

Institute Isaiah 40-44 ISAIAH'S RESTORATION CHAPTERS
APPLICATION

APPLY ISAIAH (and all scripture ☺) by asking: "What was the author's intent?" "What does this mean to me now?" "What is the dualistic message?" "What are the most essential principles or doctrines?" "What are the redeeming or the life-changing principles?" "What does the Lord want me to glean from these verses?"

Book of Mormon

Jesus cites Isaiah 40 during His visit to the Nephites, "A commandments I give unto you that ye search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah" (3 Nephi 23:1, 3).

Handel's Messiah

In the 18th C, Charles Jennens chose verses mainly from Psalms and Isaiah as the libretto for George Fredrick Handel's "*Messiah*." The oratorio opens with Isaiah 40, and includes 7 verses from this chapter (40:1-5, 9,11).

TEXT: COMFORT

40:1 *Who is speaking and who is he speaking to?* On one level, God gives Jerusalem a message—Assyrian destruction is at their door, but God is aware. On another level, all *covenant people* are *comforted* with the good tidings of Christ's redemption. All those who come in *the way* of the Lord are his people (think: "*the way*" to the Tree of Life). The prophet *gave* the message of comfort and *gives* the same now. God's command to "*Comfort ye*," is written in the command form in the plural. Prophets comfort. That comfort comes in understanding the glorious gift of the atonement. This revelation follows the awful transplant of the northern 10 tribes of Israel to Assyria, and potential destruction of Judea as the Assyrian siege of 721 BC was approaching.

IN March 1849, Orson Hyde received a six hour vision that included these same words in preparation for his trip to Palestine to dedicate the land of Israel for the return of the Jews—" . . . while meditating and contemplating the field of my future labors, the vision of the Lord, like clouds of light, burst into my view . . . 'Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem . . .' Let your warning voice be heard" (*History of the Church*, 4:376).

40:2 The message of forgiveness is one of the most comforting feelings I've had.

****Have you received the Comfort of the Lord?**

It appears that Jerusalem—the city and her covenant people—have repented. Her "*warfare / tsba'ah*," is also translated "hard service." The hardships came in part from disobedience to God's command. The Lord promises "*that her iniquity is pardoned*," or will be. But first she pays "double for all her sins."

When you read "*double*" remember the right of the first born to receive a double portion of this father's inheritance. (If a man had 3 sons, each would receive 1/4 of his father's inheritance, except the first born who gets a double portion of or 2/4 or 1/2.) Also remember that a thief must pay double as restitution (Exodus 22:4,7,9). It means the full measure has been paid for defiling the Lord's land with sins (according to Jeremiah 16:18).

THE GLORY OF THE LORD REVEALED 40:3-8

40:3 This verse has multiple applications. "Cry in the wilderness" refers to John the Baptist in the Gospels of Matt 3:3, Mark 1:3, and Luke 3:4 (JST John 1:6-24; 1 Nephi 10:8-9). It can also apply to the prophet Joseph Smith, missionaries, and all the saints who "prepare the way of the Lord" (D&C 33:10; 65:1,3; 133:17). Every time a missionary shares the message of the restoration, he is fulfilling this verse. Similarly, angels who prepare for the Second Coming fulfill this verse (D&C 128:20; **88:66-68**). On a more personal level, each person can cry to the Lord at times of or in our "wilderness" to find a way to repent and return to the Lord's highway (Isa 35:8). One way that we can prepare for the Lord's coming is by preaching repentance and gathering the sheep of God into his covenant (Malachi 3:1 D&C 84:28).

Look for
Multiple
Applications

The "highway for our God" can both refer to a highway for the saints to become sanctified to meet God—the highway is the way to holiness and Christ's Second Coming (D&C 19:19-25; 35:8). We must remove obstacles so that others can receive the message of Christ's Second Coming.

40:4 Perhaps this verse means the earth will be restored as it was before the fall/curse. But I also think that every humble human (in the valleys of their life) will be exalted into the presence of the Lord (think temple activity). Similarly, the proud will be humbled (D&C 49:34; 109:74; 133:22).

The *crooked* or deceitful will be transformed through repentance into the upright or straight. The *rough places* also mean an impassable or mountain chain. Our mortal perspective will give way to an eternal hope.

40:5 The Lord will come in his glory at the "Second Coming" within sight of all. Also when we teach of God's glorious truths (i.e. JS-H1:17), His glory is revealed. Glory is also equated with salvation.

