Session 13 The Forerunner Message in Isaiah 40

1. Introduction
   1. The context of this message is probably the Assyrian invasion of Judah around 701 BC. The Assyrian empire was the superpower of that day. Some see this as referring to the Babylon crisis. However, the promises in 40:1-2, 5 did not occur following the Babylon captivity. Isaiah gave Judah direction on how to respond to God in context to an international and national crisis.
   2. Outline for Isaiah 40

40:1-2 The call to comfort Jerusalem  
40:3-5 The call to prepare the way of the Lord  
40:6-8 God’s plans, purposes, and promises will last forever   
40:9-11 The mighty Warrior is a tender Shepherd  
40:12-20 The Lord has all power and wisdom   
40:21-26 The Lord has power over all the nations   
40:27-31 Practical application: receiving strength

* 1. Isaiah 40 has specific application to the time when Judah faced the Assyrian invasion (Isa. 36-37), when John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord, when the body of Christ has faced persecution throughout history, and when the Antichrist assaults Israel and the nations (Rev. 12-13).
  2. Isaiah issued a twofold call to the Lord’s messengers to comfort to Jerusalem (40:1-2) and to prepare the way of the Lord or to “build a spiritual highway for the Lord” by preparing people spiritually for the coming of the Lord (40:3-5). This twofold “messenger calling” is for any who will answer it.
     1. The Holy Spirit is stirring people in this hour to answer the call to comfort Jerusalem and to prepare the way of the Lord by “building a spiritual highway” for the Lord.
     2. The primary application of this calling is for messengers in the generation the Lord returns. In that time, the Antichrist will be oppressing the nations and seeking to destroy Israel.
  3. The Lord’s messengers are exhorted to “cry out” four times in this chapter (40:2, 3, 6, 9). Ezekiel pointed out the responsibility to speak boldly after being commissioned to do so (Ezek. 33:1-10).

7“…I have made you [Ezekiel] a watchman [messenger]…you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me. 8When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you shall surely die!’ and   
you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. 9Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way,   
and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. (Ezek. 33:6-9)

1. messenger call #1—to comfort Jerusalem (Isa. 40:1-2)
   1. The Lord’s messengers are mandated to speak a message of God’s comfort to Jerusalem (40:1-2).

1“Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” Says your God. 2“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.” (Isa. 40:1-2)

* 1. ***Speak comfort***: The Lord commanded His messengers to comfort or strengthen Jerusalem (40:1).
     1. There are two groups being addressed in Isaiah 40:1. The Lord commands the global body of Christ who love and listen to God (yet who are distinct from Jerusalem) to give a message of comfort to a group referred to as “My people Jerusalem” (who live in Jerusalem). The first group includes Gentiles believers speaking an end-time message of comfort to Jerusalem.
     2. We see intensity and urgency in Isaiah’s double imperative—“comfort, yes, comfort.”
     3. Isaiah comforted Israel with the truths found in 40:2, 5, 10-11, 27-31. The full comfort of salvation is anchored in seeing the millennial and eternal aspects of the biblical narrative. This is the primary place of comfort to Israel, the Church, and the nations.
     4. Paul comforted people with the truth of Jesus’ return and the resurrection (1 Thes. 4:16-18).

16For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven…and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17Then we who are alive…shall be caught up with them…to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thes. 4:16-18)

* + 1. Isaiah 40 is an exhortation to comfort and prepare people for the Lord by telling the whole story. It reveals the end of the story, our ministry focus, and God’s character and power.
  1. God called Gentile believers in the ends of the world and in the chief of nations to comfort Israel. The “messenger mandate” to comfort Jerusalem is given to believers in the ends of the earth. Will you answer this call to proclaim God’s message to Jerusalem (the daughter of Zion)?

11Indeed the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the world: “Say to the daughter of Zion,   
‘Surely your salvation is coming; behold, His reward is with Him…’” (Isa. 62:11)

* + 1. The global body of Christ is to comfort and strengthen Jerusalem. They are to sing, boldly shout, and declare God’s message of the salvation of Israel (Jer. 31:7-10). This message will be challenging to speak in context to the anti-Semitism in the end times. Many Gentile believers love Jesus, but are not yet connected to the biblical mandate to comfort Jerusalem.

7Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, “O Lord, save Your people, the remnant of Israel!”…10Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, “He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock.” (Jer. 31:7-10)

* + 1. God is calling anyone who will answer the call to be a messenger to comfort Israel.
    2. ***Her warfare is ended***: Comfort Jerusalem, assuring her that her military conflict will end.   
       This will only be fulfilled when Jesus returns and puts an end to warfare in the earth (2:4). Jerusalem’s warfare did not end after the Jewish exiles returned from the Babylonian captivity in 538 BC. Her warfare has continued—Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70 and there have been attacks against Israel throughout history and even more will come by the Antichrist.

4He [Jesus] shall judge between the nations…they shall beat their swords into plowshares, …nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.   
(Isa. 2:4)

* + 1. ***Her iniquity is pardoned***: Comfort Jerusalem by crying out to her that her sin is forgiven.   
       The Lord can only give a full pardon to Jerusalem and others because Jesus took the penalty for our sin by shedding His own blood and in bearing the wrath of God on the cross (Isa. 53).
    2. ***Double portion***: Jerusalem will receive a double portion of grace and honor in the Millennium (61:7). Jesus will sit on His throne, and the New Jerusalem will descend there.

