

ISAIAH

Chapter 40

Comfort for God's People

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. 3 A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. 5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

40:1–66:24† In chs. 1–35 Isaiah prophesies against the backdrop of the Assyrian threat against Judah and Jerusalem, in chs. 36–39 he records Assyria's failure and warns about the future rise of Babylon, and in chs. 40–66 he writes as if the Babylonian exile of Judah were almost over. He comforts the exiles and spiritual Israel of all times with the promise of deliverance from sin through the incarnation and death of the Messiah. (CSB)

Within the book of Isaiah, chapters 40-55 present prophetic instruction concerning the realization of Yahweh's worldwide plan of salvation (cf. 2:1-5; 7:14; 9:6-7; chapter 11). He has heard the cry of his people, and these chapters intend to get them ready for the new exodus so they can come home to Zion. (CC)

A foreshadowing the Babylonian exile and return comes in the life of Manasseh. The king of Assyria forcibly took him to Babylon (2 Chron. 33:11). There the king humbled himself and cried out to Yahweh, who was moved to bring the king back to Jerusalem (2 Chron. 33:12-13). (CC)

This act of redemption will take place on a national scale after Cyrus releases the Judeans from Babylonian exile as well as on a universal scale after the death and resurrection of Christ has freed all people from captivity to sin and death. The historical return to Jerusalem after the Edit of Cyrus (538 BC) is not only depicted in eschatological and cosmological colors, but the two are totally fused: the historical event is a type, sacrament, anticipation and prophetic realization of the restoration of all things. (CC)

In chapter 39, Isaiah appears in Hezekiah's court and promises that Judah will undergo Babylonian exile but not annihilation. There will be an end, but the end will be the start of a new beginning. Chapters 40-55, then, naturally follow chapter 39 and fit into Yahweh's judgment as proclaimed to Hezekiah. There are then both thematic connections between Isaiah 1-39 and 40-55 as well as a logical progression. (CC)

These links, though do not abolish the gap between Isaiah 39-40, which represents the defining interruption in Israel's history. A series of massive changes occurred between Isaiah's call in 740 BC (see 6:1) and 539 BC (Cyrus' defeat of Babylon. The Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. The Nineveh collapsed in 612 BC and along with the Assyrian kingdom (see Nahum). The disastrous reign of Manasseh hastened Judah's demise (Jer. 15:4). Josiah died at the battle of Megiddo in 609 BC (2 Ki. 23:29-30). And the subsequent rise of the Babylonian Empire under Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar II brought with it near anarchy in Judah. Most

importantly, however, was Jerusalem's destruction and devastation in 587 BC (2 Ki.24:20-25:30). The prophetic word in Isaiah 39 was true (cf. Deut. 18:21-22; 2 Pet. 1:19). Nebuchadnezzar's forces destroyed the capital city and brought its leaders to the other side of the Fertile Crescent. (CC)

The Babylonian Empire, however, was a brief blip on the stage of ancient Near Eastern history. By 550 BC, the kingdom of Persia began to eclipse Babylon and become the dominant power until the rise of Alexander the Great (333 BC). Isaiah 40-55 applies to these times between exilic displacement in Babylon and return under Persian permission. Isaiah's words of comfort follow directly upon the heels of his prediction of disaster (39:5-7). Now, the eighth-century prophet writes words that will address sixth-century postexilic Israel. (CC)

40:1-2 A Full Pardon – Sometimes a prominent person is found guilty of breaking federal law. After he is sentenced to prison, the speculation begins: will the President of the United States grant him a pardon? It certainly would be a great comfort to that man if that happened. (CSB)

In our own lives, we face the judgment that we have broken God's laws. We all fall short of what His holiness demands. But there is a great source of comfort for us. God Himself, speaking through His Holy Word, has issued us a full pardon.

This wonderful, comforting message is found in the prophecy in Isaiah 40. He writes of a great day to come, in the time of the Messiah's kingdom. God has put into motion a plan for universal salvation.

In a world full of problems, strife, and grief, this Advent season brings again the Good News of Jesus. God's own Son came to bring us an era of universal spiritual peace. In Him, we are no longer at war with God. He has pardoned our iniquity and brought comfort to us. We can count on our heavenly Father to stand by us and help us meet all of life's challenges in faith. Best of all, the road to eternal life is open to us.

40:1 *Comfort, comfort.* Repeated for emphasis ("Comfort greatly"). The double imperative is found also in 51:9, 17; 52:1, 11; 57:14; 62:10. (CSB)

First of three heralds in vv 1–11. The Lord's prophet reminds the Israelites that they are still His covenant people (Ex 6:7; 19:5; Lev 26:12; Dt 26:17-19). Repetition is the Hebraic way of driving home a point; Isaiah used this literary device often (e.g., Is. 21:9; 51:9, 17; 52:1; 57:14; 62:10). Luther: "God's people are those who need comfort because they have been wounded and terrified by the Law and they are an empty vessel capable of receiving comfort. Only those who are afflicted have comfort and are capable of it, because comfort means nothing unless there is a malady" (AE 17:3). (TLSB)

The message of "comfort" presupposes that divine judgment has brought the people to repentance. In 687 BC Babylon unleashed against Jerusalem its policies of uricide (the destruction of a city's architecture) and ecocide (the wiping out of an environment). When Nebuchadnezzar defeated Judah, it looked as though his gods Marduk (Bel) and Nebo (cf. Is. 46:1) had triumphed over the God of Israel. It seemed that Yahweh was impotent and no match for these foreign deities. Or perhaps the situation was even worse. Maybe Yahweh chose not to defend his people because he had spurned forevermore those who rejected him? (CC)

But Yahweh was not finished with the people! To the speechless silence of Judah's dislocation, God speaks! He does an about-face! Into the pain he commands his heavenly messengers,

“Comfort, comfort my people. It is time for Israel to step out of darkness and into Yahweh’s marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9)! (CC)

The repeated imperative “comfort, comfort” create a sense of urgency. On the one hand, it points to the people’s great need of comfort and, on the other hand, to the Lord’s ardent desire to extend the needed comfort. The double use of a word is a rhetorical technique known as multiclimum, which Isaiah uses frequently. This double comfort is not based on Israel’s sincerity of faith. It is the determined and gracious initiative of Yahweh alone that makes a new life possible. (CC)

Israel’s hurt was deep. But Yahweh’s comfort is deeper. The people were “dead in transgressions and sins” (Eph. 2:1). So Yahweh, “being rich in mercy, because of his great love” (Eph. 2:4), takes the initiative and speaks the Gospel. This comforting Gospel comes before Israel responds in repentance and faith (cf. Rom. 5:6-10). Brueggemann writes: “The offer of comfort is not based on the suitability or qualifications of the people but upon the resolve of God.” Paul clarifies the issue: “the kindness of God leads you to repentance” (Rom. 2:4). (CC)

nachamu is an imperative meaning to breathe pantingly. (QV)

God has always a message of comfort for His people, even in times of deep affliction; the end of all His dealings with them is their establishment in holiness and happiness. (Concordia Bible)

This verse presents the theme of the book from chapters 40-66; at the same time it presents the theme of this particular chapter. The verb-form at this point indicates that the Lord would have this comfort reiterated over and over again till finally the unbelieving and doubting heart begins to accept it as fully determined in the counsels of God. The repetition of the verb here, as often, spells urgency. The help stands ready at the door. (Leupold)

my people – After all their unfaithfulness, all their rebellion, all their sins, they are still his people. God remains their God. (PBC)

The covenant formula “my people...your God” is indicative of the election language Isaiah employs throughout chapters 40-55. The singular noun “my people,” also demonstrates that while redemption involves individuals, it always has a corporate dimension. Those whom God redeems are members of his one people Israel – in NT language, members of the body of Christ. No child of God is independent from his other relatives, but stands together with them as part of the corporate whole. (CC)

God would not be satisfied with merely changing individuals as if individuals were self-contained entities that could, for instance, serve God separately from their being part of their community... If God changes individuals, that will also do nothing for the corporate entity. If God changes the corporate entity, that will also bring about change in the individual. (Old Testament Theology, 2:394). (CC)

My has the accent, as if to say, “I have a people which I will not forsake.” But they are God’s people not according to the flesh but rather as people who are of a crushed and humble conscience and of a troubled heart and who call upon God in the day of trouble. Others who trust in their own merits, resources, riches, etc., are not the people of God. They do not need comfort, they are not in sadness and tribulation, because their vessel is full and can hold no consolation. Summary: God’s people are those who need comfort because they have been wounded and terrified by the Law and they are an empty vessel capable of receiving comfort. Only those who

are afflicted have comfort and are capable of it, because comfort means nothing unless there is a malady. (Luther)

Exodus 34:6,7 “And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”

says your God – *Your* is emphasized. A troubled conscience does not think it has God but considers God to be a devil, a judge, a prosecutor, and an enemy. This word *your* contradicts that opinion, as if to say, “Don’t be afraid, because God is not your enemy. Rather, He is on your side, He is gracious to you.” (Luther)

The verse ends, with the statement “says your God,” dovetailing with the command “behold your God” (40:9). Yahweh’s speaking is a major theme in Isaiah 40-55. Just as God created by means of his Word, so also his Word has the power to recreate, redeem, and save. The classic expressions in 40:8 and 55:10-11 further highlight this thrust. Yahweh’s Word is contrasted with idols who cannot say or do anything (e.g., Is. 41:22-24). (CC)

1 John 3:20, “whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. “

40:2 Jerusalem is a major motif in Isaiah. Earlier she was condemned. For example, the city is likened to a harlot (1:21) whose silver had become dross and whose wine had been mixed with water (1:22). Jerusalem’s leaders chased after bribes instead of looking after the orphan and widow (1:23). But this wanton woman is now pursued by her loving Husband, Yahweh! He commands his heavenly agents to speak upon her heart because his love for his bride had not grown cold. Yahweh is yearning to be reconciled with her, and the result will be that Jerusalem’s full beauty will emerge from the ashes (Is. 54; cf. Rev. 21). (CC)

Speak tenderly. The Hebrew for this phrase is used also in 2Ch 32:6, where Hezekiah “encouraged” Judah to trust in God in spite of the Assyrian invasion. (CSB)