40:6-8 Isaiah's angel (or Spirit of the Lord) asks him to teach that mortality is short lived. It will fade away as the grass. The natural world is transitory, even humanity dies like the flowers. But God will stand for ever. The text also suggests that the Spirit of the Lord will consume all corruptible flesh.

****"What does the Lord want me to learn from these verses?"**

ZION'S GOOD NEWS: THE LORD COMES AS A SHEPHERD 40:9-11

40:9 Zion, or God's people who are pure in heart, will proclaim glad tidings (or the *good news* = Gospel)—but first the Lord commands them to get "into the high mountain" or temple. God's servants are empowered through an endowment from on high to bless them as they give the message of the Lord (D&C 45:15-16; 110:9). Isaiah may define Jerusalem as "those who bring the

message of “glad tidings,” Zion or the Gospel. In the OT, Jerusalem is the bride of the Lord. Taking that definition further, the city represents her covenant people—even now. We will also receive the promise to “*BEHOLD your God.*” This is not just a metaphor, we can behold Him. I read this in the same sense of “receive” the Holy Ghost at confirmation—it’s a commandment. 40:10-11. I love the juxtaposition of these verses—God’s strong ruling, or powerful hand is contrasted to God as a gentle shepherd feeding his lambs. He will gather us, carry us when we need it, and tenderly lead us in love. Whenever I think of His outstretched hand, I imagine the marks of His death, which speaks again of his shepherding role (**Ps 23**).

WHO IS LIKE UNTO THE LORD? 40:12-15

40:12 The Lord (or Spirit or messenger or Isaiah) asks ten great questions here, “who . . . how . . .” as teaching tools. Isaiah contrasts the Lord’s greatness with humanities nothingness. The metaphors use hyperbole to describe God’s glory. For example, God can cup the waters of the earth easily as if in the palm of his hand. This image may mean that God is aware of all and protects all in his hand. Of course He created the waters, heavens, and earth. This symbol has high Christological meaning too—it is that same hand that bore the cross and provides living water. He is the source of life, eternal life too, thanks to the wounds that he now displays in His hands. God’s greatness is symbolized in the way he encompasses and comprehends the great earth. He is described as measuring the earth (dust) with the span of His hand. Look at the extremes from dust to mountains—all creation, small and large. He can judge mountains and hills. We become far too anthropomorphic centered if we don’t think on God’s greatness. Did you see the use of body parts here to describe God—he is Man of HOLINESS.

****What does that mean about your relationship to Him**

40:13-14 Although some try to counsel God, “do it my way . . . fix this now,” no mortal comes close to the position of “counselor” to God—we hope to be slaves / servants. John the Baptist understood his position as one not worthy to act as Jesus’ slave and unlatch His sandal.

40:15 The powerful units on earth—governments, kingdoms, etc. are not even acknowledged in His presence, as they are an insignificant power compared to God. What a healthy perspective! Vs. 17 calls them “vanity.”

****If God possess all power, intelligence, and goodness, and presence, why do humans make false gods?**

SACRIFICE

40:16 We now turn to sacrifice imagery. If all the trees and animals in the entire country of Lebanon (known for its forests; 1 Kgs 7:2; 10:17, 21; 2 Chr 9:16, etc.) were used for a sacrificial altar, it wouldn’t be enough for a worthy sacrifice to God. In fact, no matter how big the sacrifice, it isn’t sufficient. The end goal is not sacrifice of animals—they just point to the “great and last sacrifice.” (Alma 34)

PARALLEL MESSAGE OF GOD’S COMFORT IS GIVEN, BUT ISRAEL IS OBLIVIOUS

40:18-29 Hebrew uses parallelism for the message in the next nine verses. The double emphasis is didactic in Hebrew. Even though some try to make gods, and even though sometime God’s chosen people ask, “why has God forsaken me?” The answer is NO ONE compares to the Creator!

18 **To whom then will ye liken** God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?

19 The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains.

20 He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved.

21 **Have ye not known? have ye not heard?** hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth?

22 It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:

25 **To whom then will ye liken** me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.

27 Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?

28 **Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard,** that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

29 He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

40:29 Our God is so different than other gods, our God is powerful. Other gods were war gods who demanded things, but our God gives power to the weak. No one can fathom His hid depths. He gives strength to those who serve Him.

40:31-32 Those who *actively* wait / serve on the Lord will have their faith strengthened (D&C 89:20). They will then have “wings of eagles” (probably Isaiah’s most powerful flying animal he could describe).