7Instead of your shame you shall have double honor …they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be theirs. (Isa. 61:7)

* + - 1. The glory of God will be openly manifested in Jerusalem (60:1-3).

1Arise, shine; for…the glory of the Lord is risen upon you [Jerusalem]. 2For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth…His glory will be seen upon you. 3The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. (Isa. 60:1-3)

* + - 1. Jerusalem will be praised by all nations as the joy of the earth (Isa. 62:7). Jerusalem will be the city that most people in the nations will visit with great joy.

7And give Him no rest till He establishes…Jerusalem a praise in the earth. (Isa. 62:7)

* + - 1. Mount Zion or Jerusalem will be the joy of the earth (Ps. 48:1-2).

2…the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion…the city of the great King. (Ps. 48:2)

1. messenger call #2—The call to prepare the way of the Lord (isa. 40:3-5)
   1. The Lord’s messengers will comfort Jerusalem (40:1).

3The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; 5the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together…” (Isa. 40:3-5)

* 1. A mysterious call went forth to prepare a highway in the desert for the Lord to come to Jerusalem (40:3-4). In the ancient world, a city would build a special road to welcome a visiting king. The desert was a place where there were many rough places and obstacles in building such a highway.
     1. It was a bit mysterious—why would the Creator need people to remove obstacles in order to build a special highway for Him? There are no obstacles that can stop Him (40:12-26).
     2. The prophecy of the Lord building a “highway” is unique to Isaiah. He made at least seven references to this millennial highway (Isa. 11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 40:3; 49:11; 57:14; 62:10).
  2. ***Highway for God****:* It’s a highway “for God” or one that serves God’s purposes by preparing people either to walk with God spiritually (before Jesus’ second coming) or to come to Him in Jerusalem physically (after Jesus’ second coming). The main idea here is not in building a physical highway for Jesus’ procession into Jerusalem. He comes up to Jerusalem through Bozrah (Isa. 63:1-6).
     1. ***A physical highway***: After Jesus returns, He will cause a physical highway to Jerusalem to   
        be built. This highway will serve different purposes such as facilitating Jewish refugees in returning to Israel, Gentiles making pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Isa. 2:3; Zech. 14:16-19), and helping people who travel from Egypt to Assyria to serve the Lord together (Isa. 19:23). The bowl judgments (earthquakes, large hailstones, etc.) will destroy many roads to Israel.
     2. ***A spiritual highway***: Before Jesus’ return, the Holy Spirit will raise up messengers who will prepare people spiritually for His coming by equipping them to “walk with God” (40:3-5).

3Can two walk together, unless they are agreed? (Amos 3:3)

* + - 1. A basic kingdom principle is that God releases His power through people who walk in agreement with His values and plans—they participate in releasing His glory, instead of drawing back in compromise, fear, or offense.
      2. The forerunner message prepares people to walk in agreement with the Lord’s values and plans so that they can participate with Him in releasing His glory in context to the unique dynamics of the generation the Lord returns.
  1. The call to prepare people spiritually to receive the Lord by making straight a “spiritual highway of truth” for God is applicable at His first and second comings. This includes calling people to repent and agree with God’s values and plan.

“Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” (Isa. 40:3)

* + 1. John the Baptist prepared people spiritually for Jesus’ coming (Lk. 3). There are two passages that prophesied his ministry—Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 (Mk. 1:2-3).
    2. John the Baptist made straight a “spiritual highway of truth” by preaching repentance and preparing people for God. He did not prepare a “physical” highway. He focused on changing people, not the topography to build a physical highway
    3. After Jesus returns, a physical highway will be built (Isa. 11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 40:3; 57:14; 62:10). The physical highway is not the main emphasis in 40:3-4.
  1. ***The message of John the Baptist***: John modeled the way to prepare a spiritual highway for the Lord. He emphasized a twofold message—calling people to *repent* (to agree with God’s values)   
     and announcing *Jesus’ coming* (to agree with God’s plans that are associated with Jesus’ coming).

3And he went…preaching a baptism of repentance…4as it is written in…Isaiah…saying:   
“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight. 5Every valley shall be filled and every mountain…brought low; the crooked places   
shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth; 6and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’” (Lk. 3:3-6)

* + 1. It is a *highway of purity* (God’s values) and a *highway of understanding* (God’s plans).
    2. We know that 40:3 includes preparing a spiritual highway in context to “spiritual” valleys, mountains, and crooked places because John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy in part by preaching on repentance that addressed spiritual valleys and mountains (Lk. 3:3-14).
    3. ***Agreement with God’s values***: John called people to repent and live in agreement with God’s values—His love, purity, humility, generosity, righteousness, etc. (Lk. 3:8-14). Earlier, Isaiah identified this as the *Highway of Holiness* (35:8). The only way that the Lord dwells with His people in is context to holiness or agreement with His heart.

8…bear fruits worthy of repentance…10The people asked…, “What shall we do then?”   
11He answered…, “He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none…” 12Then   
tax collectors…said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” 13And he said to them, “Collect no more than what is appointed.” 14…The soldiers asked…“What shall we do?” So he said to them, “Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.” (Lk. 3:8-14)

* + 1. ***Agreement with God’s plans***: John announced the coming of Jesus in context to a great outpouring of the Spirit and the release of God’s judgments associated with His coming.