The Hebrew word אָרַךְ denotes speaking in public, not in a subdued voice. *To speak tenderly*, or “to the heart,” is a Hebraism which means to flatter, to cajole, as in Gen. 34:3: “He spoke tenderly to her.” So here, the heart, groaning and sighing, is comforted by the Spirit, for the Spirit speaks to the heart as He wills. Do you want a gracious God? He answers: “You have a gracious God.” Do you want to be comforted? He answers: “You are comforted.” Here, then, you observe God’s people, afflicted and sad. To them the Gospel is spoken, to their heart and feeling. For Gospel preachers are commanded to say joyful things, more than the heart can grasp, as Paul says (Rom. 8:26), “with sighs too deep for words.” So these groans are comforted with consolations too deep for words. Let the preacher say, then: “I not only preach Christ to you as the One who forgives, but I also give you His righteousness, so that, clothed with Him, you may have all that is His. The comfort is therefore far more excellent than all groanings. Do you want to be holy? I will make you holy, yes, most holy through Christ.” (Luther)

Not harshly, as rebels against the King of heaven and earth should expect, but in the tone of winsome pleading with which a lover seeks to touch the heart of a maiden he is courting (Gn 34:3; Jgs 19:3). Jerusalem did nothing to deserve tender words. Her redemption would be an act of divine mercy without any merit or worthiness on her part. (TLSB)

Through means of human language, God transfers his comfort to others. The comfort originates with God, who reveals it in human language so that it can be extended to others by the same means. Speak to the heart and proclaim, to encourage. (PBC)

The comfort involved is so rich that it takes a number of statements to unfold the fullness of what is implied. The expression involved is almost untranslatable. It means to lay something tenderly close to the heart of another (cf. Hos 2:14). Like a gentle balm this message cools and soothes the troubled heart. (Leupold)

to Jerusalem – From this point on, more and more, terms like “Zion” and “Jerusalem” stand as synonyms for the holy people of God, the true believers in Israel. (Leupold)

cry to her – Cry aloud, shout boldly, let yourselves be heard. It is necessary to speak with a very loud voice so that consciences afflicted with the worst despair may be banished and downcast spirits lifted up. For a troubled conscience is like a condemned man who has nothing to look forward to but the sword. (Luther)

her warfare. The exile in Babylon (cf. Ps 137:1–6; La 1:1–2, 9, 16–17, 21). (CSB)

In the Sacred Scriptures every striving, attempt, and religious exercise represents this warfare of the Law. May the Spirit change it into the warfare of Christ! For to conduct warfare under the Law is to strive and to toil under the Law. Certainly those who are zealous in offering works of the Law have this warfare, like the self-righteous, just as the Jews conducted warfare under the Law with an evil zeal (Rom. 10:2). Warfare is the anxious and agitated concern to render satisfaction to God. For under the Law we are as it were under a custodian (Gal. 3:24). To love and to strive is to conduct warfare, and they are zealous in these works of loving and striving. When these works are finished, it is said that “your warfare is ended.” Thus those who are zealous of works here conduct warfare under the Law. For them another warfare is set forth by the Spirit and the Word, namely, Christ as the Mediator and the One who renders satisfaction, as the apostles teach. Every man must necessarily first be disturbed by the scepter of the Law, of death, and of hell and must experience a confounding of his conscience. Such people truly conduct warfare under the Law. To them properly belongs the comfort of the Gospel which says, “Do not fight any longer. Your warfare is finished and ended through Christ, the Redeemer.” (Luther)

All of these lie in the future. The events God announced were so certain that God speaks as if they had already been completed. No doubt exists about this future. (PBC)

This has primarily to do with military service, but can also mean difficulty and trials. On the one hand, the promise means that the Babylonian captivity has come to end. On the other hand, sin and death forge chains of bondage for every sinner. Every sinner longs for the announcement that he or she is free from such bondage. Because Jesus has come, we are released from death. We are no longer slaves to sin. We are no longer locked in the dungeon because of God’s wrath and anticipating an eternity of punishment and hell. Our hard service is completed, not because we have achieved release by our own effort or because we have done our time and satisfied the law. Our bondage is over because God has achieved our release through his Son, the Messiah. (PBC)

Destruction of the nation and subsequent Babylonian captivity (Is 43:14). God promised to cut short the time of “hard service” (14:3) in exile, even though justice required that suffering for sin should never end. (TLSB)

iniquity... pardoned... double.† Although she could do nothing to make amends for the debt incurred by her sin, nevertheless the Lord would let her receive good things in “double” proportion to the punishment she deserved (cf. 61:7). (CSB)

You are set free from sins, not by working and struggling but by forgiveness. Scripture teaches deliverance from sins by forgiveness and divine pardon, gratis and apart from works of the Law. This is contrary to the self-righteous, who teach that forgiveness of sins lies in works and strivings. For all seek remission of sins in their own powers, merits, and devotions as they busy themselves with the object of the Law. They want to be delivered by means of cowls, pilgrimages, etc. You shameless hypocrite, you want to revive those things which the Gospel looks back on. The Gospel says, “Believe God, trust in God. For your faith receives pardon for sins.” This is a grand text. Satan has often scolded me for believing the Christian faith to be contained in such few words, “The warfare is ended and iniquity is forgiven.” Mean-while he wanted to have me turn to the objects of the Law and tried to lead me back to this finished warfare. (Luther)

The debt caused by every twisted and perverted deed committed by God’s people and all humanity has been paid off. This does not mean that the 70 years of Judah’s captivity have been enough to pay the debt that Judah’s sins created. Judah could not atone for her own guilt or for the guilt of any other nation or people. But her sins have been paid for. If Judah could not pay the debt, how would her sins be paid for? The answer provides the reason why Isaiah’s prophecy remains so important. Someone will come to pay for her sins. In chapter 53, Isaiah clearly describes how this will happen. (PBC)

double for all her sins – By the pure mercy of God doubled gifts are given for all sins. We have learned this by experience. By our endless works and labors and in endless ways we have resisted this grace and achieved nothing but anguish of conscience. Here, however, you see it said by the wisdom of the Spirit that we attain to all these things by the grace of God alone, not as a result of our merits, but for our sins. (Luther)

Penalty of her iniquity was paid, even though she could do nothing to make amends for the debt she incurred. She received from the Lord’s hand good things in double proportion to the punishment she deserved for her sins (61:7; Jb 11:6). (TLSB)

“Double” points back to the double “comfort, comfort” announced in 40:1. Thus 40:1-2 both begins and ends with the two-fold gift of comfort by grace. (CC)

Double grace, that is, much grace, for God not only forgive her, but also exalted her. (Concordia Bible)

An obvious prerequisite is implied in all this. God does not pardon the impenitent. Therefore a preceding repentance must have been shaping up. (Leupold)

Isaiah 53:6 “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

The word double simply means that God’s blessings are ample, abundant, and beyond expectations. The sins of God’s people have deserved punishment, but God has offered forgiveness and eternal life instead of punishment. (PBC)

Romans 5:20 “The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.”

I Am with You in Waiting

Comfort, comfort My people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Isaiah 40:1–2

Are we there yet? You said it was only a little farther a long time ago!” These are the familiar words of children on a long trip. It’s difficult to wait, whether to reach our destination, or for a special event to arrive.

The people of Jerusalem waited, as exiles in Babylon. Year after year, they longed to return to Jerusalem. Through the prophet Isaiah, God spoke to them and comforted them with a message of coming deliverance. God assured them that He had not forgotten them and was still with them. Their longing to return home was soon satisfied, and their longing for the promised Messiah would finally be fulfilled as well.

Over the centuries, God’s faithful people longed for the coming of the promised Savior. Through His prophets, God was with them, assuring, encouraging, and comforting them in their waiting. As we long for His return, we also may grow weary of waiting. As He sent the promised Immanuel to be with us, so surely will He also deliver us from our waiting. We can wait patiently because God is with us.

Thank You, my Immanuel, for being with me in my waiting and longing. As I wait, comfort me with the knowledge that You always keep Your promises and that You will never forsake me. Amen.

40:3 40:3-5 takes up promises from chapter 35 and announces their fulfillment. The wilderness will be transformed (35:1-2, 6-7), Yahweh’s glory will be revealed (35:2), and the King will come (35:4). (CC)

voice. Three voices are mentioned (vv. 3, 6, 9), each showing how the comfort of v. 1 will come about. The NT links the voice of v. 3 with John the Baptist in Mt 3:3; Mk 1:3; Lk 3:4; Jn 1:23. (CSB)

The second herald, John the Baptist, was commissioned to “go before the Lord to prepare His ways” (Lk 1:76-79). He did so when he preached repentance “in the wilderness of Judea (Mt. 3:1). (TLSB)

In the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4), the speaker with this voice is John the Baptist, the herald of the Christ (Mt. 3:1-3; Mk. 1:1-4; Lk. 3:1-6; John 1:19-23). To quote Pieper: “This prophecy, let it be said, concerns not only John the Baptist but also all other preachers who have a similar calling, whether they lived before John or later than he.” Following in the footsteps of John, we are reminded that those who speak God’s Word of comfort are of little consequence (cf. Jn. 3:26-30; 1 Cor. 3:7). It is the message, not the messenger, that is paramount. (CC)

The word *voice* appears three times in the next nine verses. The verses can be divided by the appearance of the word. God communicated his message through human speech – the means through which God works on the hearts of his people. God does not work through telepathy or inner illumination. He communicates his thoughts to humans through human words expressed by human voice. No human knows the gospel of God by intuition or meditation. Humans learn the

love of God when messengers give voice to the Gospel: God hasn't promised to work in any other way. (PBC)

It is as if he were saying: "The preaching of the Law was a muttering, incomplete and unpleasant to all ears, and produced nothing but hypocrites. But here comes a *voice*, a clear and complete and universal proclamation which purely and joyously and most loudly declares that the warfare is ended and that sins are forgiven." This is received from a "voice," that is, through the public preaching of the Word. It must be heard and received from a speaking voice. (Luther)

