

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH  
COMFORT FOR GOD'S PEOPLE:  
ISAIAH 40, 41



T. M. Moore

*A Scriptorium Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

Comfort for God's People: Isaiah 40, 41  
Copyright 2019 T. M. and Susie Moore  
Susie Moore, Editing and Finishing  
The Fellowship of Ailbe  
[www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org)

*Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. All psalms for singing adapted from The Ailbe Psalter. All quotations from Church Fathers from Ancient Christian Commentary Series IV a and b: John, edited by Joel C. Elowsky, General Editor Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006. Verse translation of John by T. M. Moore.*

## Introduction to *Isaiah 40, 41*

To this point, Isaiah has been focusing on contemporary events, or those shortly to occur. He is building a case for trusting the Lord. Even though the people of Judah and Jerusalem must undergo discipline at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, God has not forsaken them. He Who acted according to His Word in rescuing them from Assyria will fulfill all His precious and very great promises to them.

Judgment is coming, but God's people must not prepare for it by resorting to vain idols or military might. They must look to God, cling to His promises, hope in His Word, and wait for the promised day of restoration, when they will proclaim God's redemption to the world. In Isaiah 40 and 41, the prophet makes a turn toward a more distant future, when God will redeem His people and all creation through the work of that Servant Whom we will meet in the next sections.

Please visit our website, [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org), to discover the many other resources available to serve your needs. The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Visit our website also to subscribe to our worldview study *ReVision* and our devotional newsletter *Crosfigell*.

If you find these studies, or any of our other resources helpful, we hope you will consider making a contribution to help support our work. You can do so by using the donate button at the website or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

T. M. Moore, Principal  
[tmmoore@ailbe.org](mailto:tmmoore@ailbe.org)

## 1 Coming Glory

*Pray Psalm 126.4.*

Bring back our captivity, O LORD,  
As the streams in the South.

*Read Isaiah 40.1-5.*

*Reflect.*

1. Chapters 40 and 41 open with a word of comfort. Why should God's people take comfort?
2. What is the sense of the "straightening" and "leveling" mentioned in these verses?

*Meditate.*

Now that Israel's riches have been exposed to the Babylonians, it will not be many years before they come calling, and Jerusalem will fall to Nebuchadnezzar. But that's not God's last word to His people. The remaining chapters of the book of Isaiah (40-66) are comprised of precious and very great promises of redemption and restoration – a salvation so great that it embraces even the Gentiles and extends beyond time.

This part of Isaiah's prophecy thus begins with a word of comfort. Though they will shortly be carried away into captivity to Babylon, the people should take comfort, because God is going to bring them forgiveness and peace (v. 2), once His wrath against them is satisfied (v. 3). All this has historical significance for the three generations that would succeed Isaiah. But its deeper significance reaches far beyond that.

Verse 3 launches us beyond the scope of the Old Testament to the time of John the Baptist, who identified himself with this prophecy (cf. Jn. 1.19-23). A day of leveling and straightening is coming, to make access to the Lord easy for all who will come to Him (vv. 3, 4). But men must make preparation for meeting the Lord (v. 3), and John would explain to them how (Lk. 3.1-18).

The "highway for our God" is the route by which He will come to His people and His people will come to Him. Jesus is that Highway (Jn. 14.6), and in His presence, the glory of the Lord is revealed (v. 5; cf. Jn. 1.14) and the proclamation of that glory will reach to "all flesh" (v. 5). The God Who humbled Sennacherib, healed Hezekiah, and dialed back the sundial has spoken it. Surely it will come to pass.

"Comfort, yes, comfort My people!"

*Prepare.*

1. How would you describe the comfort we know in the forgiveness and peace of God? How can that comfort sustain us during times of trial (such as being carried away to Babylon)?
2. What is the sense of this large-scale smoothing of the hilly terrain around Jerusalem, proclaimed in verses 3 and 4?
3. What is the glory of the Lord? How is that glory made known to "all flesh"?