16One mightier than I is coming…He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.   
17…He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire. (Lk. 3:16-17)

* 1. ***Make straight*:** The Lord’s messengers make the message straight or clear by removing the ambiguity. They are to boldly, clearly, and tenderly address God’s values in speaking to individuals and in context of the cultural wars. For example, John rebuked Herod for immorality (Mt 14:3-10) and warned the people of covetousness (Lk. 3:8-14). Isaiah highlighted four aspects of walking on the spiritual highway. They reinforce the call to holiness and the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle. Because these four aspects include issues that anger and offend people, it is common for preachers not to address them in a straightforward way.
     1. ***Every valley shall be exalted***: There are valleys or low areas in our lives emotionally and spiritually that need to be healed and brought up. This includes areas where we have wrong thinking in accepting a low view of God and of our spiritual identity. This includes emotional low spots where rejection, condemnation, and inferiority dominate our heart and mind. The Lord wants us to resist wrong thinking and replace it with the truth of who we are in Christ.
     2. ***Every mountain shall be brought low***: There are high things or proud things in our thinking and emotional life that need to be brought down such as drawing undue attention to ourselves, manipulating situations to gain honor, or being defensive in refusing to accept correction.
     3. ***The crooked places shall be made straight***: Crooked places speak of areas where people continue to live in compromise, including immorality, drunkenness, covetousness, slander, along with various addictions or areas of perversion. Jesus highlighted drunkenness and immorality in context to the escalation of end times pressures and temptations (Lk 21:34-36). There will be more fear, lust, demons, etc., thus a heightened desire to “self-medicate to escape pain” with immorality and drunkenness, etc.
     4. ***The rough places shall be made smooth***: Being in a rough place emotionally is to live in a judgmental, critical spirit or with a mean or critical spirit such as many of the Pharisees had.
  2. ***A voice***: John the Baptist was the voice prophesied by Isaiah (Jn. 1:23). For over 700 years, no one knew who “the voice” was or in what generation he would speak the message of 40:3-4.

22They said to him,…“What do you say about yourself?” 23He said: “I am ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Make straight the way of the Lord,” ’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”   
(Jn. 1:22-23)

* + 1. I assume that Isaiah would have never guessed that “the voice” referred to a man preaching on repentance about 700 years after Isaiah’s ministry was over.
    2. I imagine the Pharisees asking him “Where was the highway of which Isaiah prophesied?”   
       In “building a highway” by calling people to repent, John introduced the idea of Isaiah’s highway also being a spiritual one. It was easier for the Pharisees to reject and criticize John as “the voice” since John did not do any miracles (Jn. 10:41).

41Then many came to Him and said, “John performed no sign …” (Jn. 10:41)

* + 1. John was content to be a voice—he was not seeking to be “a name” or to promote his own reputation and honor. He saw himself as a friend of the Bridegroom (Jn. 3:29).

29He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom…rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice…30He must increase, but I must decrease.   
(Jn. 3:29-30)

* + 1. God is raising up those who will be a “voice” and not merely an “echo.”
    2. Gabriel prophesied that John the Baptist would turn many to the Lord (Lk. 1:16). In what sense did John “turn many to God” and “prepare people for the Lord?” Scripture only identifies two of John’s disciples that followed Jesus—Andrew and John (Jn. 1:40, many consider the unnamed disciple to be John). There were only 120 people who made it to the upper room after John and Jesus’ ministry (Acts 1).

16And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17He [John the Baptist] will also go before Him [Jesus]…to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (Lk. 1:16-17)

* 1. ***Crying out***: John the Baptist refused to be silent even when rejected by the leaders of his nation. The religious leaders said John had a demon (Mt. 11:18) and Herod put him to death (Mt. 14:10).

18For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, “He has a demon.” (Mt. 11:18)

3For Herod…put him in prison for the sake of Herodias…4Because John had said to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her”…10So he sent and had John beheaded in prison.” (Mt. 14:3-10)

* 1. ***All flesh shall see it*** ***together***: Isaiah anchored this “messenger mandate” in an end-time context when all nations see the glory of God (40:5). Thus, the primary context of 40:1-11 is on preparing people spiritually for Jesus’ second coming when all the nations will see His glory (40:5, 10).

3“…make straight in the desert a highway for our God…5the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together…”10Behold, the Lord God shall come… (Isa. 40:3-5, 10)

* + 1. Jesus will be seen by every eye when He returns (Mt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7).

7Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him… (Rev. 1:7)

* + 1. In context to John the Baptist’s ministry, *not* *everyone saw God’s glory* as Isaiah prophesied (40:5). Thus, John was only a partial fulfillment of the 40:3-5 prophecy.
  1. The end-time call to prepare a people for God includes *the* *Bride* being made ready (Rev. 19:7) and *all Israel* (unsaved survivors of the Tribulation) receiving Him to fulfill His prophecy (Mt. 23:39).

