God and oppose His people. God's mighty power will rescue the people who truly believe and follow Him. As a mighty conqueror, the LORD will use His power to redeem His people. Most likely this is a picture of the future Messianic kingdom, the time when the Lord Jesus Christ will return to set up the kingdom of God on earth. In that day He will defeat all the enemies who stand opposed to God and His people. Through the exercise of His mighty power, the LORD will remove all unbelievers from the face of the earth. Only the righteous will be left as citizens of God's kingdom. The LORD will reward all His people with the blessings of God's kingdom. But the wicked will be rewarded with judgment (Isa 43:10; 62:6; 63:7; 2 Tim 1:7-10).
- c. The righteous believer is to fearlessly proclaim God's tender care for His people (v. 11). God is the shepherd of all who belong to Him (Psa 80:1). And Jesus Christ is the good shepherd (Jn. 10:11) (Mathew Henry. *Mathew Henry's Commentary*, Vol.4. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., n.d., p. 214). The LORD is not only the God of justice and judgment, but He is also the God of love, compassion, and mercy. As a shepherd cares for the sheep of His flock, so the LORD cares for His people. He gathers them in His arms and holds them close to His heart. He feeds them, providing nourishment and growth. And He leads them, protecting and showing them the way to go.

**John. 15:27** *And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.*

**Acts 4:20** *For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*

**Acts 5:20-21** *“Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.” At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin — the full assembly of the elders of Israel — and sent to the jail for the apostles.*

**Acts 5:32** *“We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”*

**Acts 22:14-15** *Then he said: ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you [Paul], to know his will, and see the Righteous One, and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.’*

**2 Cor 4:13** *It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak.*

**2 Tim 1:8** *So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.*

**Titus 2:15** *These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.*

**Isa 43:10** *“You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.”*

**Isa 63:7** *I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the lord has done for us — yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. ■*