*He [Christ] was a reproach but at the same time also the majesty of the Lord, as it is written, "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh together shall see the salvation of God." What had he lost if he had nothing less? He had neither comeliness nor beauty, but he had not ceased to be the power of God. He appeared a man, but the divine majesty and glory of the Father shone on earth. Ambrose of Milan (333-397 AD), Letter 27*

*Show me Your glory, O Lord! And let Your glory show through me today as I...*

*Pray Psalm 126.*

Use this psalm to seek a vision of the promised restoration of the Lord. Though we're not there now, we must "sow" toward that day. Commit yourself to sowing by prayer, obedience, and witness.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 126** (*Truro: Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*)

When God restored our fortunes all, we were like those who sweetly dream.  
Our mouths with joy and laughter filled, made Him our constant song and theme.

Then the astonished nations said, "The Lord has done great things for them!"  
Indeed, great things our God has done, Whose Name we praise, Amen, Amen!

Restore our fortunes, Lord our King! Let grace like flowing streams prevail.  
All they with tears of joy shall sing who sow while yet they weep and wail.

They who in tears of sorrow sow, and cast their seed on every hand,  
with joy shall reach their heav'nly home, and bring the harvest of their land.

## 2 Proclaim the News!

*Pray Psalm 144.1, 2.*

Blessed be the LORD my Rock,  
Who trains my hands for war,  
And my fingers for battle—  
My lovingkindness and my fortress,  
My high tower and my deliverer,  
My shield and *the One* in whom I take refuge,  
Who subdues my people under me.

*Read Isaiah 40.6-11.*

*Reflect.*

1. God calls His people to cry out from their comfort. What message do the people of God cry?
2. Who is the Lord's "arm" and what "rule" does He establish? Where do believers fit in that scenario?

*Meditate.*

These verses are filled with energy and anticipation! The Lord is coming! Those who trust in the arm of flesh will wither before the powerful Word of God and His Right Arm, Who rules His Kingdom for His glory! The Breath of the Lord, which blew over the armies of Sennacherib, will blow across the world, bringing Good News of the Kingdom of God, His work on behalf of His people, and His coming to shepherd and carry His flock!

Those who know the comfort of the Lord, and His presence and glory, must not simply wallow in that comfort. We are a people with a mission, and the mission is to "Cry out!" the Good News of the rule of God and His mighty Right Arm. In this we do not trust our own strength (vv. 6, 7), because our own strength will fail us every time. We trust the unfailing, never-fading Word of God. He has appointed us His witnesses and sent us, like Jesus (Jn. 20.21), to proclaim the Good News of Christ and His Kingdom.

We must not be afraid (v. 9). Rather, let us draw on the Lord's strength and begin our witness by encouraging one another to see Jesus and draw near to Him (v. 9).

Then, resting in the shepherding care of our Good Shepherd, let us lean on the strong hand and mighty arm of the Lord to tell the world – everyone in our Personal Mission Field – that God's work of salvation is finished, He is coming to rule, and He welcomes, as a Shepherd, all who come to Him in obedient faith. We must proclaim to the world that the comfort, forgiveness, and peace of the Lord can be theirs.

I know of few passages in the Old Testament that are more hopeful, more energizing, or more specific in their intent – and yet more routinely ignored – than these amazing verses from the pen of Isaiah. The comfort and peace and strength of the Lord are for those who receive and act on them. And they are all of a piece: you will not long know the Lord's comfort if you choose only to indulge it for yourself, rather than to go forth from it with His Good News on your lips.

*Prepare.*

1. Does the comfort of the Lord lead to bold witness-bearing on your part? How could that become a more consistent part of your walk with Jesus?
2. We are called daily to "Behold your God!" because, unless we *see* Jesus, we will have little incentive to

proclaim Him. Explain.

3. Verse 9 suggests that believers should encourage one another in that mission. Whom will you encourage in their witness for Christ in the week ahead?

*Ascend this mountain ... not with physical steps but with more exalted deeds. Follow Christ so that you might be a mountain yourself, for there are mountains surrounding him. Look in the Gospel, and you will find that only the disciples went up the mountain with the Lord. Ambrose of Milan (333-397 AD), Expositions on the Gospel of Luke 5.41*

*Guide me in serving You this day, O Lord, that I might obey Your every command and...*

*Pray Psalm 144.*

Our battles as Christians are primarily spiritual, and the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, is our primary weapon in banishing darkness and proclaiming the Light of the Lord. Ask the Lord to strengthen you for your battles today, and to prepare you to share the Good News of Jesus.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 144** (*Tidings: O Zion, Haste, Your Mission High Fulfilling*)

Blest be the Lord, Who trains my hands for battle;  
He is my Rock, my steadfast love and strength!  
He is my shield; no foe can shake or rattle;  
He will subdue them all to me at length.