7…for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. (Rev. 19:7)

39…I say to you, you [the leaders in Jerusalem] shall see Me no more till you say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Mt. 23:39)

* + 1. I assume that Elijah (Mal. 4:6) and/or the two witnesses (Rev. 11:3-6) will be the primary “voices” fulfilling the prophesy of 40:3-4 supported by many thousands of messengers from all over the earth—who will give expression to the “messenger calling” in their local area.
    2. Elijah and the two witnesses will do many miracles (Rev. 11:3-6)—this is in line with what Isaiah prophesied, saying that all flesh would see God’s glory together (40:5).
  1. Will you answer this call to prepare yourself to prepare others spiritually to be messengers also?
  2. ***The mouth of the Lord has spoken***: This emphasized the certainty of these things coming to pass.

5The glory of the Lord shall be revealed…for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. (Isa. 40:5)

1. God’s plans, purposes, and promises will last forever (40:6-8)
   1. Isaiah emphasized the certainty of victory before the hostile Gentile armies of the earth.   
      Nothing can prevail over God’s plans, purposes, and promises—they are eternal (40:6-8).

6The 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. 7The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath   
of the Lord blows upon it…8The grass withers…but the word of our God stands forever.”   
(Isa. 40:6-8)

* 1. ***What shall I cry***: Isaiah had just exhorted the Lord’s messengers to “cry out” in comforting Jerusalem (40:2), he spoke of “crying out” to prepare the way of the Lord (40:3), and now a voice spoke to Isaiah of “crying out” (40:6).
     1. Isaiah was asking for more specifics on the message that he was to “cry out” as he called messengers to comfort Jerusalem and to prepare people for the Lord. The Lord answered Isaiah by telling him that all flesh is grass (40:6-7) and that God’s plans and power will prevail over all obstacles and will last forever (40:8-26).
     2. I see the message in Isaiah 40:6-31 as giving insight into the spiritual diet on which John the Baptist fed and what he spoke to others to prepare them for the Lord. End-time messengers will follow John’s example in preaching these themes alongside the truths outlined in 40:1-5.
  2. ***All flesh is grass***: Isaiah was to proclaim the truth about humanity—its enemies and opportunities. Solomon cried out, “Vanity of vanities” (Eccl. 1:2-3). Thus, even “good things” that are done outside of God’s will are vanity. What matters most are the things that have value after our death.

2“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher; “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” 3What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun? (Eccl. 1:2-3)

* 1. ***Grass***: Isaiah also spoke of the enemies of God’s people as being a weak as grasshoppers (40:22).
  2. ***Stands forever***: The plans and promises of God will stand forever. They will continue long after sin and Satan are gone from the earth. It is wise to invest our lives in the purpose of God that will last forever. The word of God is permanent. This is the only measurement of reality.

1. The mighty Warrior is a tender Shepherd (isa. 40:9-11)
   1. Believers in Jerusalem are to boldly proclaim the coming of Messiah as a mighty warrior who is also a tender shepherd (40:9-11). Believers in Jerusalem mentioned here will be emboldened as the global body of Christ comforts and strengthens them (40:1). Note that Jerusalem and Zion are nearly interchangeable in most Scriptures.

9O 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! 10…[He] shall come with a strong hand, and…shall rule.” (Isa. 40:9-10)

* 1. ***The context***: Jesus warned the people in Jerusalem to flee when they saw the abomination of desolation (Mt. 24:15-16) because an Antichrist attack against Jerusalem and Judea would begin very soon after the abomination of desolation. It is important to understand what the Bible says about the context of Jerusalem at the end of the age to fully grasp the implications of the exhortation in 40:9.

15“…when you see the ‘abomination of desolation’…standing in the holy place… 16let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” (Mt. 24:15-16)

* + 1. Jerusalem will be surrounded by the armies of the Antichrist (Zech. 12:2).

2Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. (Zech. 12:2)

* + 1. Jerusalem will be taken by the armies of the Antichrist (Zech. 14:2).

2For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken…  
Half of the city shall go into captivity… (Zech. 14:2)

* + 1. ***Cities of Judah***: A hostile culture of anti-Semitism at that time will make it challenging for believers in Jerusalem to boldly lift their voice without fear to the cities of Judah (40:9). There will be a company of believers in Jerusalem who proclaim to the cities of Judah that Jesus is coming, even as the Antichrist is surrounding them in a siege.
    2. ***Good tidings:*** This speaks of the truths related to the gospel of the kingdom (Mt. 24:14), the return of Jesus (40:10-11), and the victory and honor of Jerusalem in the Millennium (40:1-2).
    3. ***Get up on a mountain***: Messianic believers are to boldly proclaim the coming of Jesus to overthrow the Antichrist and deliver Israel. Currently believers in Jerusalem are forbidden by the authorities to evangelize the Jewish people. The witness of believers in Jerusalem is important for many in Israel to understand who Jesus is when He returns (Mt. 23:39).
  1. ***Lift up your voice***: There will be a company of believers in Jerusalem boldly telling the region of Judah that Jesus is coming, even as the Antichrist’s armies surround them.
     1. Imagine a Jewish man in the Warsaw ghetto in Poland (surrounded by the Nazis) proclaiming that a Jewish King was coming to free them, kill the Nazis, and exalt Israel to be the leading nation on earth. This message has caused trouble for Jewish people through history—that God will exalt them and kill their enemies. Even some of the fellow prisoners in the Warsaw ghetto might be angry at that message, along with the Nazi leadership.
     2. ***Do not be afraid***: Some in Jerusalem will be tempted to draw back in silence out of fear.   
        The cities of Judah will be experiencing intense military conflict, hostility, and oppression. Boldly declaring that their Messiah is coming to crush the Antichrist will anger many.
        1. It is important to be intentional about gaining understanding of these things now before the pressure greatly increases and, along with it, the fear that naturally comes.
        2. Some will wait until the time of intense pressure before they start to search out what the Scripture says about standing with Israel in the end-time conflict. It is best to be rooted in the truth now. It is more difficult to see clearly and to be objective about what the Bible says if one only starts to search it out once already in the storm of pressure.
     3. ***Jerusalem and the cities of Judah***: There will be an important relational dynamic between Jerusalem and the cities of Judah in context to the end-time conflicts (Zech. 12:4-7).   
        The Lord will come to Jerusalem from Bozrah, possibly marching through Judah (63:1-6).

