



• Isaiah explains how there can be worldwide redemption – the mighty ‘Suffering Servant’ of God

Isaiah 40–55 can be regarded as the sixth major section in the book of Isaiah. Chapters 1–5 (describing Israel’s plight in general terms), 7–12 (pinpointing some details of the need of Isaiah and his people), 13–27 (pointing to the hopelessness of the nations), 28–35 (showing how God is Lord of history), 36–39 (giving the historical background of Isaiah’s message concerning Assyria and concerning Babylon) have all prepared the way. Now Isaiah is coming to explain how there can be worldwide redemption. Someone will come as the mighty ‘Suffering Servant’ of God who will be a Saviour for Israel and at the same time provide salvation for the world.

(i) Entire world will find strength and comfort in salvation

Isaiah chapters 40–55 can be considered in four sections. **Firstly** Isaiah says that the entire world will find strength and comfort in a coming salvation¹. Then, **secondly**, God reveals his plan. He has a way of releasing people from bondage². In a **third** section he speaks of the great rescue of Israel by Cyrus the Persian³. Yet – **fourthly** – even when Israel have been redeemed from Babylon, there is a still greater deliverance that they need, deliverance from sin⁴.

1 40:1-42:17
2 42:18-44:23
3 44:24-48:22
4 49:1-55:13

(ii) God reveals His plan

(iii) Rescue of Israel by Cyrus

The new section begins dramatically. Israel’s days of captivity in Babylon are to come to an end. A herald of some kind is pictured as calling out the promise that Israel will experience an end to her difficult days.

(iv) Greater deliverance still needed

*¹Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.
²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her time of hard labour has been completed,
that the punishment for her sin has been accepted,
that she has received from Yahweh’s hand
that which is fitting to cure for all her sins.*

• A herald of an end to difficult times

• Israel’s idolatry was so bad that God sent the nation to Babylon

Backsliding ways get very severely rebuked. Israel’s idolatry became so bad that God decided to send the nation to the land of idols — Babylon. There life was not impossibly difficult, yet it was distressing, for Israel had the terrible experience of not enjoying the presence of God. Now Isaiah wants to tell Israel that one day the sufferings of exile will come to an end. God is so gracious! He has punished Israel only because he is determined to use his people. When the time comes God is ready to be tender to his people again. He loves them and will use them again once they have been prepared by their suffering. God will never entirely give up on any people once he has put his hand upon them. Israel will never be abandoned (nor any other nation that has come to be beloved by God because of those of his people who have been intercessors for it in days gone by). God will surely and certainly use Israel again (and any other nation which has been used by God similarly). The day will come when chastising punishments will end.

• Isaiah predicts the end of exile

• Israel will never be abandoned – God will use Israel again and chastening punishments will end

The rest of this section¹ has three voices which make their comments on the promise of God that has just been given in 40:1-2.

1 40:3-5, 6-8, 9-11

1. The first voice encourages us to prepare the way for God to come back to us

1. **The first voice encourages us to prepare the way for God to come back to us.** If (as 40:1–2 says) God will again use his people, then it is an encouragement for his people to prepare the way for it to happen.

*³Listen, someone is calling out,
‘In the desert prepare
the way for Yahweh;
make straight in the wilderness
a highway for our God.
⁴Every valley shall be raised up,*

• If God is willing to restore us, we need to encourage Him to bless us

*every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the mountain ranges shall become a pass
through the mountains.
⁵And the glory of Yahweh will be revealed,
and all flesh together will see it.
For the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.'*

• Salvation is secured by the blood of the Lamb, but we need to respond to God

If God is so compassionate as to be willing to restore his exiled people, then we ought to set out to encourage God to bless us! It is not that salvation is by good works; Israel's status as God's nation was secured by the blood of the lamb. But if they want that status to become a practical reality, they will have to respond to God.

2. The second voice invites us to take God's word more seriously

2. The second voice invites us to take God's word more seriously. If God gives these promises of salvation for the world, then this gospel-message is more important than anything else.

*⁶A voice says, 'Cry out.'
And I said, 'What shall I cry?'
All flesh is like grass,
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.
⁷The grass withers and the flowers fall,
because the Spirit of Yahweh blows on them.
Surely the people are grass.
⁸The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God stands forever.'*

• The gospel-message is more important than anything else – it will last forever

Everything merely human will deteriorate; it is only the word of God that will last forever.

3. The third voice urges us to begin to take steps to see that this message is heard

3. The third voice urges us to begin to take steps to see that this message is heard.

*⁹You who bring good tidings to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.
You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem,
lift up your voice with a shout,
lift it up, do not be afraid;
say to the towns of Judah . . .*

• God's people must proclaim the good news

Hills were god places to have open-air public meetings. Before modern technology a public speaker would choose places in the hills where the acoustics were good in order to speak to a large number of people. God's people must go to places where crowds can be addressed. They must do what they can to get everyone to hear the good news that they have discovered. God will come to his people. The preachers must proclaim it.

'See, here is your God!'

• God reveals His power

When God comes he reveals his power, he 'makes bare his arm'.

*¹⁰See, the Sovereign Yahweh comes with power,
and his arm rules for him.*

• He rewards us for being ready for Him

He motivates us by rewarding us for having been ready for him to come.

*See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense is before him.*

• He shows the love of a shepherd to the weak

He shows the love of a shepherd to the weak.

• This message
must be heard
everywhere

*¹¹He tends his flock like a shepherd:
He gathers the lambs in his arm
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.*

This is the message that must be heard everywhere.

Dr Michael Eaton (1942-2017) was highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. Born in the UK, he lived for many years in Kenya where he became a citizen. He was one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship in Nairobi. His Preaching through the Bible books are highly popular worldwide, written in a clear and down-to-earth style but underpinned by rigorous scholarship. Some of these books have been reformatted as individual sheets for personal and group study and preaching. The New Testament volumes have been re-edited and combined in the Branch Commentary. The Old Testament, including previously unpublished material will follow. More details: www.slices.org.uk.