*Refrain v. 15*

Happy are they on whom blessings fall!  
Blessed are the people who on Jesus' mercy call!

Lord, who are we, that You regard and love us?  
Why should You care for our poor sinful plight?  
We are but breath; You dwell on high above us;  
our days like shadows pass before Your light.

*Refrain*

Bow down the heav'ns, come down and touch the mountains.  
Flash forth like lightning; scatter all Your foes!  
Send out Your arrows, send them out to rout them;  
stretch forth Your hand and save us from all woes!

*Refrain*

From every foe and every lie deliver!  
Then will we sing new songs unto Your praise.  
Rescue Your servants, who are Yours forever;  
grant us deliv'rance by Your hand always.

*Refrain*

Bless, Lord, our children, strengthen them forever.  
All our provision, day by day supply.  
Bless our endeavors; from distress deliver.  
Keep us from harm and all distressing cries.

*Refrain*

### 3 Behold Your God!

*Pray Psalm 79.8, 9.*

Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us!  
Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us,  
For we have been brought very low.  
Help us, O God of our salvation,  
For the glory of Your name;  
And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins,  
For Your name's sake!

*Read Isaiah 40.12-31.*

*Reflect.*

1. How does the Lord use creation and culture to help us think about His greatness?
2. How should we be encouraged by the fact that God is so overwhelmingly great?

*Meditate.*

At this strategic turning point in Isaiah's prophecy, the Lord presents Himself as the incomparable God.

God summons all the scope and majesty of creation and culture as measuring sticks of His greatness and power, and yet He is far beyond them all. He takes no advice or counsel from anyone, for He knows everything and understands all truth (vv. 12-14). All the nations taken together are a drop in the bucket, a mite of dust on a scale, compared to the God of Jacob. Indeed, they are nothing before the Lord of glory (vv. 15-17).

Compared to God, the idols men make are a joke (vv. 18-20) – the product of men's puny imaginations and vain labors. God rules all things, every man and his silly idols, every nation, all the heavens, every prince and ruler and judge throughout all the earth (vv. 21-23). Their fates are in His hands, to do with as He pleases (v. 24).

Look at the Lord! Cities of Judah, behold your God! He rules the cosmos by His Word and strength (vv. 25, 26). Is it conceivable that a single Word of His mouth should ever fail?

The people of Jerusalem were discouraged, and feeling forgotten and alone (v. 27). They had escaped Sennacherib, but they knew Nebuchadnezzar was coming. Isaiah's message to them was, "Behold your God!" (v. 9) He is all their hope, and all the hope they needed. Who is like God? Who can resist whatever He might wish to do? His people should know that He intends to be strong for His weak people, to give strength to their youth, and to cause them to rise with the wings of eagles above every trial and tribulation to walk with Him in His strength (vv. 28-31).

These words are so bold, refreshing, and encouraging. Yet only "those who wait on the LORD" (v. 31) can expect to realize the benefit of His great salvation. We wait on the Lord when we look to Jesus, meditating on His greatness and glory, and live boldly and courageously toward the promises of His Word.

*Prepare.*

1. What situations or trials are threatening to overwhelm you today? Look to our incomparable God! Look to Jesus! What does He promise you in these verses?

2. God reveals Himself through creation and culture, but we need the light of His Word to understand His revelation there. What does this passage teach us about how we should view the world and its cultures?

3. Verse 21 can be paraphrased, "How many times do I have to tell you?" How does God expect us to respond to what He reveals about Himself? What does it mean to wait upon the Lord?

*The wonder of God is not only found rightly in the magnificent work he did in the creation. For he has done nothing less than save the inhabitants of the earth, delivering the human race from death and destruction and the devil's snare. For he has condemned the sin that had become master through our sins, so that he has justified through faith those who are able to be with him. He became for us righteousness and redemption and sanctification before God the Father. Cyril of Alexandria (375-444 AD), Commentary on Isaiah 3.5.41.2*

*Lord, today I will have many opportunities to honor Your Name. Help me to prepare for them, so that...*

*Pray Psalm 79.*

Whatever troubles or oppresses us, and whatever vexes our churches, God is greater, and He can deliver. Offer your trials and challenges to the Lord in prayer.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 79** (*Passion Chorale: O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*)

O God the nations all Your inheritance have spoiled!  
Your City have they ruined, Your temple they have soiled!  
Your servants' bodies all to the birds of heav'n are thrown;  
The flesh of all Your faithful the jaws of beasts now own.