4In that day “…I will open My eyes on the house of Judah, and will strike every horse of the peoples [Antichrist’s armies] with blindness. 5The governors of Judah shall say in their heart, ‘The inhabitants of Jerusalem are my strength in the Lord…’ 6I will make the governors of Judah…like a fiery torch…they shall devour all the surrounding peoples…” 7The Lord will save the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of…the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall not become greater than that of Judah. (Zech. 12:4-7)

* + - 1. ***Jerusalem is my strength in the Lord***: The governors or political leaders of Judah will be strengthened by the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Zech. 12:5)—this may include the “message” that they receive from them as prophesied by Isaiah (40:9).
      2. ***Open My eyes on Judah***: The leaders of Judah will receive supernatural help from the Lord who will strike the horses of the Antichrist armies with blindness and make Judah like a fiery torch to devour the Antichrist armies surrounding them.
      3. ***Tents of Judah***: Those in Judah will be in a more defenseless condition, as suggested by dwelling in tents outside the well-defended Jerusalem. The Lord will empower the soldiers in Judah *first*, possibly to create a greater bond of unity with Jerusalem (Zech. 12:7).
      4. This bond of unity will help end the long-standing tensions in the Jewish leadership (Zech. 11:6, 14). Zechariah prophesied that both the “house of Judah” in the south (Zech. 10:3, 6) and the “house of Joseph” (Zech. 10:6-7) in the north would be anointed for battle, not just those in Jerusalem.
  1. ***Behold God shall come***: The messianic believers in Jerusalem will proclaim the coming of Jesus in power to prevail against the Antichrist (40:10).

10Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand… (Isa. 40:10)

* 1. Isaiah describes seven activities of Jesus coming to earth with a strong hand (40:10-11). This is one of the most descriptive passages about what Jesus will do when He returns in strength. He will come as a mighty warrior (40:10) and a tender shepherd (40:11)–so strong, yet so tender.

10…the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him…His reward   
is with Him, and His work before Him. 11He 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.   
(Isa. 40:10-11)

* 1. ***The Lord shall come with a strong hand***: The messianic believers in Jerusalem will proclaim the coming of Jesus in power to prevail against the Antichrist. The most detailed description of Jesus coming with a *strong hand* is found in the book of Revelation. The Lord will not be passive. Throughout history Israel and the nations have accused God of being passive because He has been patient and has not intervened with great strength like He will. This is their question in 40:27.
     1. ***His arm shall rule***: He will take over all the governments of the earth (Rev. 11:15).
     2. ***To reward***: He will reward and vindicate His people who have been persecuted as outcasts. His reward is with Him (Rev. 11:18; 20:4-6; 22:12). He will reward those who spoke His message boldly and who refused compromise in times of pressure and temptation.

12“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.” (Rev. 22:12)

* + - 1. Jesus will reward the times that His people lost opportunities for personal gain because of taking time to pour over the Word to learn it and the time they invested in intercession and in ministering to the needs of others.
      2. In this context, He will vindicate all those in Jerusalem who boldly proclaimed to the cities of Judah the end-time message of Jesus coming with a strong hand.
    1. ***His work is before Him***: His work includes causing the New Jerusalem to descend to the earth (Rev. 3:12; 21:2, 10), establishing in social order based on righteousness and justice in all the nations, and restoring animal life, the atmosphere, and the agriculture to the conditions seen in the garden of Eden (Isa. 11:6-9; 35:1-8; 51:3; 65:17-25; Ezek. 34:29; 36:35; 47:6-12).
    2. ***He will feed His flock***:He will provide abundantly to meet basic human needs like food, water, clothing, shelter, etc. In the context of the end times, many people—both Jews and Gentile—will be refugees or in prison camps. Jesus will rescue them and provide food for them as they endure an arduous journey walking to Israel (Mic. 5:4; 7:14).

4And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord… (Mic 5:4)

9That You may say to the prisoners, “Go forth,”…They shall feed along the roads…  
10They shall neither hunger nor thirst…He who has mercy on them will lead them, even by the springs of water He will guide them…12Surely these shall come from afar; Look! Those from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinim [China]. (Isa. 49:9-12)

* + - 1. There are many documentaries of what life was like immediately following World War II. Millions of people had to walk back to their city. Many had to walk hundreds of miles. They could only carry a small amount of food and water.
      2. Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would provide food and water supernaturally for those making the long journey back to their home town. This is a very significant.
    1. ***He will gather the lambs***: Jesus will gather His people in several ways. He will gather the saints together in the sky at the rapture, and He will gather the unsaved remnant of Israel, some who are refugees and some in prison camps (Isa 27:12; Mic. 2:12; Zech. 10:10).