Romans 10:14-15 "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

in the desert – This voice is sent forth in the wilderness both by the preacher himself and by the hearers. By contrast *wilderness* is placed opposite the teaching of the Law. For like a jail, a wall, and a city, the Law secures and fences us in. The voice of the Gospel, however, is a free wilderness, open to all, public, and unrestrained like a wilderness. There is indeed a limitation about the Law, but the teaching of the Gospel is most free and most unrestrained. Hence all these words are as by contrast set against the teaching of the Law. (Luther)

prepare the way.† Clear obstacles out of the road (cf. 57:14; 62:10). The language of vv. 3–4 has in view the ancient Near Eastern custom of sending representatives ahead to prepare the way for the visit of a monarch. The picture is that of preparing a processional highway for the Lord's coming to his people. In Mt 3:1–8 John declares that repentance is necessary to prepare the way for Christ. (CSB)

The double comfort of vv 1-2 will come about when the Lord breaks into history and comes to the aid of His people. The Lord has done before (cf. Dt 33:2; jgs 5:4-5; Ps 68:7-8) and will do so again (Is 52:7-10). The prophet may also be playing on a Babylonian hymn that speaks of making straight paths for Nabu, Babylonian god of writing and wisdom. Roads were often constructed for visiting dignitaries, triumphant kings, or for idols as they were carried in procession. (TLSB)

To prepare the way of the Lord means to prepare ourselves for the Lord's activity in us, so that God may help us and our life may be the life of Christ. It is the way because men ought to have a heavenly way. But how is this way prepared? To prepare is to clear out of the way whatever will be an obstruction. This preparation is nothing else than our humbling ourselves from our arrogance and glory. Those are the chief obstacle for the hypocrites, who walk in human ways and in their own presumption and do not accept the grace of Christ. To prepare this way, however, means to walk on it naked, without merits of any kind, in the grace of God alone and with the reception of double gifts by faith. It is as if we should say: "If Thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities" and "But there is forgiveness with Thee" (Ps. 130:3 f.). Now, this preparation is twofold: (1) That we put off our gross sins. This is easy. (2) That we get rid of all self-reliance and count it as refuse (Phil. 3:8). This is difficult for the flesh. Therefore people must cry, importune, and shout, because they are not devoted to sound doctrine, but reason always thinks that justification is in the Law and in works. Thus the flesh and reason judge. Against this the Holy Spirit cries and says, "The Law must indeed be kept in training, as it were, in self-examination, but on a far higher plane and in God's way through Christ by faith." (Luther)

make straight ... a highway. In typical Oriental fashion they are even to smooth the way for their king. Since he went into the wilderness, from the wilderness he will again come. (Leupold)

According to His eternal plan, “the way of the Lord” has as its predestined goal the redemption of all humankind through His Son, Jesus Christ. All obstacles will be cleared from His highway of salvation. His chosen people will come forth from the grave of the exile and survive the rise and fall of empires in order that the Savior might be born “of the house and lineage of David” (Lk 2:4) as foretold. (TLSB)

40:4 *every valley...lifted up* – This is the way it must be. If I level hills and valleys, then they are all alike. So the Gospel makes us all equal. “We have borne the burden of the whole day. Then the Gospel comes and upsets everything. *Valleys* are sinners, fools, lowly. *Mountains* are presumptuous saints. Here before God all things must be leveled. (Luther)

uneven ground ... level. Isaiah is not specifying a literal topographical change but the restoration of the fallen creation. The coming of Christ offers a joyful homecoming to all who have been exiled from the Father because of their sin, which can be described as mountains, hills, crooked ground, and rough places standing in the way of God’s advent to them. The sins of the nation, which had brought about the period of indignation and had kept God from His people, will be removed so that they will not longer stand in the ways of His appearance among his own. (CC)

All obstacles to redemption of God’s people shall be taken out of the way. (Concordia Bible)

In a general way all this is to be interpreted spiritually. The nation is to remove every spiritual barrier that might hinder the coming of their God. (Leupold)

This, too, is figurative. There are two inconveniences that weary us, the crooked road and the stony road. These denote ways of life according to commandments and reason because, when we attempt to go faster by way of the commandments, we proceed slowly on crooked roads. Then there is the stony road, that is, living according to the Law. This is a bothersome, troublesome, and inconvenient way, as you have experienced. As you toiled along, this way gave you nothing but trouble and unpleasantness. Summary: Every kind of world outside of grace is a crooked and rough road. This I experienced myself when I lived according to the human way in contrition, confession, and vigils and was walking on broken and rough ways. Let him who has never tried it see for himself. Thus the commentary adds more commentary, and one law follows another. There is no sure way. The Gospel, however, teaches the straight and level way, to believe in Christ and to serve the neighbor. This is the straight way to heaven. It is direct and does not meander and curve. (Luther)

40:5 *glory ... revealed.* God would redeem Israel from Babylon, and all the nations would see the deliverance (52:10; cf. Lk 3:6). Ultimately the glory of the redeeming God would be seen in Jesus Christ (Jn 1:14; 11:4, 40; 17:4; Heb 1:3), especially at his return (Mt 16:27; 24:30; 25:31; Rev 1:7)—but also in the redeemed (see 1Co 10:31; 2Co 3:18; Eph 3:21). (CSB)

The Lord’s presence in, with, and under a pillar of cloud or pillar of fire (cf Ex 16:10; 40:34). This phrase has played a key role throughout Isaiah thus far (cf 4:5; 6:3; 35:2) and will continue to play an important role, esp in ch 66. (TLSB)

God’s glory may be seen by the eyes of faith as well as by the physical eye. (Leupold)

That is to say, the crooked and rough ways establish and produce nothing but our own righteousness and glow in our own works and despair in our sins, because our own glow naturally follows human righteousness. God alone must resist this so that He may reveal His own glow and we may appear empty, since our own righteousness has been condemned by the Law. Then the Christian will boast most proudly in the glory of Christ, who was born, who suffered and died. The Jews think this glory will come because they will return to Jerusalem. (Luther)

all flesh shall see it – All people. When the Lord’s glory was revealed in His incarnate Son, His purpose was not to destroy sinners but to bring the light of salvation to all peoples of the earth (52:10; 60:1-3). However, there will also come a time when “the Son of Man comes in His glory” to judge “all nations” (Mt 25:31-32). (TLSB)

Lord has spoken – Christ Himself speaks in the New Testament. Moses has been repealed. The Word of God is set forth with full clarity, and through it Christ will be proclaimed. (Luther)

40:1–5 The Lord promises comfort and restoration for the Babylonian exiles. These promises, fulfilled through John the Baptist’s ministry, have personal consequences for you and for all people. Just as the Lord doubled the comfort and forgiveness for the exiles, He has doubled comfort and forgiveness for you in the person of His Son. • Lord, as You have prepared comfort for all people through Jesus, prepare my mouth and heart to speak of that comfort and peace to those around me. Amen. (CC)

The Word of God Stands Forever

6 A voice says, “Cry!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

40:6, 8 Quoted in part in 1Pe 1:24–25. (CSB)

40:6 *voice*. The Lord’s messenger. (TLSB)

cry – This time God directs his command to a single messenger, perhaps Isaiah as a representative of all messengers. But precisely who is to cry out is left indefinite and vague. Once again the Lord appears to cover all his messengers in these verses. Every messenger disappears behind the news. The news becomes more important than the one who delivers it. (PBC)

Here this imperative most likely means “to call out” or “to preach,” but it could mean “to read.” Isaiah’s vision initially addressed those who could neither hear nor see (6:9-10). Those who opposed this Word understood it as gibberish (28:13). These examples demonstrate the interconnectedness between orality and written texts. Texts composed for public address are written for the ears and not only for eyes. This has multiple ramifications for the Divine Worship service, which features the oral reading of the Scriptures and the preaching of the same. (CC)

what shall I cry – A message of law and gospel. The law comes first and destroys all human pride. (PBC)

It is now being indicated that much as Israel might want to rebuild herself in her own strength – and who would not want a share in the achievement of great things? – human strength is too utterly inadequate a thing to achieve results like these. (Leupold)

are grass. The message to be called out or read aloud is sobering. “All flesh is grass, and all its covenant love is like a flower or the field.” At his call Isaiah had drawn attention to the sinful nature of humanity by saying that the people are “unclean of lips” (6:5). Original sin and its consequence, universal death, is the reason for the declaration that “all flesh is grass,” that is, we are temporal, unreliable, and dying. (CC)

beauty. Hbr *chesed*, typically translated “steadfast love.” All of Israel’s covenantal love is worthless. Their only hope is that the Lord’s mercy will triumph over His judgment (Jas 2:13). (TLSB)

The prophet’s message leaves no human glory standing before God’s great majesty and power. Twice we see the word all. All humans and all human achievements are included. That message devastates the human with its pride. All of us want to consider ourselves important, and we desire to do something important. But all humans are like grass, and every achievement – all their glory – is nothing more than the blossom of a flower, which blooms beautifully but soon drops its petals and dies. (PBC)

Grass came out beautifully in spring in the Holy Land and after a few weeks withered and shriveled. (Leupold)

like the flower of field. Even the power of Assyria and Babylon would soon vanish. (CSB)

40:7 *breath of the Lord* – The “breath” or Spirit of the Lord is normally a life-giving breath (Gn 2:7; Ps 104:30; Ezk 37:1–6; Jn 20:22). However, here it brings death. It is like the hot, dry desert winds that come upon Israel in May to turn the lush, green countryside to a brown desert like land in less than 48 hours. (TLSB)

In the face of the Lord’s hot breath, both the people, who are grass, and their achievements, which are flowers, wither and fall. No matter what humans may accomplish, death still stalks every last one of us and will eventually pounce on us all and devour us. We are not to place our hopes and dreams on anything human, no matter how glorious it seems. The above phrase perhaps recalled the hot dry winds that frequently blew across Palestine from the desert. In a short time such a hot, persistent wind could dry up everything and make life in Jerusalem miserable. (PBC)

It takes nothing more than “the breath of the Lord” – we might say “any passing wind” – to bring about the quick withering of the grass and the fading of the flower. (Leupold)

The Spirit may also bring death to sinners upon whom he blows. In this capacity, Yahweh’s Spirit is likened to the hot, dry desert winds that come upon Israel in May to turn the lush green countryside to a brown desert-like land in less than forty-eight hours (cf. Jer. 13:24). The Babylonian devastation of Judah and Jerusalem can be likened to this particular case of withering. In turn, Yahweh will also execute judgment on Babylon through Cyrus, who will drive out the empire like chaff (40:23-24; 41:2) and reduce its hills to stubble (41:15). (CC)