The blood of faithful servants like water flows around;  
And none are there Your saints to commit into the ground.  
Our neighbors mock and scorn us: How long, O Lord, how long?  
How long will You be angry and scorn our mournful song?

Pour out, O Lord, Your wrath on all who deny Your Name;  
Who trust You not nor seek You, bring down to deepest shame!  
For they have with great rancor Your precious saints devoured;  
Lay waste their habitation at this late dreadful hour.

Why should the nations mock and say, "Where now is their God?"  
Let there be known among them harsh vengeance for our blood!  
Hear, Lord, our groans and sighing; preserve us by Your pow'r.  
For we are fairly dying each day and hour by hour.

Reproach those who reproach us with judgment sevenfold!  
Let thanks and praise to You by Your precious flock be told.  
We are Your sheep, O Savior, we thank You all our days.  
Look on us with Your favor as we declare Your praise.

## 4 Our “With Us” God

*Pray Psalm 146.1, 2.*

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

While I live I will praise the LORD;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

*Read Isaiah 41.1-10.*

*Reflect.*

1. A great power is coming against Israel from the east. But why should the people not be afraid?
2. On what basis does God look favorably upon Israel?

*Meditate.*

God calls all the nations along the coast, and by implications, all those between Babylon and the coast, to prepare for judgment (v. 1). He is raising up a powerful nation “from the east” (v. 2), and is giving him the rule of all these nations (vv. 2, 3). But it is God Who has done this, and is without beginning or end (v. 4).

How shall the coastlands prepare for this coming judgment? They become fearful (v. 5), seek alliances with neighboring nations (v. 6), polish up their golden idols (v. 7), and forge iron weapons (v. 7). But that last word, *totter*, suggests powerfully that all these efforts to *escape* judgment will avail not a whit.

What about Israel? How should Israel prepare for the coming judgment? By knowing the Lord, looking to Him, and drawing on His strength (vv. 8-10). They should not seek to escape the coming judgment, but to endure it, and grow through it (cf. Jeremiah 29.4-11), so that, when the remnant returns – as God had promised they would – they will be able to resume His work with new vigor and vision.

It's great being friends with God (v. 8).

*Prepare.*

1. Should Christians expect to know times of judgment and suffering? Why? How can we prepare for these? How can we make sure that we grow through them?
2. In this passage, God reminds His people of His sovereign power (vv. 1-7) and of His unfathomable grace and goodness (vv. 6-10). Why is it good for us to be reminded of these?
3. How do you expect the strength and help of God to uphold you today (v. 10)? Give thanks in advance for what you anticipate God will be doing in your life.

*He adds that he is to strengthen and sustain those undergoing afflictions at the hands of those [who oppose God] with the vision of the goal that awaits them. He encourages with good news of God speaking to you without deceit: “I am the Lord and God, and I strengthen your right arm,” and I say to you, “Do not fear, I will help you.” Eusebius of Caesarea (260-340 AD), Commentary on Isaiah 2.20*

*Lord, You have promised to be with me; help me to be with You throughout this day, so that I...*

*Pray Psalm 146.*

Enumerate with rejoicing the many reasons you have to bless God, and not to fear. Commit yourself to seeking His eternal Kingdom more earnestly today.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 146** (*Hallelujah! What a Savior: Man of Sorrows*)

Praise the Lord, my soul, give praise! While I live, His Name I'll raise,  
and exalt Him all my days – God forever reigns in Zion!

Trust we not in prince or man – no salvation's in their hand.  
Death shall take them, breath and plans – God forever reigns in Zion!

Blessed are they whose hope resides in the Lord, Christ at His side.  
By Him heav'n and earth abide – God forever reigns in Zion!

He is faithful evermore; He gives justice to the poor,  
Feeds the hungry from His store – God forever reigns in Zion!

Jesus sets the pris'ner free, heals blind eyes that they may see,  
lifts those burdened painfully – God forever reigns in Zion!