****How does waiting on the Lord renew our spiritual strength?**

Chapter 43: “I will not Remember thy Sins

Chapter 43 is filled with Old Testament citations which the New Testament quotes often. It builds on previous themes, beginning with a promise and concluding with judgment. The Lord offers a message of hope for Israel’s future deliverance—spiritually and physically. Isaiah speaks of the ideal relationship between God and His people.

Israel’s Future Gathering 43:1-7

43:1 This is an abrupt change from the previous chapter. The Lord speaks in first person promising deliverance for Israelites. He introduces himself as their *creator* and the one who *formed* them at Sinai. These same two words are used in Moses’ description of the creation in Genesis 1:1 and 1:26-27. Israel owes its survival to God, just as the earth owes its survival to God. This verse is written in the past tense, but it refers to the future. It’s the “prophetic perfect” tense, which means the prophet saw/heard it in a past, but the event is in the future. “Redemption,” insinuates being bought back. In this sense the Lord “owns” us and we are His servants.

Isaiah often uses the combined titles of Jacob and Israel (17 X in chps 40-49). The Lord reminds Jacob, His chosen people, that they have a new name. Israel is the covenant name given after Jacob wrestled with God and means, “God contended, or God Strives.” Israelites refer to many things biblically, including: the blood of Jacob, the land of Palestine, and the covenant people of God. In that sense, the title Israel replaced the name Jacob, so those who choose to follow God (the chosen people) can become “Israelites in deed as well as lineage.” (Ludlow, *Isaiah*, 363). Other scriptures also describe a covenant Israelite (Mosiah 5:6-15; Deut 14:2; Moses 1:39).

43:2 To an ancient Israelite, “passing through water” brought to mind the crossing of the Red Sea and Jordan River. To Christians, it represents baptism. Especially with an allusion also to fire, we may see a baptism of water and the Spirit. Isaiah also prophecies that the Israelites in Babylon will not be harmed by the flames of fire (Dan 3:19).

43:3-4 The Lord harkens back nearly eight hundred years earlier when He saved them from Egyptian slavery. He does this to stir up greater faith for future redemptions. The exile represents their spiritual separation too. The word “Savior” shares roots with the name Jesus / Joshua “Jehovah is salvation.” This is the first time Isaiah uses the title Savior / *moshiya* to refer to the Promised Messiah. Did you notice that four names are recorded here for God in vs. 3? Isaiah also refers to God with other names throughout the chapter. Look:

(43:3) Yahweh/Jehovah/LORD, Elohim, Holy One of Israel, Savior

(43:10) I am He

(43:11) I am the Lord

(43:14) Redeemer

(43:15) Your Holy One; the Creator of Israel; your King.

These names are used in a loving relationship with the children of Israel. “King” is only used this way here.

Gathering of Israel and Other Nations 43:6-9

43:5-6 I think this refers to the latter-day worldwide gathering? The gathering includes the growth of covenant Israel (see title page of the BoM), and the gathering of Jews to the land Israel. Joseph Smith’s *History* prefaced these verses: “In addition to all temporal blessings, there is no other way for the Saints to be saved in these last days, [than by gathering] as the concurrent testimony of all the holy prophets clearly proves, for it is written-(in Isa 43:5-6)” (*HC*, 4:272). As Latter-day Saints, God calls us to assist Him in the gathering!

43:7 The Lord introduces Himself again as the Creator with “created” and “formed.” It hints of Moses 1:39.

43:8 The spiritually “blind” and deaf will see and hear God’s Good News of the Restoration and be gathered to truth. Loosing much of my sight recently has reinforced that I have blind spots! I am who God is speaking to in vs. 8.

God’s Servants Witness 43:10-13

43:9-10 Israel acts as the Lord’s witness of the past and future. Other nations cannot explain His workings, but Israel can testify that the Lord alone is God. This verse speaks of the responsibility of God’s servants to witness

43:11-13 This climatic declaration of “I am” includes at least 7 repeats of “I.” The Lord repeats this usage to declare that the God of the Old Testament is Jesus of Nazareth. I think vs. 13, refers to the “days” of creation, or before the days of the earth, when “I, Jehovah worked” (Deut 32:39; and last of D&C 76:1). The Book of Mormon prophets relied heavily on these ideas—or were inspired by the same Being of the same truths (Helaman 5:9; 2 Neph 25:20).

Israel’s Future blessings 43:14-21

43:14 The Lord promises Israel freedom from the Babylonians (. . . who aren’t even their overlords yet . . . thus critical biblical scholars say there are 2 Isaiah’s—this one written much later . . . but I believe in prophecy). Babylon also is symbolic of the wicked world or spiritual captivity.