This comparison between people and wilting vegetation is not simply a figure of speech. A profound theology is contained in the words “surely the people are grass.” Humanity was created to tend and govern the rest of the creation (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:5, 15). We are inescapably rooted in the created order, as expressed by Moses’ pun on the words “the man,” and “the ground,” in Gen. 2:7. The sin of Adam and Eve brought death upon humanity as well as a divine curse upon the

earth and its vegetation (Gen. 3:17-19). What happens to trees and grass impacts people, whose sustenance is the fruit of the earth. Plants thrive and we thrive; they die and we die. The earth mourns and laments (e.g., 16:8; 24:4; 33:9) as do people (e.g., 19:8; 61:2-3; 66:10). Conversely, trees rejoice (e.g., 14:8 44:23; 55:12) and so do people (e.g., 42:10; 51:11). Attribution of human characteristics to plants, like the attribution to people, affirms the critical ties binding humans to the landscape they depend upon. (CC)

Long before the environment movement burst into the mainstream of Western society's consciousness with its warning about pollution, the abuse of pesticides and herbicides, and the fragility of ecosystems, Isaiah testifies to the connections between civilization and vegetation. Spiritual health and environmental well-being are interconnected throughout chapters 40-55. Land degradation signals that people have turned away from Yahweh. On the other hand, the land will flourish when the people return to their God, and he revisits them (e.g., Lev. 26:3-6, 10; Deut. 28:2-5, 11-12; Ps. 65 and 72). (CC)

40:8 *word of our God stands.* The plans and purposes of the nations will not prevail. (CSB)

Unlike the frailty of created things, God's Word remains for all time. Cf Jb 14:1-2; Ps 102:14; 103:15-17; Is 55:10-11; 1Pt 1:24-25. (TLSB)

Matthew 24:35, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

Finally, when the Lord returns, the earth and all that is within it will be destroyed. The Word of the Lord will survive even that catastrophe. It is permanent and enduring. (PBC)

The power is the Word of the Lord. Trusting in that Word and using that Word, God's people can confidently face the future, which will bring Israel results that are otherwise humanly impossible. (Leupold)

In the original there is a "but" that precedes the phrase "word of our God stands forever." This is a defiant "but." God's Word is indestructible! It is "forever fixed in the heavens" Ps. 119:89). And so, the Gospel promises in Is. 40:1-2 forever stand! (CC)

The "Word of our God" takes us back to 40:1 and its echo of the covenant formula "my people... your God." This is not just any god, but the Word of the covenant God, Yahweh, who graciously reenters into a relationship with Israel to bestow his gift of double comfort. (CC)

40:6-8 The Lord's messenger contrasts the Lord's faithfulness with the unfaithfulness of all people. Rather than defend your weaknesses, confess them before the Lord, who gives life through His Word. • Dear Lord, breathe on me Your life-giving Spirit through the faithful promises in Your Word. Then I will be swayed by Your mercy and bear fruit to Your glory. Amen. (TLSB)

The Greatness of God

9 Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" 10 Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. 11 He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. 12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure

and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? 13 Who has measured[g] the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel? 14 Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? 15 Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. 16 Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering. 17 All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness. 18 To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? 19 An idol! A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains. 20 He who is too impoverished for an offering chooses wood that will not rot; he seeks out a skillful craftsman to set up an idol that will not move. 21 Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? 22 It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; 23 who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. 24 Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. 25 To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. 26 Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing. 27 Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God”? 28 Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. 29 He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. 30 Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; 31 but they who wait for 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.

40:9 Zion. So Zion, though she will lie in ruins and lament Yahweh’s absence, will resurrected. Then she will be able to get up to a high mountain and announce her glad tidings. Yahweh, then, tells Zion not what she is, but what she will become. A similar strategy is used in Gen. 17:5 when Yahweh reminds Abram (“exalted father”) Abraham (“father of man”) and in Gen. 32:27-28) when he dubs Jacob (he supplants, tricks”) Israel (“he wrestles with God”). Zion’s final destiny is made manifest in Is. 2:1-5, where⁴ the prophet foresees the day when she will be lifted up as the highest of all the mountains and Gentile nations will stream to her. “For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn and her salvation life a blazing torch” (62:1). (CC)

good news.† The news that God cares for his people and will redeem them (52:7–10; 61:1). The NT explains that this “good news” or “gospel” refers to the salvation that Christ brings to all people (1Co 15:1–4). (CSB)

Last of the three heralds in vv 1–11 is Jerusalem. She broadcasts good news to surrounding neighborhoods, in this case “cities of Judah.” (TLSB)

Every Christian is also an evangelist, who should teach another and publish the glory and praise of God. But the order must be preserved intact so that we do not teach in a confused manner. I would, however, rather hear him who has been sent, and I will hear him, than preach myself, unless I were sent myself. For we must be humble, and we should outdo one another in showing honor (Rom. 12:10). *O Zion, herald of good tidings.* מְבַשְּׂרֵי. The emphasis lies on the word

herald. רָשַׁע means to proclaim joyful and happy tidings. For since Zion has been well informed and taught, she must proclaim and urge joyful tidings. (Luther)

go up on a high mountain – The message to be published is so momentous that Zion is bidden to go up into the high mountain in order that her voice may carry far and wide. (Leupold)

voice – The word “voice” appears for the third time but this time not as the first word of the verse. Two ideas receive emphasis before we read the word “voice.” First, the Word of God rises far above anything human. It deserves to be proclaimed from the highest mountain. God directs the messengers who possess the “word of our God” (Verse 8) to go up to a high place where their message can be broadcast to the widest audience. Second, the message they were to proclaim is “good tidings.” This is the gospel – the good news of God’s tender love for His people. In the verses that follow, we will learn more about the good news. (PBC)

fear not – To announce the good tidings, for thou shalt not disappoint the hopes of those that hear them. (Concordia Bible)

behold your God – If the breath of the Lord caused the grass and flowers of humanity to wither, why would anyone want to hear that the Lord is coming? We find the answer in the law and the gospel. Those who reject God will fear His coming, but those who believe will anticipate His coming and prepare for it, will actually look forward to it joyfully. The Lord’s good news works this change, for the good news reveals not God’s anger against sin and the sinner – that is the message of the law – but His compassionate and gracious heart. Both law and gospel reveal the same God. The law reveals Him as fierce in judgment. The gospel reveals Him as gracious and loving. (PBC)

Focus is on God only—not His city, temple, or people. (TLSB)

40:10 *comes with might* – “He comes with might.” Know, then, that although you are only one, your word will go forward because it is the power of God. This appeared in the weak apostles, where the strength of God moved forward against the power of the world, according to 1 Cor. 1:18 ff. (Luther)

arm rules. Cf. 51:9; 59:16. He is characterized by both strength and gentleness (v. 11). (CSB)

Personal strength in action. Cf 48:14; 51:5, 9; 52:10; 53:1; 62:8; 63:5, 12. (TLSB)

Yahweh’s tough and tender arm defines not only the last words of 40:9, “behold your God,” but also the Gospel that Zion/Jerusalem is commanded to announce. The political, economic, and theological claims of Babylon and other oppressors would try to banish Yahweh from the horizon. While he may have left his people for a short time (54:7-8), now he is back, returning as King (41:21; 43:15; 44:6; 52:7). Yahweh’s royal authority will trump the Babylonian hegemony and its claims regarding Marduk. Babylon’s power was celebrated in the festivals marking the coming of their deities into the city, but now a far greater One was coming to his people and his coming would wither the pretensions of Babylon and its man-made gods. (CC)

Our eyes are to look to God and see His coming. What do we see? The Sovereign Lord, that is, the powerful gracious, and faithful God of the covenant. He controls all things and comes in power. He comes leading the exiles back home from their captivity. He leads them in triumphant procession. (PBC)

“Arm rules” says that His strength prevails and gains the victory. (Leupold)

reward ... recompense.† The efforts he puts forth bring the desired results (cf. 59:16; 62:11–12). (CSB)

The Lord brings punishment for the wicked and blessings for the faithful. (TLSB)

The reward is the result of the work that God Himself performed. God has obtained the reward by the suffering, death, and resurrection of His own Son. Through that work God has achieved forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and deliverance from everything that would separate His people from Him. Blood bought this reward, and God achieved it by His own work. Such blessings no human could achieve. God appears in this portrait ready to dispense these blessings to His people. (PBC)

40:11 *tend his flock.* Cf. Jer 31:10; Eze 34:11–16. (CSB)

Congregation of believers. (TLSB)

Because of His work, God has claimed us as His own, and by grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, we surround this glorious and powerful Lord as sheep surround a shepherd. As God’s people, we are familiar with the picture of the shepherd tenderly caring for his flock. Jesus made use of the image (John 10), so did others like David (Psalm 23) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 34). The powerful Lord cares for His people. He places the lambs, weak and newly born, in the folds of His garment close to His heart. Those who have young need His special care to lead them. It is no wonder that this message, these good tidings, should be proclaimed from the mountains for all to hear. (PBC)

These are the things that Zion is to publish throughout the cities of Judah. But she cannot publish them effectively unless she first appropriates them in faith. (Leupold)

He assumes the role of a mother and a nurse. He will so fructify the Word that it will in no wise appear futile but will encourage both the strong and the weak. He will feed His sheep, that is, the believers and the instructed. (Luther)

like a shepherd. Those who hear His voice and follow Him can depend on Him to be kind and generous in caring for them, be they ever so helpless and weak (Ps 23:1; Lk 1:52; Jn 10:3–4). Once the Lord arrives, He will deal with Israel as a shepherd cares for his sheep. The militaristic arm of v 10 is also a shepherding arm. This change from soldier to shepherd occurs elsewhere (2Sm 5:2; 7:7; Mi 5:4). (TLSB)