12…in that day that the Lord will thresh, from the channel of the River to the Brook of Egypt; and you will be gathered one by one, O you children of Israel. (Isa. 27:12)

12“…I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together like sheep…they shall make a loud noise because of so many people.” (Mic. 2:12)

10I will also bring them back from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon, until no more room is found for them. (Zech. 10:10)

* + 1. ***He will carry them in His bosom***: He will carry His people (46:3-4; Deut. 1:31; Lk. 15:4). This is not poetry; this is real. Here we see His tender heart and care for His people. He will rescue them and lead them back to Israel. He will treat them with affection and tenderness.

3“Listen to Me…all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been upheld by Me from birth, who have been carried from the womb…4even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.” (Isa. 46:3-4)

31…in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place. (Deut. 1:31)

* + 1. ***He will gently lead those who are with young:*** Multitudes of refugees and those who were held as captives will walk back to Israel (Isa. 42:16; 49:9-12). He will be especially attentive to those traveling with small children (Jer. 31:8).

8Behold, I will….gather them from the ends of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and the one who labors with child, together; a great throng shall return there… 9I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters… (Jer. 31:8-9)

16I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. (Isa. 42:16)

9You may say to the prisoners, “Go forth”…10He who has mercy on them will lead them, even by the springs of water He will guide them. 11I will make each of My mountains a road, and My highways shall be elevated. 12Surely these shall come from afar (Isa. 49:9-12)

1. The Lord has all power and wisdom (isa. 40:12-20)
   1. The emphasis of 40:12-20 is that God is *all loving* (40:11), *all wise* (40:12-14), and *all powerful* (40:15-17). Because God is all loving, He desires our best; because He is all wise, He knows what is best for us; and because He is all powerful, He can accomplish it—He fulfills all His promises.
   2. Jesus is great in power and wisdom; thus, He understands everything, fulfills all of His promises, and perfectly administrates justice (40:12-14). Isaiah describes the vast range of God’s wisdom and power from the vastness of the heavens to intricate details in the dust. He measures the distances between the stars, yet notices the small details about pieces of dust, and can navigate the complex issues such as weighing mountains still attached to the large land masses of the earth.

12Who 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? 13Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counselor has taught Him?   
14With 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? (Isa. 40:12-14)

* + 1. Isaiah asked two questions (40:12-14)—who measured creation and who taught God?
    2. ***Measured heaven***: Who has such vast wisdom and power that that they can count the stars, yet be so detailed that they can calculate the dust? God does all of this easily so there is no need to be afraid of the Assyrians in Isaiah’s day or the Antichrist at the end of the age.
    3. ***Who directed the Lord***: Isaiah emphasized the issue of trusting His leadership (30:13-14, 28). He asked who taught God or who improved the wisdom of God’s leadership. Resisting fear and trusting the Lord’s leadership is a central issue in the generation the Lord returns.
    4. ***Who taught God justice***: Paul quoted this passage in Romans 11:34. The issue of justice is brought up again in 40:27.
  1. The Lord has the power to easily overpower all opposition and solve all problems (40:15-17).   
     Isaiah emphasized how powerful God is and how small and weak everything is compared to Him.

15Behold, 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. 16And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering. 17All nations [Antichrist’s empire] before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless. (Isa. 40:15-17)

* + 1. ***The nations***: The combined power of nations is insignificant in their ability to challenge and prevail against God. They are compared to a drop of water or to small dust. Their princes and judges (40:23) are weak as grasshoppers in God’s sight (40:22)
       1. The powerful empires of the ancient world like Assyria, Babylon, and Rome, and even the end-time empire of the Antichrist, are no greater challenge to God than a mere drop of water.
       2. ***Very little***: The small island nations are considered by God as a very little thing. What seems like a big threat or obstacle to man is, in fact, a very small thing to God.
       3. ***All nations***: The Antichrist’s empire with its 10-nation confederation will have more money, technology, military power, and public support than any other empire in history. This coalition of nations will not be able to prevail against God.

19And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. (Rev. 19:19)

* + - 1. The message is that Israel should not be afraid of them as long they are embracing God’s leadership. Compared to God, these empires have no real power.
    1. ***Lebanon is not sufficient***: If all the trees in the vast forests in Lebanon were burned together to create the largest altar of sacrifice possible, and if the many beasts in Lebanon were offered on that altar—even on a scale so large, such a sacrifice would not be a sufficient expression of worship that is due our glorious and majestic God. If these vast forests were all set on fire and all its animals offered as sacrifices to God, it would not be an adequate expression of the devotion that is due to God. Isaiah’s point is that that largest and the most extravagant offering that people could possibly give to God would not equal His greatness.
  1. No force on earth can compare to or prevail against King Jesus (40:18-20). In 40:12-17, Isaiah set forth the reasons why none can compare in power to our *God as Creator*;nowin 40:18-24 he focuses the power of *God as Ruler* of the nations.

18To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him? 19The workman molds an image, the goldsmith overspreads it with gold, and the silversmith casts silver chains. 20Whoever 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. (Isa. 40:18-20)

* + 1. ***Who is like God***: He is the only One powerful enough to look to and to trust in as our source. The Lord is incomparable in power to idols made by people and empowered by demons.
    2. Paul highlighted the demonic element that is involved in worshipping idols (1 Cor. 10:19-20)

19What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? 20Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice [to idols] they sacrifice to demons… (1 Cor. 10:19-20)

* + 1. Multitudes will marvel at the Antichrist, seeing him as incomparable in power (Rev. 13:3-8).