He the righteous loves the best; wand'ers in His grace are blessed;  
Needy ones in Him find rest – God forever reigns in Zion!

But the wicked who defame His eternal blessèd Name,  
Them He brings to ruin and shame – God forever reigns in Zion!

## 5 Roles Reversed

*Pray Psalm 72:18, 19.*

Blessed *be* the LORD God, the God of Israel,  
Who only does wondrous things!  
And blessed *be* His glorious name forever!  
And let the whole earth be filled *with* His glory.  
Amen and Amen.

*Read Isaiah 41:11-20.*

*Reflect.*

1. Two role reversals are indicated in this passage. Can you identify them?
2. How many promises are attached to the word “I” in these verses?

*Meditate.*

Isaiah unpacks more of the specifics of what God promised in verse 10, how He will strengthen and help and uphold His people.

First, He will put to shame and destroy all those powerful enemies which now the people fear (vv. 11, 12). He will shame them, disgrace them, make them as nothing, and cause them to be no more. And while those enemies yet exist and bring such hardship on His people, God will hold their hand and help them through it (v. 13). This promise has short-term fulfillment in the destruction of Babylon by the Persians, and the subsequent return of Israel to the land of promise. But its longer-term focus is on the destruction of the enemy of our souls by the cross of Jesus. This passage is pointing toward Isaiah 53, and beyond that to the coming eternal King (Is. 9:1-7).

A great role reversal is indicated in verses 14-16. Those who “threshed” the people of God, the people of God will “thresh” and “winnow” in the days to come. Because this has no direct temporal fulfillment, it can only refer to the time of harvest when the Gospel brings fruit and judgment to the field of the world. This is the second way God intends to help His people, when He has given them the means, through the Gospel, to thresh and winnow the world. He promises that they will rejoice to take up this work, and will glorify God in it (v. 16).

Third, God promises to make those who are now impoverished and destitute rich in the blessings and bounty of His goodness (vv. 17-20). From rags to riches, poverty to prosperity, God will restore His blessings and promises to His people by His “hand” (v. 20). Here again, the time of the Gospel is in view, and all these material blessings stand for the unspeakable riches of blessing and salvation which are ours in Christ because of what God has done.

God’s people are called to “see and know, and consider and understand together” (v. 20), that they might comfort and encourage one another in the precious and very great promises of God.

*Prepare.*

1. In what ways is the proclamation of the Gospel like threshing and winnowing?
2. How do the promises God made to Israel in these verses apply to us as followers of Jesus?
3. How should Christians “see and know, and consider and understand together” the precious and very great

promises of God?

*"I have placed you like a new threshing wagon [sledge] with jagged wheels." ... We can also say that the person of the church is in a new wagon with the jagged wheels of the preaching of the gospel, which cannot be worked at all in the old way of the letter but in the new way of the Spirit, and which wears away the hardest hearts of unbelievers, separating the wheat from the chaff.*  
Jerome (347-420 AD), *Commentary on Isaiah 12.4*

*You have sent me to the world to thresh and winnow, Lord, and promised that You will be with me. So today, help me to...*

*Pray Psalm 72.*

A psalm of David (v. 20) for his son, Solomon (superscription), this psalm anticipates the coming of Christ and His Kingdom. Give thanks for the many Kingdom promises mentioned in this psalm. Commit yourself before the Lord to seeking these promises today.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 72** (*Martyrdom: Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed*)

O give the King Your judgment, Lord, and righteousness Your Son;  
and let Him judge by Your good Word the need of every one.

Let now the mountains ring with peace, the hills in righteousness.  
Let justice rise, oppression cease, and all the needy bless.

Let nations fear You while the sun and moon endure on high;  
refresh, renew us, every one, like sweet rain falling from the sky.

Let righteousness abundant be where Jesus' reign endures;  
Let peace increase from sea to sea 'til moonlight shall be no more.

And let the Righteous rule the earth, and let His foes bow low;  
Let nations praise His matchless worth, and all His bidding do.

The Lord the needy rescues when he cries to Him for grace;  
All they who suffer violence find mercy before His face.

Let Christ be praised and all the gold of Sheba be His right;  
Let blessings to His Name be told, and prayers made both day and night.