The victory parade from 40:10 continues. Yahweh, the Mighty Warrior, is also the Good Shepherd. On his way back to Jerusalem (cf. 40:5), he carries Israel as a shepherd tends to his sheep. He leads the procession returning to Zion (52:8-12). The details given in 40:11b emphasize the fact that the shepherd does not lead an undifferentiated multitude, but individuals: each one receives the care he needs from him. “My people” in 40:1 is equivalent to “his flock” in 40:11. And the flock that Yahweh gathers includes the most vulnerable: newborn lambs and their nursing mothers. (CC)

gather the lambs – This is taken from the life of shepherds, who deal thus with the newly-born lambs. As a shepherd protects them with his cloak and in his bosom and gently leads the

mother with him, so our God gathers us in His bosom and His arms like a shepherd. He grazes the strong flock running about, but He carries the weak little lamb. These are charming words. Here you see that in the church there are the strong and the weak in faith, and a conscientious pastor looks after them both. To *carry in the arms* means to receive the weak brother. The kingdom of God rejects no one but receives all who hear the Word. (Luther)

carry them in His bosom. Fold of a robe above the sash could hold a sick or injured lamb. (TLSB)

lead those that are with young – That is, He deals with them as they can bear it. This is what Jacob did when he was accompanying his brother Esau. Jacob said (Gen. 33:14): “I will lead on slowly ... according to the pace of the children.” Thus we must deal with the weak brothers. We must gather them. The Hebrew word for “lambs” means “spotted ones,” which is the genus in place of the species. Here you see the supreme consolation. First He invigorated the preachers with His own strength. So He consoles them here by assuring them that He will regularly be with them as their Shepherd, so that they may not despair in their own faintheartedness. (Luther)

40:12–31 Rhetorical questions are used to persuade the people to trust in the Lord, who has the ability to deliver, strengthen and restore his people. (CSB)

40:12 *Who.* He whose handiwork is the vast universe (Jb 38–39; Ps 19:1; 104; Is 48:3). (TLSB)

measured the waters. See Job 28:25; 38:8. In Job 38–41 the Lord overwhelms Job with a description of his greatness. (CSB)

Someone has estimated that the world’s oceans contain 340 quintillion gallons of water. (LL)

Contemporary measurement techniques are more sophisticated than those in Isaiah’s day, but even light-years cannot measure the heavens and we can only estimate the volume of the oceans. (PBC)

marked off the heavens. See 48:13. (CSB)

Scientists now “mark off the heavens,” measuring the universe at 30 billion light years, a figure almost certain to be revised – doubtless, upward. These answers to only two of Isaiah’s questions fill us with the kind of awe appropriate for finite creatures who encounter the incredible majesty of our infinite Creator! (LL)

enclosed the dust...scales – The Hebrew word *נִפְרָר* means spaded earth, soil, a clod. This is what Adam was made of. With three fingers He enfolds the whole earth. These pictures denote the power of Him who gave the earth and every mountain and body of water its width and size and weight. So He says elsewhere (Is. 66:1): “Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool,” as if to say, “Why do you strive to appease My immeasurable majesty with works, all of which are done through Me and are Mine?” (Luther)

weighed the mountains – The Lord acts as an artisan and a merchant designing the world with tools of the marketplace. (TLSB)

40:13 Quoted in Ro 11:34; 1Co 2:16. (CSB)

40:14 *whom did he consult* – All of these words are full of invective and very sharp against those who want to be gods. All the self-righteous are involved in this desire. They want to educate God, teach God. If He has forgotten anything, they are ready to remind Him of it. (Luther)

who taught him – The self-righteous man replies: “I did.” Not that he actually uses that word, but he says so by his actions. For he who refuses to obey God is an idolater, as is very plainly stated in 1 Sam. 15:23. So our most shameless self-righteous people do not want to be formed. They desire rather to form, to choose, and to will, and they count the Divine Majesty for nothing. (Luther)

He is speaking against those who want to teach Him knowledge. He is not speaking about gross sins but about the internal sins of Antichrist, where we would teach God. I would not have imagined that that sin is so common. But as we fall very quickly from the Word of God, so we slip very quickly into idolatry, we fashion God and teach Him according to our own opinion. (Luther)

No one had more knowledge than God. The most intelligent human being may be acclaimed by his or her society for the great contributions made to some field of knowledge. But we measure such greatness only by comparison with other humans, not by comparison with the omniscience of God. (PBC)

path of justice – The Hebrew word *דַּרְשׁוּ* means knowledge, which is the recognition of the good. Understanding is itself the practice and guide of wisdom. Our God is incapable of doing this, but the ungodly self-righteous do their works, because when they fall away from the Word, they quickly fall into idolatry and set out to teach God wisdom and understanding. (Luther)

40:15 *nations ... a drop in a bucket*. This is a great and mighty text. Just as one little trace is nothing alongside the ocean and a little dust is nothing alongside the heavens, so all human plans are nothing. You will do well to understand “nations” as referring to the wisdom, knowledge, design, and righteousness of all people. All of these things are like a *drop from a bucket*. (Luther)

That doesn't mean God thinks the nations are unimportant and worthless. His love for the world moved Him to send His Son so that all who believe in Him would have everlasting life (John 3:16). Here Isaiah presents the comparison in order to remove human pride and arrogance. (PBC)

Of no account. Comparison elaborates v 12. (TLSB)

dust. Some little residual powder left on a scale and balance plate, a milligram. He means to say: God Himself is so great in righteousness, power, and majesty that compared with His power and majesty ours is nothing. It is like a *drop from a bucket* and like dust. There would be the devil to pay, for the world would have bought that bucket at so great a price. All the sweat, toil, and cost for our righteousness has been expended for a bucket and for dust. (Luther)

This is a most abundant refutation of human glory, and whoever presses forward to this place is against God. Because it is inborn in us that we want to be gods and we strive for divinity, therefore the prophet with so many words and so much thunder and lightning brings human glow to naught. In other words, all the righteousness and uprightness, and the wisdoms of the whole world by means of which a man wants to be justified—all these are like powdery particles, like a little dust. (Luther)

No matter what these nations and coastlands do, burning their precious wood (Lebanon was known for its cedar forests) or even sacrificing all their bulls, the nations will not be significant compared to the Lord. Cf Is 2:6–22. (TLSB)

coastlands. Synonym of “nations” referring to what lies at the edges of the land, i.e., the ends of the earth. (TLSB)

40:16 *Lebanon.* The wood of its cedar trees. (CSB)

The very abundance of Lebanon, a huge mountain, would not suffice to provide the material for one religion. What do our sacrifices amount to? Where will the Jews remain with their sacrifices? “If we were to burn up the whole Hercynian forest for one sacrifice, we would have done nothing,” the prophets would reply. What are all the temples we have built? “Nothing,” says the prophet, “because the righteousness that is in them is in opposition to the righteousness of Christ.” (Luther)

its beasts. Cf. Ps 104:16–18. Sacrifices, however numerous, could never do justice to the greatness of God. (CSB)

A fine text. All of Lebanon together with its beasts would not be enough for one whole burnt offering. If this accomplishes nothing, I might just as well keep my load of wood and my cow at home. Nevertheless, our thoroughly blinded reason will not stop thinking of God as of a man and trying to please Him by means of works. (Luther)

40:17 *nothing ... emptiness.* In spite of the temporary splendor they might possess. (CSB)

הָיָה. The nations are absolutely nothing, that is to say, not inasmuch as they are creatures but when they are presumptuous and want to appease God by their own wisdom and righteousness. Here he is not speaking of the nations metaphysically as far as their creatureliness is concerned (for that is in itself good) but according to the practice of those who desire to rise and be God by their own righteousness. All of these endeavors are הָיָה, that is, “empty” and “nothing.” (Luther)

40:18–20 More than any other prophet, Isaiah shows the folly of worshiping idols. His sarcastic caricature, satire and denunciation of these false gods reach a peak in 44:9–20 (see 41:7, 22–24; 42:17; 46:5–7; 48:5). (CSB)

40:18 *To whom ... compare God?* See v. 25; 46:5.

Now the prophet makes his application against human wisdom and righteousness that is to be established instead of the Word of faith. “What have you ungodly self-righteous people done? You have made of Me an image of a man and a perishable creature. You treat Me like a young puppy that needs to be looked after.” *To whom, then, will you liken God?* Some refer this passage to the defensive power of the godly. We take it to be praise of a refuting power which can turn the ungodly with all their designs into little grains of dust, so that the prophet is ridiculing their designs by the power of God to reduce to nothing. Thus God knows not only how to protect the godly but also to refute the ungodly. Thus the prophet with these words silences our designs and righteousnesses. (Luther)

40:19 *idol!* Hbr word usually translated “graven image” or “carved image” (cf v 20; 10:10; 44:15). Process of manufacturing an image shows how ridiculous humans are to worship what they fabricate out of lifeless material. Cf 41:6–7; 44:9–20; 46:1–2; Jer 10:1–16. (TLSB)

craftsman ... goldsmith. See 41:7; 44:10–12. (CSB)

Here the prophet taunts them. “This is that worship of yours that you have given Me, that you construct an image for yourself and bend the knee. Do you think you are honoring Me in that way?” It is as if He were saying: “Is such a carved image like Me, something that a goldsmith shapes with much toil and embellishment?” (Luther)

gold ... silver. That is, various kinds of ornamentation. There are two kinds of idolatry, that of the rich man, who makes golden idols, and that of the poor man, who makes wooden ones. (Luther)

40:20 *too impoverished* – Sarcasm. He can make a god, but not a sacrifice. (TLSB)

Even though a poor man cannot create a god as exquisite as that made of gold and silver, nevertheless he will carefully spend time selecting the best materials he can and hire a skilled craftsman to fashion his god. For the poor man, his religion requires sacrifice and devotion. (PBC)

wood. See 44:14–16, 19. (CSB)

הָרִימָה is wood suitable for an offering. This is what the poor offer, because they do not have gold and silver. (Luther)

that will not rot. See 41:7; 46:7. (CSB)

Gods of the nations cannot be affected or moved to compassion. Isaiah treats idolatry as foolishness. (TLSB)

The rich man has long-lasting gold and silver, but the poor man is careful not to choose wood that will rot so that his god will not soon rot. This was customary in the prophet’s time. Although we do not have this kind of idolatry, since the material of the heathen’s idolatry is not the same as ours, yet the use and the attitude of both kinds of idolatry is the same. What the heathen had in their wood, we have in our opinions and our righteousness, and thus the attitude is the same. (Luther)