43:16-17 The Lord promises miracles at sea and protection from enemies. These exodus themes will extend and repeat the miracles for God’s chosen people.

43:18-20 I think the Lord is prophesying of the Restoration here. The “new things” include Joseph’s dispensation of the Gospel. The old ways (Laws of Moses, apostasy, philosophies of men, etc.) are done away in light of the new. The restoration is foreshadowed as miracles in the desert. The water that the Lord supplies His people is both physical and spiritual here. The western desert became a parallel with the Sinai desert. The “beasts” are unclean animals that represent the gentiles—with whom the Israelites will share the living waters of truth.

43:21 Br. Ludlow (p.370) points out the parallel structure Isaiah uses up to this point in this chapter. Note the most important part of the chiasmus is the **center (I), then the beginning, and third (here as letter E / E')

- A. (vs.1) The Lord called Israel in the past
- B. (vs. 2) Protection given through fire and water
- C. (vs. 3) Four titles: Lord, Thy God, Holy One, Savior
- D. (vs. 3-4) Israel was ransomed from the West (Egypt)
- E. (vs. 5-7) Promised Gathering of covenant Israel
- F. (vs. 8-9) Let all nations produce witnesses, if they can.
- G. (vs. 10) Israelites are God's witnesses "saith the Lord."
- H. (vs. 10) No other God will be God of Israel
- I. (vs. 11) I AM Lord
there is no other Savior
- H' (vs. 12) No strange God is among Israel
- G' (vs. 12) You, Israel, are God's witnesses "saith the Lord"
- F' (vs. 13) None can stop the Lord's work [of gathering]
- E' (vs. 13) Everything since the beginning testifies of God's work.
- D' (vs. 14) Israel will be freed from the East (Babylon)
- C' (vs. 15) Four titles: Lord, Holy One, Creator, King
- B' (vs.16-17) Water and fire are powerless before the Lord
- A. (vs. 18-21) New things to happen as the Lord blesses His chosen people.

A Trial between God and Israel 43:22-28

- 43:22 These last verses sound like a trial speech in a court of law, where the Lord accuses Israel of worshiping false gods. Even though God has performed, and will perform, wonderful miracles and acts as a redeemer for Israel, Israel has turned away from Him. They reject their role as a servant of God and messenger to the world. The phrase "hast been weary" is also translated, "neither hast thou laboured about me" (Douay Rheims).
- 43:23-24 "Not" becomes a favorite in this accusation (7 negatives!). The children of Israel have not fulfilled their ordinances. They haven't offered their sacrifices, service, spices, (see 24a), or money—only iniquity.
- *43:25-26 Even in the face of such disobedience, the Lord mercifully extends forgiveness. He will atone for their sins, and "not remember" their sins—if they "put me [God] in remembrance." But humanity must completely repent. These verses fill the reader with hope and praise. Just pause and think about it.
- 43:27-28 The first father could be many people from Adam to Moses' children of Israel. The point is we've been sinners for a long time—even their fathers, teachers, and priests (see 28a) were transgressors. This is why Jacob will be cursed (which is the worst indictment God gives) and receives reproach.

God Still Chooses Israel 44:1-8

- 44:1-2 "YET"— The harshness of the previous verses are contrasted with forgiving promises found in the next few ideas—Jacob is still called as a servant of God, created by God as "an upright one" (Jesurun), and chosen. The chapter begins with the messenger formula: "Listen/hear . . . Thus saith the Lord . . . fear not" (Ludlow, p.377). Isaiah reminds Israel of their covenants.
- 44:3 In the Messianic age the Lord will pour out His Spirit, like water to a thirsty ground. The children or offspring will be blessed if Israel will follow (also in Joel 2).
- 44:5 The children of Israel (including gentile converts) will also learn to say, "I am the Lord's" and take upon them the name of Jacob/Christ. Covenant children take on a new name in 4 ways: the Spirit assists in this adoption and all true followers become the seed of Abraham. They use their hands to carry out the works of the covenant. And Israelites are not just "willing" to take on the name of Christ, but have lived in a manner for it to be clear.
- 44:6-7 Can you find 7 titles or attributes of Christ? To "*set in order*" the Lord in part means writing scriptures.

Now Israel must Choose God 44:9-21

- 44:9 The Lord no longer gives positive promises (44:1-8), but negative warnings.