3And all the world marveled and followed the beast… 4they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast?”… 8All who dwell on the earth will worship him…(Rev. 13:3-8)

* + 1. The truth of God being incomparably greater in power than idols was to be applied in Isaiah’s day, but also by those who fear the demonic power behind idols in the Antichrist’s global worship system. Idols will be associated with the image of Antichrist (Rev. 9:20; 13:8, 15).

20But the rest of mankind…did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood… (Rev. 9:20)

* + 1. After Jesus returns, He will remove the many idols throughout Israel that had been associated with the Antichrist’s worship system related to the mark of the Beast (Zech. 13:2)

2“…in that day,” says the Lord…“I will cut off the names of the idols from the land…  
I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land.” (Zech. 13:2)

* + 1. ***The workman molds an image***: Mere men are involved in every stage of making an idol—from molding it and overlaying it with a precious metal, to finding a skillful workman to make its base secure. He points how foolish it is to worship and trust idols, which are created by men.
    2. ***Whoever is too impoverished***: The perceived power of an idol was proportionate to the value of the materials that were used in constructing it. For example, idols made only of wood were less powerful than those covered with gold and precious stones. Isaiah pointed out that some only had enough money to choose a wood that will not rot to construct their idol. The idol was only as strong as materials and the builder who fashioned it and carved its base.

1. The Lord has power over all the nations (isa. 40:21-26)
   1. The Lord has power over all the nations and their leadership (40:21-24).

21Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning?...  
22It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers…  
23He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless. 24Scarcely 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. (Isa. 40:21-24)

* + 1. ***Have you not known***: Isaiah brought up information related to God’s greatness with which many were familiar. They grew up with this knowledge, but without engaging with it in their lives, they were now overwhelmed with fear of their enemies. Isaiah was saying, “You know the information, but you must engage with it by waiting on God” (v. 31).
    2. ***Sits above the circle of the earth***: The Lord sits enthroned with power over the whole earth. The “circle” of the earth refers to the heavens (Job 22:14) or to the horizon.
    3. ***Grasshoppers***: People are as weak as grasshoppers in their ability to prevail against God. The picture that comes to mind is of a powerful warrior being challenged by one grasshopper.
  1. ***He brings princes to nothing***: People in powerful positions of leadership, such as princes and judges, can easily intimidate those under them, but these powerful leaders are under God’s control. He can easily remove any leader or group of leaders such as the leadership of the Assyrian army in Isaiah’s day or the Antichrist and his top leaders in the end times.
     1. ***Judges***: Those who interpret the laws and decide the penalties for breaking them. The Lord will make judges useless by reversing their laws and verdicts. David prophesied that kings and judges in the end time would resist Jesus and His Word and also those standing up for it (Ps. 2).

2The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers [judges] take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 3“Let us break Their bonds [God’s Word] in pieces…” 10Therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. 11Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. (Ps. 2:2-11)

* + 1. ***Scarcely shall they be planted***: The Antichrist will plant his place or headquarters near Jerusalem (Dan. 11:45).

45And he [Antichrist] shall plant the tents of his palace [near Jerusalem] between the seas and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and no one will help him. (Dan. 11:45)

* + 1. ***Jesus will blow on them***: The Antichrist shall scarcely be established in power, then Jesus will blow on him, and his empire will wither—he will only rule for 3½ years (Isa. 11:4; 2 Thes. 2:8)

8And then the lawless one [Antichrist] will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. (2 Thes. 2:8)

4He shall strike the earth…and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.   
(Isa. 11:4)

* 1. No force in the heavens can stop God’s plan (40:25-26). Jesus also has authority over the powers in the sky or the heavens (Acts 2:19-20). Jesus is more powerful than the heavenly forces that will seem to threaten the very existence of life on earth (Rev. 6:12-13; 8:12; 16:8-10, 21).

25“To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?” says the Holy One. 26Lift 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…not one is missing. (Isa. 40:25-26)

* + 1. ***To whom will you liken Me***: In 40:25 Isaiah repeated the question that he asked in 40:18.
    2. ***Lift up your eyes***: After describing God’s power in 40:19-24, he exhorted them to look up at the stars. Isaiah exhorted those struggling with fear to look up and remember who God is.
    3. ***Stars***: He calls and directs the stars to the places that He assigns them. When Adam named the animals in Eden, this implied that he understood them and had power over them. The Lord “brings” the stars out by number; thus, they are clustered together by divine design.
    4. ***Not one is missing***: Since the Lord understands and directs trillions of trillions of stars,   
       then surely He can take care of His people who are so dear to Him. Since He has such detailed knowledge of the whole universe, we can be confident that He will not overlook the details in His people’s lives. Jesus made this same point when He said that God knows every hair on our head and every sparrow that falls to the ground (Mt. 10:28-31).

28And do not fear those who kill the body…fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. 30But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. (Mt. 10:28-31)

1. Practical application: receiving strength (isa. 40:27-31)
   1. Isaiah teaches God’s people how to respond to the Lord (40:27-31). God’s people need not be afraid that God has forgotten them. Trusting His leadership is a foundational issue in the kingdom.

