

<u>Isaiah 1-5</u> Introduction How can one be spared judgement and live happily ever after?	<u>Isaiah 6-39</u> New Creation God will rule over a new, perfect and eternal creation	<u>Isaiah 40-55</u> New relationship God will restore his people from exile to a permanent relationship	<u>Isaiah 56-66</u> Who God will choose the humble and reject the proud
Isaiah 40-55 explained in under 60 seconds: youtu.be/z-S3q76crLM	<u>Isaiah 40-48</u> 'I'm coming to get you!' YHWH tells his people he will act to fix their relationship	<u>Isaiah 49-55</u> 'Here's the plan!' YHWH's suffering servant will bear the penalty for sin, permanently fixing their relationship	

Isaiah 40:1-26 (NIVUK)

40 Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

³ A voice of one calling:
'In the wilderness prepare
the way for the LORD;^a
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.^b

⁴ Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.

⁵ And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'

⁶ A voice says, 'Cry out.'
And I said, 'What shall I cry?'

'All people are like grass,
and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall,
because the breath of the LORD blows on them.
Surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures for ever.'

Sunday 11 January 2026

1. 'Tell exiled Judah that I'm coming!' (40:1-11)

- punishment for sin is complete (40:2)

- YHWH is coming... (40:3-5)



...for untrusting people (40:6-8)

Insecure Judah

Throughout Ch40-55, Judah is depicted as wary and insecure. After all, God did banish her (after she sinned)!

Isaiah 49:14

Zion said, 'The LORD has forsaken me, the LORD has forgotten me.'

^a Or *A voice of one calling in the wilderness*: / 'Prepare the way for the Lord

^b Hebrew; Septuagint *make straight the paths of our God*

Isaiah 40-48 ‘I’m coming to get you!’ YHWH tells his people he intends to fix their relationship	40:1-11 ‘Tell exiled Judah I’m coming!’	40:12-26 ‘There’s no other creator like me!’	40:27-41:20 ‘No need to be insecure, I want to restore you!’	41:21-29 ‘Your idols are useless!’	42:1-7 ‘A preview of your future!’	42:8-17 ‘Be certain! I have the agency to deliver!’
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- YHWH is coming... (40:9)

⁹ You who bring good news to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.
You who bring good news to Jerusalem,^c
lift up your voice with a shout,
lift it up, do not be afraid;
say to the towns of Judah,
‘Here is your God!’

...with power (40:10)

¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,
and he rules with a mighty arm.
See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.

...and tenderness (40:11)

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

Why use messengers?

Isaiah 40:1-11 is unique within Ch40-55 in using plural unnamed messengers to speak to Judah. Why might Isaiah have made this literary choice?

2. ‘Who else has creator power like me?’ (40:12-26)

- creator power (40:12)

¹² Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,
or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens?
Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket,
or weighed the mountains on the scales
and the hills in a balance?

- creator wisdom (40:13-14)

¹³ Who can fathom the Spirit^d of the LORD,
or instruct the LORD as his counsellor?
¹⁴ Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him,
and who taught him the right way?

- creator magnitude (40:15-17)

Who was it that taught him knowledge,
or showed him the path of understanding?
¹⁵ Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket;
they are regarded as dust on the scales;
he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.
¹⁶ Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires,
nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.

^c Or Zion, bringer of good news, / go up on a high mountain. / Jerusalem, bringer of good news

^d Or mind

<u>42:18-44:5</u> 'Despite your sin, I want you back!'	<u>44:6-28</u> 'Your idols are useless compared to me!'	<u>45:1-14</u> 'I can even use Cyrus to restore you!'	<u>45:15-25</u> 'You feel my absence, but all will feel my presence!'	<u>46:1-13</u> 'Babylon's idols will end up in captivity'	<u>47:1-15</u> 'I'll humiliate Queen Babylon'	<u>48:1-22</u> 'Despite your stubbornness, I'll rescue you from Babylon!'
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¹⁷ Before him all the nations are as nothing;
they are regarded by him as worthless
and less than nothing.

¹⁸ With whom, then, will you compare God?
To what image will you liken him?

- idols: creatures created by
creatures (40:18-20)

¹⁹ As for an idol, a metalworker casts it,
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold
and fashions silver chains for it.

²⁰ A person too poor to present such an offering
selects wood that will not rot;
they look for a skilled worker
to set up an idol that will not topple.

²¹ Do you not know?

- creator timelessness (40:21)

Have you not heard?

Has it not been told you from the beginning?

Have you not understood since the earth was founded?

²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,
and its people are like grasshoppers.

- the creator vs his creation
(40:22-26)

He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

²³ He brings princes to naught
and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

²⁴ No sooner are they planted,
no sooner are they sown,
no sooner do they take root in the ground,
than he blows on them and they wither,
and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

²⁵ 'To whom will you compare me?
Or who is my equal?' says the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:
who created all these?

He who brings out the starry host one by one
and calls forth each of them by name.

Because of his great power and mighty strength,
not one of them is missing.

Tone - carrot or stick?

Some preachers use Isaiah 40:12-26 as a rebuke – 'why do you not worship God?!'

Others prefer to teach the passage to entice the hearer back to God – 'isn't this God wonderful?!'

Which way seems more in line with the wider section (or 'exhibition') of Isaiah 40-55?



For reflection on Isaiah 40:1-26

- 40:1-2 To what extent do you acknowledge *banishment from God's presence* (or 'exile') as the starting point of being a Christian?
How does it feel to hear God's declaration of comfort?
- 40:3-5 How do you imagine/visualise these verses?
What difference might it make when God is physically present and visible?
- 40:6-8 To what extent are you actively aware of the frailty of your trust in God?
- 40:9-11 Are you more naturally inclined to God's *power* or *tenderness*?
How do these verses help address that imbalance in your thinking?
- 40:12-17 To what extent are you actively aware of God's creator power, wisdom and magnitude?
How do you imagine/visualise these verses?
What difference would it make in your life if you were to become more actively aware of God's *creator-ness*?
- 40:18-20 Idols are things that we wrongly sacrifice time and energy towards. What are the idols that you are tempted to worship?
How do these verses help dissuade you from those idols?
- 40:21 To what extent are you aware of your place within the timeline of history?
To what extent do you consider God timeless and beyond human history?
- 40:22-26 Were there any comparisons that particularly caught your eye? Why?
To what extent do 40:23-24 challenge your view of current political leaders?
To what extent do you like being reminded of God's *creator-ness* by these verses?

Bonus Bible-handling for Isaiah 40-55

1. How would you describe the genre of Isaiah 40-55? How might that fit the *Art Gallery* analogy?
2. Isaiah 40-55 repeats certain themes over and over. What might the function be of this literary choice?
3. How does Isaiah use the theme of idols in Isaiah 40-55? Some preachers indicate *rebuke* – to what extent do you agree with this?