40:21-31 Sixth-century Israelites in Babylon lived in exilic hopelessness (e.g., Psalm 137). Full of despair, the people doubted if the Lord could free them and bring them home. Is 40:12–20 announces that the Lord was—and is—the one and only God. He is transcendent over creation (40:12) and history (40:15–17). He is unlike the idols of Babylon (40:19–20); indeed, the Lord cannot be compared with anyone or anything else (40:18). The Lord is the Creator and King who exercises a full monopoly of power and authority. Contrary to the gods and goddesses of Babylon, the Lord is not a nationalistic deity or an individualistic idol. He is the only true God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

40:21-23 These verses build on the theme set forth from 40:12–15. Not even the rulers of the nations, many of whom claim to be gods, are of any consequence compared to the Lord. The phrase “sits above the circle of the earth” (v 22) refers to the vault of the heavens, which—to the naked eye—appears to stretch from horizon to horizon. This is where the Lord sits, enthroned above the world. From this point, people look like grasshoppers (cf. Num 13:33). This vault is merely a curtain or tent canopy, which, one day, the Lord will tear up in order to reveal himself to

the world (cf. Is 51:6; Rev 19:11). Marduk, the creator god in Babylonian religion, had to work by committee. He consulted with Ea, “the all-wise,” before making any decision. The Lord needs no one with whom to discuss his decisions. Compared to his mighty works, human authorities are *tohu* (“emptiness”; cf. Gen 1:2). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

40:21 *do you not know...do you not hear...not been told...not understood* – The four questions of this verse are blunt challenges to all who create God in their own image and make idols. God has not hidden Himself. He has revealed Himself from the beginning. (PBC)

Rhetorical questions. Things they obviously should know. Not only could God’s “eternal power and divine nature” be clearly perceived (Rm 1:20), but He also revealed Himself by His holy prophets (Lk 1:70). (TLSB)

There is certain tone of impatience, and even exasperation here. The prophet is peaking of certain elementary truths concerning which there should really be no need that he instruct the people of God. (Leupold)

This is the rebuke which follows the refutation. “Are you so mad and foolish? Have you not heard from the beginning? Have you not understood even though it has been sufficiently shown to you? Now you should know it. How are you going to excuse yourselves for your error?” It is as much as saying, “The very thing you worship ignorantly, that you do not know.” In John 8:54 f. Christ says, “Of whom you say that He is your God. But you have not known Him.” They confess that they have a notion of God, but they do not have knowledge of God. So he says here: “Since you have heard it said often enough, why do you do these things? God already exists, He cannot be formed, but He Himself gives breath and life to all.” Every ungodly person grants: “If there is a God, He gives and helps and does not want to be helped.” This is what the heathen demonstrate. Each one begged his own idol, Mars, Jupiter, and Venus, to help him. How, then, do you want to choose and shape God, to give Him things and help Him, when you should rather beseech Him in your needs and call upon Him? Why, then, do you invent a way in which you want to shape Him, as if He were not already God? (Luther)

These questions assume that the Spirit (40:13) is working through the Word of forgiveness (40:1) to enable the audience to understand Yahweh’s will and ways. (CC)

from the beginning. God’s work as Creator is emphasized in the rest of the chapter (cf. 37:26; 41:4, 26). (CSB)

Connections to Isaiah 6 that were in 40:1-11 continue in 40:21-31. This last section of chapter 40 implies that the curse of 6:9-10 is reversed by the power of the Gospel now proclaimed. (CC)

40:22 *circle.* Or “horizon.” See Job 22:14; Pr 8:27. (CSB)

Firmament. Everything appears small before God. (TLSB)

This refers to the vault of the heavens, which – to the naked eye – appears to stretch from horizon to horizon. The cosmology revealed to Israel in the Scriptures is at home in the ancient world rather than in the modern world. In some ways the cosmic geography of the OT is comparable to that of Israel’s neighbors, although it is distinct in its revelation of how Yahweh operates in the world. (CC)

like grasshoppers – Humans are like so many grasshoppers. Because of their sin, they are nothing like God. They are finite, temporal, imperfect, subject to changes of all kinds, and mortal. What arrogance for finite creatures to fashion God! If we want to know about God, we must humbly listen to what He tells us. (PBC)

He sits above the cherubim, and in His eyes we are grasshoppers that whirl and buzz with their wings. The prophet thus rejects most vehemently every kind of righteousness that despises the measureless mercy of God, which is beyond comprehension. This comparison with grasshoppers is frequently used in the Scriptures, as if to say, “Grasshoppers are easily shooed away.” All inhabitants of the earth are like this in the sight of God. They cannot bear God’s least judgment but are scattered by one word and breath of God. (Luther)

stretches out the heavens ... like a tent. See 42:5; 44:24; 51:13; Ps 19:4; 104:2. (CSB)

Possible references to the heavenly tabernacle (Heb 8:1–2). (TLSB)

As a man might with infinite ease spread out a light veil, so it in days of old cost the Lord no more effort when He for the first time created and “spread out the heavens.” Or, as a man pitches a tent, with ease in quick order, this being a common occupation among men, with the ease the Lord spread out the heavens like a tent to dwell in. (Leupold)

The prophet repeats himself in various ways to confute the daring of those who attempt to fashion God, because there is simply no comparison between the greatness of God and our littleness. (Luther)

40:23 *princes ... rulers ... to nothing.* Translated “emptiness” (v 17), “wasted” (24:10), “empty” (45:18), “void” (Jb 26:7). (TLSB)

God takes us and His prophet one step further. Even the great leaders of the world are nothing compared to God. The princes and rulers of this world come under the control of the God of the heavens. He controls their history. God exists far above the world He created; He rules the universe as a powerful monarch above all creation. (PBC)

In the ancient Near East, the monarchy was frequently considered to be a source of restoring divine order in the world. But Isaiah maintains that pagan potentates are the cause of disorder. They often corrupt societies and lead them into darkness. Political heavyweights are less than lightweights (cf. Jn 19:10-11). (CC)

He is not condemning the princes and rulers but rather their plans. For their plans will be *היהוה*, that is, nothing, as if they did not have root, sprout, or seed. Although these words can be understood as applying to the mercy of the princes, it is best to refer them to their plans. The ungodly are not so, not so but like dust which rises from the ground, as Christ says (Matt. 15:13): “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted, etc.” Where are all the princes, Sadducees, and Pharisees? There is nothing left of them except the little that is remembered concerning them on earth. It must come out as though it had neither root nor seed. (Luther)

40:24 In vv 6–7, people are like grass in its full growth, but here they are cut short, seen as barely sprouted seeds. (TLSB)

tempest ... like stubble. The storm blows the dried grass away as chaff. Cf Ps 1:4. (TLSB)

This echoes the earlier comparison of people to grass and flowers in 40:6–8. Princes and rulers—those who posture themselves as the real “power brokers”—are transient and nothing compared to the Lord (cf. Jn 19:10–11). Contextually, the stubble refers to Cyrus’s enemies (41:2), one of which is Babylon (47:14). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

In another powerful figure their (princes & rulers) vanishing is described. They are likened to plants, which have just scarcely been planted or sown, or have just begun to take root, when, because He is done with them, the Almighty One blows upon them and before the hot blast of His mouth they first wither and then are carried away by the storm. How great must He be who disposes of earth’s mightiest men with such consummate ease! (Leupold)

This is taken from Ps. 1:4. Not only will they be uprooted and pulled out of the ground, but also the whirlwind and breath of God will blow upon them, as you heard above and as you have already experienced. When the truth flowers again, all kinds of sects will wither like grass. (Luther)

Isaiah is so confident because he knows that when Yahweh delivered Israel from Egypt, His east wind blew locusts all night, (Ex 10:13), and it blew all night to part the Red Sea (Ex 14:21). This same wind shatters Tarshish ships (Ps 48:7; cf Ez 27:24–26) and dries up vegetation (Hos 13:15; cf Ez 17:10; 19:12). There is nothing Yahweh’s Spirit cannot do! The specific verb “to blow” that Isaiah employs appears elsewhere only in Ex 15:10. In this way, Israel is called to look at Babylon and other worldly superpowers from the perspective of what Yahweh did to the superpower Egypt at the Red Sea. When the people do so, they will realize that there is really only one Superpower. His name is Yahweh! (CC)

40:25 See v. 18. Apparently some Israelite doubters were comparing their God with the gods of their captors, and they believed that the Lord was failing the test. (CSB)

Isaiah returns to the question he first raised in verse 18, but now it is a question God Himself asks. God, the Holy One who is high above and separate, has always wanted His creatures to know who He is and what He has done. (PBC)

The incomparable greatness of the Lord is still under consideration and now in light of a realm which He alone controls. But this is introduced by a reminder that nothing has in the present investigation been found to be in any sense worthy of comparison with Him or is in any sense actually like Him. (Leupold)

Holy One. One of Isaiah’s favorite titles for the Lord (1:4; 5:19; 10:17; 29:19; 43:3; 55:5). He is different and set apart from everyone and everything else. (TLSB)

Similar ideas to v 18, but here the Lord is “the Holy One,” one of Isaiah’s favorite titles (e.g., 1:4; 5:19; 10:17; 29:19; 43:3; 55:5). As the Holy One, the Lord is set apart from everyone and everything else—not only in essence, but also in moral perfection. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

The title “the Holy One” is the final assault against those who dare to compare Yahweh with the manmade deities. A more common title is “the Holy One of Israel,” one of Isaiah’s favorite titles for Yahweh. As the Holy One, Yahweh is poles apart from everyone and everything else. This title separates the uncreated Yahweh from His creation, since it is now tainted with sin. Likewise, Jesus, the uncreated, coeternal, and sinless Son of God, is called “the Holy One of God in Mk 1:24; Lk 4:34; Jn 6:69 (see also 1 John 2:20; Rev 3:7). (CC)

40:26 *lift up your eyes* – Now the prophet proceeds to encourage the weak, as if to say, “See how much you have when you do not set your hope on your own powers.” Here the stars of heaven are spoken of not so much as regards their number and greatness but rather as regards their durability, because otherwise all are on the move and are changed, one after the other, while the stars are so fixed and established that not one of them will fall. So great is the permanence and durability which you must look for in Christ that even in corruptible things this example is applied. (Luther)