And let the earth abound with grain, let fields His fame proclaim;  
and may our King forever reign and nations bless His great Name.

Now bless the God of Israel Who wondrous works performs.  
And bless His Name, His glory tell both now and forever more!

## 6 The Futility of Idols

*Pray Psalm 115.1.*

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,  
But to Your name give glory,  
Because of Your mercy,  
Because of Your truth.

*Read Isaiah 41.21-29.*

*Reflect.*

1. Why are idols not to be trusted?
2. Why do you suppose Israel trusted in idols rather than in God?

*Meditate.*

In this passage we see God taunting the idols Israel had been clinging to. What could they do? Nothing. What had they foretold? Nothing. Would the idols of Israel and the nations prevent God from bringing His judgment on them all? Not a chance.

God's Word to Israel "from the beginning" (v. 26) has been reliable and true. That would continue to be the case, both in the coming of judgment and of "one who brings good tidings" (v. 27).

Clearly there was no "case" (v. 21) for clinging to idols, but sinful people do dumb things. When we trust in anything or anyone rather than the Lord, we're setting ourselves up for disappointment. Things and circumstances can become idols when we focus on them and strive too hard to maintain them, forgetting that only the Lord provides for our needs and keeps us in His care.

Things and circumstances don't have to become idols. But when we sense they have, when we're looking to these rather than to God and His Word for our happiness and wellbeing, it's time to recognize the futility of all idols, and return to the Lord in repentance and faith.

*Prepare.*

1. How can you know when something has become an idol?
2. What does it mean to trust the Lord? How do you practice trusting Him?
3. Suggest some ways you can enjoy things and circumstances as gifts from God, without allowing them to become idols.

*It is in a perfectly appropriate way that he both shows the stupid nature of the idols and accuses of impiety those who have fashioned them. For if the idols are inanimate, their makers are full of stupidity and impiety.* Theodoret of Cyr (393-466 AD), *Commentary on Isaiah 12.41.29*

*Lord, let there be no idols in my life, but let me trust always in You by...*

*Pray Psalm 115.*

Renew your only in the Lord as you pray this psalm. Recall the many ways He has blessed you, and commit yourself to being a good steward of the opportunities He puts before you today.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 115** (*Plainfield: Nothing But the Blood of Jesus*)

Not to us, O God, not us, but unto Your Name give glory!  
For Your love and faithfulness, ever to Your Name be glory!  
Why should the nations cry, "Where is their God on high?"  
You rule us, Lord, on high – ever to Your Name be glory!

Idols made by men's own hand – ever to Your Name be glory –  
See nor hear nor understand – ever to Your Name be glory.  
They neither feel nor walk, nor can they speak or talk;  
all those who serve them fall – but unto Your Name be glory!

All who trust in Jesus yield – ever to His Name be glory –  
Find in Him their help and shield – ever to Your Name be glory!  
O Israel, trust the Lord! He helps us evermore!  
Fear Him obey His Word – ever to Your Name be glory!

Blessings from our gracious Lord – ever to Your Name be glory –  
Will attend us evermore – ever to Your Name be glory!  
Bless all who fear You, Lord, all who obey Your Word,  
All who Your Name adore – ever to Your Name be glory!

Grant us, Savior, great increase – ever to Your Name be glory!  
Bless us with eternal peace – ever to Your Name be glory!  
Heaven and earth are Yours; let every soul adore  
and bless You evermore – ever to Your Name be glory!

## 7 God Who Comforts and Redeems

*Pray Psalm 81.1, 2.*

Sing aloud to God our strength;  
Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob.  
Raise a song and strike the timbrel,  
The pleasant harp with the lute.

*Review Isaiah chapters 40, 41.*

*Reflect.*

1. How many different ways does God emphasize the reliability of His Word in these two chapters?
2. Why does God put so much emphasis on His sovereignty in Isaiah 40 and 41?

*Meditate.*

These chapters are designed to point Israel beyond her current difficulties, and those which are shortly to befall her, to a coming day of redemption, comfort, prosperity, and conquest in the Name of the Lord. In this part of Isaiah's book, he is refocusing the people of Judah and Jerusalem from the *immediate* implications of God's Word to the *longer term* blessings, yet to be revealed.