27Why do you say, O Jacob…“My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God”? 28Have 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.   
(Isa. 40:27-28)

* + 1. ***Jacob***: Jacob is another name from Israel because Jacob had twelve sons from whom came the twelve tribes of Israel. After the civil war in 933 BC., the ten tribes in the north formed the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In 9:8-9, Isaiah referred to Israel by four different names— as *“Israel”* (Jacob’s covenant name), *“Jacob”* (the father of the twelve tribes), “*Ephraim”* (its largest tribe), and *“Samaria”* (capital city of Israel).
    2. ***My way is hidden***: Israel’s complaint was that their life was “hidden” from God because He seemed to allow injustice to continue. They felt overlooked by God in the pressures in their life and the crisis in their nation.
  1. The Lord gives strength to His people to the degree that they pursue it His way (40:29-31).

29He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. 30Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, 31but 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. (Isa. 40:29-31)

* + 1. ***Faint and be weary***: Jesus spoke of people fainting with fear when observing the escalating pressures in the end times (Lk. 21:26). People who are overcome with fear often give up.

25And there will be signs in the sun…and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; 26men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (Lk. 21:25-26)

* + 1. ***Utterly fail***: Daniel saw an angel who swore an oath that the Great Tribulation would only last 3½ years, yet it would *completely shatter* the strength of the pride of Israel (Dan. 12:7).

7I heard the man [angel] clothed in linen…[he] swore…that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time [3½ years]; and when the power of the holy people [remnant of Israel]   
has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished. (Dan. 12:7)

* + 1. Some believers make decisions that lead them to fail utterly. But their failure is not the last word as the Lord promised to show tender mercy and to strength any who will wait on Him.
  1. ***Wait on the Lord:*** To wait on God is to be preoccupied *engaging with Him* and His plan and narrative for our life*.* Christ-centered waiting includes active engagement and conversation with the Lord.
     1. We wait on God in two ways—by engaging with Him in prayer with faith and by not drawing back into passivity and offense when His promises are delayed. Waiting on God is not about “just biding time,” but is engaging actively with God in contending for His promises.
     2. ***Renew your strength***: The Lord promised to renew the strength of His people—their love, resolve, peace, courage, etc.
     3. ***To mount up with wings***: This speaks of being lifted up and empowering by the Spirit. This is in a way parallel to how an eagle interacts with the wind while flying to the heights.
     4. ***Run and not get weary***: In a believer’s life there are some seasons that require more intensity than others in “running” to God and with God and running from compromise (Rom. 6:13).
     5. ***Walk and not faith***: In a believer’s life that are some seasons that require more perseverance to “walk” with faithfulness in the midst of the routine and mundaneness of everyday life.
  2. ***Summary***: The message of comfort that prepares the way of the Lord includes God coming to Jerusalem (40:3), manifesting His glory worldwide (40:5), showing His strength in defending them (40:10) and His tender heart in caring for them (40:11). The message emphasizes her military conflicts ending, her sin being forgiven, and double honor being given to her in the Millennium (40:3). His end-time plans will display His perfect wisdom and power (40:12-17) that triumphs over all the hostile armies on earth (40:18-24) and imparts strength to prevail to all who wait on Him (40:27-31).

1. the Questions, exhortations, promises and declarations in Isaiah 40
   1. ***Questions***: The number of times that questions were asked by the Lord or the prophet in Isaiah 40 is noteworthy—15 times (v12, 13 [3x], 18 [2x], 21 [4x], 25 [2x], 27, v. 28 [2x same as v. 21]).
   2. ***Exhortations:*** There are 12 imperatives or exhortations to action— comfort (v. 1), cry out (40:2, 3, 6, 9), prepare the way (40:3), make straight a highway (40:3), get up on a mountain (40:9), lift up voice (40:9), say to the cities of Judah behold your God (40:9), look (40:15), lift eyes and see (40:26), wait on the Lord (40:31).
   3. ***Promises***: There are various promises that God gave to Israel in Isaiah 40 such as—her warfare is ended (40:2), her iniquity is pardoned (40:2), she has received double honor (40:2), every valley shall be exalted (40:5), every mountain shall be brought low (40:4), the crooked places shall be made straight (40:4), rough places made smooth (40:4), the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh (people) shall see it together (40:5), the word of the Lord stands forever (40:8), the Lord God shall come (40:10), He gives power to the weak (40:29), He increases strength (40:29), He shall renew their strength (40:31), those who wait on God shall mount up, run, and walk (40:31).
   4. ***Declarations***: The Lord and/or Isaiah made various declarations in Isaiah 40 such as—the voice of one crying in the wilderness (40:3), all flesh is grass (40:6-7), the nations are as a drop in the bucket or dust (40:15), He lifts up islands (40:15), Lebanon or its beasts are not sufficient to give glory due to God (40:16), all nations are less than nothing in their ability to challenge God (40:17), He sits above the circle of the earth (40:22), people are like grasshoppers (40:22), He stretches out the heavens (40:22), He brings princes and judges to nothing (40:23), He will blow on princes and judges and they will wither (40:24), He brings out the stars by number and name and not one of them is missing (40:26), the Lord never wearies (40:28), His understanding is unsearchable (40:28).