Since the Babylonians were astrologers, Isaiah urges that the stars do not rule history; rather, the Lord *alone* controls the destinies of people and nations. Israel had been warned not to worship the astral cults of her neighbors (e.g., Deut 4:19; 17:3), yet they succumbed (2 Ki 21:3), bringing about exile. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

created. Yahweh’s challenge “see who created these things (stars)” is a frontal assault against Babylon’s worldview. [Yahweh warned Israel not to worship the astral deities of her neighbors (e.g., Deut 4:19; 17:2-5), yet the people succumbed to this temptation (e.g., 2 Kg 17:16; 221:3; Jer 7:18; 8:2; 44:17, Amos 5:26). And such idolatry brought about both the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles (e.g., 2 Kg 17:5-23; Jer 25:1-14).] The Babylonians were astrologers, and much of their intellectual and religious life was tied to astral worship (47:13), but the prophet maintains that stars do not rule history. Yahweh alone controls the destinies of people and nations. “Not one of the planets or stars dares be idle on parade when Yahweh is the drill sergeant. So why do obeisance to the infantry when the commander-in-chief invites your attention? Since the stars are part of Yahweh’s army in heaven (24:21; cf. 45:12), He is able to deploy both heavenly and earthly powers (i.e., Cyrus and the Suffering Servant) to rescue Israel. (CC)

starry host. Also worshiped by the people (see 47:13; Jer 19:13). (CSB)

What a contrast to those who think that the stars control their destinies and who consult their horoscopes to discover what life will bring them. God controls the stars and us; the orbits of the planets and stars do not control us. (PBC)

all by name. See Ps 147:4. (CSB)

They are like a huge army that appears overhead as if created anew every night. The stars march across the sky in unbroken ranks. Nations viewed the stars as visible representations of the gods (Am 5:26). Israel succumbed to the temptation of worshiping the stars (2Ki 17:16; 21:3), which in turn brought about exile. (TLSB)

Amazing, isn’t it! According to the *World Book Encyclopedia*, “with large telescopes astronomers can photograph over thirty billion stars. And we think there must be billions more beyond the reach of our most powerful telescopes.” Not only is He able to name each one but also brings out each one every night.

One of the realms that is under His control is “the host of heaven.” What makes this comparison all the more meaningful is the fact that especially in the land of the Babylonians, where the children Israel had been in bondage, the heavenly bodies were regarded astrologically, as controlling the affairs of men, that transpired down here on earth. Their control of these affairs was absolute, far beyond that of the gods themselves. Not so in the religion of Israel. There they appeared first of all merely as a part of the creation of God. “Who created these?” allows for only one answer: the God whom Israel worshipped. And as they once originated with Him, so they

forever remain under His control, His, “who brings forth their host by number.” The spectacle of the starry skies, night after night, is, frequently speaking, nothing other than a case where the Almighty Maker of the universe brings them out as a shepherd brings forth his flock. Besides, the count is made, as it were, night after night, and the sum-total remains the same invariably. The figure may be regarded as blending into another one at this point: the Lord of this heavenly host is a shepherd, who calls forth these sheep of His, night for night, as the shepherd, who calls forth His sheep one by one out of the fold. As it were, in His astronomy He has them all named from the time when they were created and He may be thought of as remembering their name. It is not due to the laws of nature and their normal operation that the stars all appear nightly. It is rather the “result of the greatness of His might and the abundance of His strength” that “not one of them is ever missing.” The utmost simplicity of argument is blended with the greatest of insight in this illustration. (Leupold)

An ancient Near Eastern proverb states: “Many are the stars of heaven whose names no man knows. (Words of Ahiqar) Though they appear to be innumerable (cf. Gen 15:5; Heb 11:12), Yahweh created them all and calls each one by name (Ps. 147:4). Scientists estimate that the Milky Way is 104,000 light-years across and contains over 100 billion stars. To count them one by one would take a person over three thousand years. According to the latest probe of the Hubble Space Telescope, there are hundreds of billions more galaxies in Yahweh’s universe! The point is this: If Yahweh recalls each star by its name, how could He ever forget Israel (cf. 49:14), whom He also calls by name (43:1)? Jesus likewise knows our names (cf. Jn 40:12-26) and assures us that our heaven Father has numbered the very hairs on our heads (Mt. 10:30). (CC)

greatness of his might – It has never been discovered that one star since the beginning of the world ever got tired, because theirs is an infinite duration and power, so that each stays in his perfect orbit and performance. We, too, should be consoled in our faith in the greatness of God through the spoken Word of God, which conceals for us that limitless righteousness of God which consists in the forgiveness of sins and His free grace. (Luther)

not one ... missing. By asserting the greatness of Yahweh and the smallness of idols, rulers, and the hosts of heaven (40:12-26), Isaiah has paved the way for his argument in 40:27-31. The prophet-poet, after having taken the intellectual and existential doubts of the people seriously, demolishing the credibility of all rivals and celebrating the incomparability of God, thus brings the disputation to a close with the most eloquent poetry of all. (CC)

40:27–31 As in many psalms of praise, Isaiah now stresses the goodness of God after describing his majesty (vv. 12–26). Such a God is able to deliver and restore his distressed people if they will wait in faith for him to act. They are to trust in him and draw strength from him. (CSB)

40:27 God’s promises seemed meaningless to His chosen people. However, their complaint showed a lack of faith that is reproved and challenged by God’s question: Why do you say such things? (TLSB)

why do you...speak – All too often we fail to depend on God’s power and tender interest in the affairs of His created world. God’s people are not beyond complaining that such a powerful and boundless God has forgotten them. Jacob and Israel are names for God’s people that recall the love of God and the origins of God’s OT people. God cared for Jacob, blessed him, and protected him. God wrestled with him and changed his name to Israel. Then God repeated the promise that the Savior would come through his descendants. All this God did out of grace and mercy. Jacob did not deserve any of it. (PBC)

way. Condition. (CSB)

In view of the way God cares for the stars of heaven and in view of the care God demonstrated in the past for His people, their complaints were groundless. If God can call the stars by name, He certainly could care for His people. If God demonstrated such love for the ancestor of His people, He would continue to care for them. God had pledged Himself to His people; He had bound Himself to them by promise. No matter what difficulties they faced, He was powerful enough to care for them. He loved them too much to abandon them. (PBC)

hidden ... disregarded. Cf. 49:14; 54:8. (CSB)

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick” (Prov 13:12). Israel will hit rock bottom in the exile because the people’s hope for return appears forever deferred. From the standpoint of Jacob/Israel in the sixth century BC, Jerusalem will be a pile of rubble (cf. Is 44:26-28) with Babylon firmly in control. The people will grow weary of Yahweh and will no longer call upon Him (e.g., 43:22). Imperial supremacy will appear endless, while any chance of returning home will look pointless. The scattered people will think that Yahweh can’t see them or that Yahweh doesn’t care. Yahweh counters this lament (like doubts in 49:14, 24) by affirming that He is both able and willing to rescue His people. (CC)

The Lord is the Creator and preserver of all things; he oversees the natural world, the nations, and all people (vv 21–26). So why do the exiles doubt his power? Here and elsewhere, they maintain that the Lord had forgotten them (e.g., Is 49:14–16). Just as “Jacob” (employed by Isaiah twenty-seven times in chs 40–66) sojourned outside the Promised Land (Gen 27:41–31:55) and eventually returned (Gen 32:1–35:14), so the sixth-century exiles will return home to Judah and Jerusalem. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

40:28-29 The questions of v 21 are repeated here, and the argument from this section is summarized. The Lord is the Creator, and far from being either disinterested in the plight of his people or unable to help, he (unlike the passing creation, which grows weary) has both the strength and the understanding to save Israel. Those who admit their weaknesses are recipients of Yahweh’s strength and power (Ps 147:10–11; 2 Cor 12:9). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

40:28 *have you not known have you not heard* – Once again, two questions appear. The questions direct us back to what God reveals about Himself in the Scriptures. That’s where we can discover who God is. There God reveals Himself as “the Lord,” Jehovah, the God of the free and faithful grace. (PBC)

everlasting God. See 9:6. (CSB)

The Lord is the sole Creator, possessing the unchangeable energy shown in the first six days. (TLSB)

Before creation Yahweh was there, and He will be after this world ceases to exist. [Motyer writes: “His ways belong to eternity, we to time; His vision is for the world, we are local; His ceaselessness keeps Him always ahead of the point we have reached” – The Prophecy of Isaiah, 307] His eternal nature provides the foundation for additional claims in Isaiah 40-55. Yahweh’s Word is everlasting (40:8), as is His salvation (45:17; 51:6), His righteousness (51:8), His covenant love (54:8), and the unconditional covenant He will establish for all people based on

His merciful promises to King David's line (55:3). [Isaiah refers to these gracious promises to the line of David to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ also in 7:13-14; 9:6-7; 11:1-16; 16:5; 22:20-24; 37:35; 38:5; 55:3.] Contrast this with Babylon's claim, "forever I will be" 47:7. How blasphemous! (CC)

Creator. God has unlimited power and uses that power for the benefit of His creatures. He gave them life and provided a beautiful world in which to live. (PBC)

"I have made all these things, they are My creatures, they are under My control, they cannot touch the least hair of your head. Do not be afraid." The flesh says: "The opposite is true. You are barely God in a flea and in a nook." So it seems to the flesh and reason. Nevertheless, the Word of God proclaims what is contrary to our view, and therefore we must believe it, that we may easily regard and grasp God and His very efficacious Word. Therefore our boasting remains in the Word. We are foolish, sheep for the slaughter, weak. Our God is wise, a liberator, living and strong. We are poor and wretched, Christ is rich and cheering. (Luther)

not grow weary. Contrast 44:12. (CSB)

His power was not exhausted by creation nor does He grow tired with the continuous care of the world in which we live. (PBC)

This is a wonderful proclamation concerning God, but it seems mad to reason. The prophet is, however, depicting God in terms of our senses, as if he were saying: "We get tired and are worn out by Satan's plotting and cunning tricks. But you have a God who does not get tired. He will set you free from the incessant stratagems of Satan. Satan and the world are our relentless enemies. They keep after us until at last they exhaust us. Here God consoles those who labor and are wearied: 'I will not become weary. I have always been active, I am fresh and new. I can help you.' You, then, may conclude in opposition to what appears: 'If I am a sinner, Christ is holy, etc.'" Thus a certain nun by the name of Mechtild kept repelling the onslaughts of Satan with one word: "I am a Christian." So I, too, must say: "I am dead, but Christ lives; I am a sinner, but Christ is righteous, because I believe in Jesus Christ and was baptized in His name. Thus when we are fatigued, let us run to the fresh and untiring Christ and not remain with ourselves. (Luther)

his understanding is unsearchable – He is holy. Humans know there is a god; the psalmist says, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no god'" (Psalm 53:1). But the full truth about God lies beyond our empirical investigation. God must reveal Himself if we are to know anything about Him, beyond the fact that He exists and He is great. (PBC)

While God both loves His people and has power to save them, His plans unfold in ways we would not imagine. (CC)

The Hebrew נָחֵם means understanding, the power and acuteness of wisdom. It is as if He were saying: "Let them be as wise and acute as they wish. I will be more than a match for them and be wise. Just stay with Me. Look at Me as you would at a mirror. In you there is death, sin, despair, destruction. In Me there is life, righteousness, consolation, and deliverance. Since My Word is everlasting, cling to it. Do not dwell on your own thoughts." It is natural for us who are beset by sins to struggle in our own thoughts. "But you must not give place to them. Instead, drive them out by the Word. Do not pursue your own thoughts in tribulation, because then you will fall into a sea of temptation. Rather, keep thinking of Me, because there is no search of the understanding directed against you. I will be more than a match for them. They first have to overpower Me."