The emotions in these two chapters range from gentle and comforting to outraged and indignant. God is not indifferent, either to the suffering of His people or to their disregard of His covenant and Word. The underlying affection of these chapters is hope – hope in a coming new day, when God and His people will be fully reconciled and restored to one another. And this is just the prelude to the remaining chapters of this magnificent book.

“Don't worry about the nations who threaten you,” God seems to be saying. “They are My servants, doing My bidding, and when I'm finished with them, I will set them all aside.” The focus of all God's sovereign work on earth is the salvation of His people for the glory of His Name. He uses nations according to His purposes, not overlooking their sinful rebellion, but not denying their usefulness for His long-term purposes.

While the nations and people of Judah were busy trying to decide which false deities to placate and how to assemble enough weapons to defeat their enemies, God stands in the midst of them, in the person of Isaiah, and commands them to remember His greatness. We are so short-sighted sometimes! A friend once reminded me that a penny is a very small thing, until you hold it right up against your eye. Then it can seem like all the world. The people of God had filled their line of sight with the looming threats of Assyria and Babylon. But as God had disposed of the one, He would likewise deal with the other, when His purpose for Babylon was complete.

The people should look to God, trust in His Word, rely on His ancient covenant and promises, repent of their rebellious ways, and not be afraid of what they are about to endure. He will be with them, and He will return them to their place in His promised land, with blessings greater than they can imagine, and power beyond what they'd ever known before.

How all this takes place will be the subject of the remaining chapters of the book of Isaiah.

*Prepare.*

1. How can you remind yourself throughout the day that God is sovereign and faithful? Why should you do

so?

2. We are to fear neither men nor our circumstances, but God only. What does it mean to fear God? Why is fearing Him so important to serving Him well?

3. What's your primary takeaway from Isaiah 40, 41?

*For to none other than to God does it belong to implant courage in the fearful, saying to the fainthearted, "Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed," as says the psalmist, "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." Gregory of Nyssa (335-394 AD), Commentary on Isaiah 2.20*

*Today, Lord, help me to be alert to all the evidence of Your sovereign power and care, so that I...*

*Pray Psalm 81.*

This psalm recalls God's redemption of His people and His calling of them to be a holy people before Him. Use it to recall and give thanks for your own salvation and for the daily opportunities you have for serving the Lord.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 81** (*St. Petersburg: My Hope is Built on Nothing Less*)

O sing for joy to Jesus our strength; to Jacob's great God shout joyfully at length!  
And strike the drum, and offer a song; all instruments, your glad music prolong.  
"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

Let every kind of instrument play to celebrate God's deliverance today.  
It is His statute and His command to worship and praise all over the land.  
"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

Declare His mercy, tell of His grace; our enemies flee the look of His face.  
In mighty deeds strong witness He gave, and powerfully did His chosen ones save.  
"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

God set us free from bondage to sin and graciously brought us near Him again;  
He rescued us whenever we cried and often our falt'ring confidence tried:  
"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

"Let no false gods among you be found; but scatter their altars over the ground.  
Pursue not wealth, nor leisure nor fame, but worship the Savior's glorious Name:  
O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

For You are God, Your Name is the Lord, who faithfully keeps His covenant Word,  
Who rescued us from bondage and pride; our mouths He would fill, we open them wide.  
"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

"My people would not listen to Me, but hardened their hearts most hideously;  
I cursed them for their hard-hearted ways to wander in darkness all of their days:  
O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

Now let us all abandon our ways and listen to God, and offer Him praise!  
Our foes He will so quickly subdue, extending His hand to save and renew.  
"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

*Comfort for God's People: Isaiah 40, 41*

Then even those despising the Lord would falsely obey and follow His Word;  
In vain they seem to follow His way, yet judgment awaits on God's chosen day.  
"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

The finest foods for us He will buy, and furnish us an abundant supply;  
How sweet our lives can be in the Lord, when only we heed His glorious Word.  
"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

*Comfort for God's People: Isaiah 40, 41*

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What *comfort* does God offer His people in Isaiah 40 and 41? When should they expect this comfort?
2. As they are awaiting this comfort, what should God's people do?
3. What should they *not* do, while waiting for God to fulfill His promises?
4. What comfort does God offer to us, His people today? What should we be doing as we wait for the full realization of that comfort?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from Isaiah 40 and 41? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.