Our wisdom may say, “Yes, I easily believe that You are strong, but how shall I receive Your strength?” (Luther)

40:29 gives power to to the faint – God turns Himself toward His creatures. He gives blessings to them out of love for them. (PBC)

Yahweh is the Creator and, far from being either disinterested in the plight of his people or unable to help, He has both the strength and the understanding to save them. Those who confess that they are weak receive Yahweh’s strength and power (Ps 147:10-11; 2 Cor 12:9). Jesus affirms Yahweh’s invitation with these words: “Come to me, all who labor and heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11:28). (CC)

He not only does not lack strength. He supplies it, supplies every bit of strength that man may ever need or has needed. (Leupold)

“I who am speaking to you and whom you hear am the kind of God who gives strength to the faint and the powerless.” Here you must understand what it means to be faint and impotent, in opposition to carnal reason, which wants to be strong and most powerful. If our flesh were like this, how would God come to us? He does not give power to the powerful and unwearied, but He comes to the aid of the faint and powerless. “You are wearied and impotent, but not I. Indeed, I will come to your aid.” Reason willingly hears one thing—that God gives strength, but it does not want to be worn out and nothing. So all the self-righteous willingly receive strength from God, but they do not want to be faint, as if God would not give strength to the weary. What need is there for the secure to receive strength? But God gives strength to the weary, the oppressed, and the troubled. The emphasis lies on the word “faint,” but we look for the stress on the word “power.” It is as if God were saying: “You must be weary and emptied, so that there is no way out for you. Then I will give you strength. First you must become nothing, then consolation and strength will come.” This happened to me, Martin Luther, who against my will came up against the whole world, and then God helped me. Summary: The Word of God is the Word of strength, righteousness, power, etc. Therefore it can reign nowhere but over those who are lying under sin and weakness. Therefore let us learn to console ourselves when we are afflicted and say, “What I do not have and what I cannot do, that Christ has and can do.” (Luther)

40:30-31 But why should we place such absolute trust in Yahweh? Because He commands a highway to be built (Is 40:3), clears the way (40:4), leads the way (40:5), victoriously processes (40:10), and tenderly carries His people (40:11). To make this happen, Yahweh will renew His people with strength (cf. 51:10; Rom 12:2; Titus 3:5), and the deportees will fly and run home. The weak and discouraged people are invited to turn from nations, idols, rulers, and stars, and seek Yahweh alone. (CC)

Jesus made a similar promise: stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Lk 24:49). Ten days later the waiting was over. Luke describes the coming of the Holy Spirit like the sound of a rushing wind, and the Spirit delivered all the gifts won through the death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2). Simeon and Anna are two NT examples of faithful waiters, and they were not disappointed (Lk 2:25-38; cf. Rom 5:5). (CC)

Robust young men in their prime faint and fall down exhausted (v 30). On the other hand, v 31 announces the good news that those who wait on the Lord will again have strength. The Lord will replace (*chalaph*) their weakness with strength (cf. 2 Cor 5:21). For the third time in vv 28–31, Isaiah employs the words *yaga* (“to be weary”) and *ya’aph* (“to faint”). In v 28, they appear as attributes the Lord does *not* have, while they describe youths and young men in v 30. In v 31,

those waiting on the Lord “shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” Simeon and Anna are two New Testament examples of those who wait faithfully on the Lord (Lk 2:25, 38). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

40:30 *shall faint...exhausted.* We are creatures, not the Creator. We grow weary and weak. We can understand some things, but we are often confused and ignorant. We must learn; God knows all things. Without the Lord the best humans will stumble and fall. The young appear to be tireless and energetic; yet they too will certainly grow weary and stumble. To such limited creatures, God promises to give strength. (PBC)

The prophet argues from the opposite. *Youths*, or young men. They must be understood to refer to whatever in the world relies on its own strength, which is like the young and the strong time of life and lives at the height of vigor and presumption, just as a youth is very brash in his age. There you have the strong and cocky young men, who seem ready to complete the job. They are the ones to do it. But I say that these youths will fall short and come to grief, because it is nothing but a mask and outward show. Just when they think they are sitting most securely, they will fall. Thus if I should say today that the most vigorous youth is nothing against the Turk, the flesh would not believe it. The illustration of Abraham in the next chapter will show how Abraham hardly had the strength to chase away the flies, and yet he conquered four kings. (Luther)

40:31 *wait for.* Trust in or look expectantly to (see 5:2; 49:23). (CSB)

Hope in Him. “Wait” and “hope” in Hbr come from the same root word. (TLSB)

Namely, those who look to their God in the midst of weakness and impotence and in faith wait against all enemies. (Luther)

renew. Lit. “exchange.” Their weakness will give way to God’s strength (v. 29). The Hebrew for this verb is used of changes of clothes (Ge 35:2; Jdg 14:12), which can symbolize strength and beauty (Isa 52:1). Paul tells believers to clothe themselves with Christ (Ro 13:14; cf. Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). (CSB)

Faith in the Lord brings this strength. When we rely on human strength, we will stumble. When we trust in the Lord for strength, he gives it. Not only will believers receive strength; they will renew their strength. They will arise from the ashes of grief and suffering to run and walk again. (PBC)

That is, they will be adorned with a heavenly victory against the resources of the world. (Luther)

eagles. Known for their vigor (Ps 103:5) and speed (Jer 4:13; 48:40). (CSB)

Believers are pictured as eagles soaring in the blue sky. Eagles ride the air currents as they stretch out their wings and soar. God promises to be the wind beneath the wings of His people. What a wonderful comfort for all “who hope in the Lord!” The entire life of God’s people – their walking, running and soaring – is filled with the boundless and tireless strength of God. Even in death, they mount on eagle’s wings and soar to God in heaven, where God gives them joy forever. (PBC)

This is our supreme consolation. While they are falling, tiring, and failing, we shall be very swift with the flight of an eagle, very swift and very nimble in running. Thus, then, is depicted the consolation of all who are afflicted because of the Word and work of God, of all who lie prostrate

under their enemies and are apparently without hope. These, I say, in the midst of the darkness of the Word lay hold of Christ, who is wealthy, strong, and vigorous. It is for us to seem faint and inadequate and as nothing in the eyes of the world. As our adversaries are moved to complain about us, so let us become fit for the divine consolation. (Luther)

They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles. (Isaiah 40:31 RSV)

Often when we think of courage, we think of it in connection with someone else and not ourselves. We might think of the soldier who gives his life to save his platoon. We think of firefighters, police officers, and others who risk their lives for welfare of the public.

Is real courage restricted to such displays of valor? Real courage runs deeper than specific heroic acts. As a matter of fact, heroic courage often goes unnoticed and unpublicized. Think of the wife who doesn't give up after her husband dies. Think of the person with a terminal illness who nevertheless maintains inner peace and concern for others. This list can go on and on.

The above instances have a common denominator: courage. Courage comes from trusting in God or, as our text puts it, "waiting for the Lord." Christianity doesn't ask us to overlook our difficulties nor does it teach simply the power of positive thinking. It does teach us to face our problems by relying on God's promises. This is courage. It is not something developed by us. Real courage is given—from God Himself. We receive this courage through God's Word and the sacraments. We join the apostle in asserting, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31 KJV).

On Eagles' Wings I bore you on eagles' wings. (Exodus 19:4 RSV)

Sometimes we are fearful to try our wings in a new area of endeavor. We are frozen with the fear of another failure.

One day a fisherman watched a mother eagle drop a young eaglet into the canyon below. The eaglet plummeted and fluttered. It seemed about to be dashed to its death on the rocks below when out of the sky the father eagle plunged and caught his offspring on his broad back. Then he flew up high and dropped the young one again. This time the mother eagle caught the little one on her back. The routine was repeated until the little eagle learned to fly.

God gives us opportunities to try our wings so we might learn to fly on to greater and higher experiences. Often these flights are adventures together with our Lord in ministry to others. Our Father always watches over us and spreads His wings of protection beneath us.

God, who sent His Son to die for us and to lead us through death to life eternal, will certainly not forsake us on our earthly flights.

Mount up with wings like eagles! The Lord will sustain you.

O Lord, when I grow weary, lift me up on Your wings. Give me the courage and strength I need for today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

In the summer of 2008 while on vacation with my family I was sitting at the pool looking up at the sky. I saw three eagles (parents and a young eagle) flying high in the sky. I noticed that

every once in a while the young eagle apparently needed a rest and would fly up on the mother's back and sit there for a while. After a brief respite the young eagle would resume flying on its own. This cycle of events was done a number of times until they eagles fly out of site or landed somewhere. (Site – Eagle Resort on Eagle Lake just outside of Eagle River, WI – EWB)

run ... walk. They will accomplish their purposes, as God wills. (TLSB)

40:9–31 Israel has an incomparable God who watches over her. Though the Lord may use His power for condemnation, He acts as your Good Shepherd for your salvation. • Lord, renew the strength of faith in me, that I may renew my service to Your everlasting purposes. Amen. (TLSB)