

The Importance and Uniqueness of Chapter 40

A STEADY DEVELOPMENT of thought begins in chapter 41. Here Cyrus suddenly appears, filling the nations with terror. God reassures the Israelites, telling them that Cyrus, instead of being a danger to them, is the divinely appointed instrument for their deliverance from Babylon. From this point the thought moves steadily forward, as God tactfully leads His people to realize that the Exile, terrible as it is, is only a symptom, and that the most vital problem is sin. Until this is removed any deliverance can be only temporary. Eventually complete deliverance from exile is declared and celebrated, and then the great deliverance from sin is presented and explained.

Before this steady progress of thought begins, there is a chapter that seems to stand by itself. Chapter 40 may be considered a beautiful overture to the entire section. It forms a definite unit, introducing the more specific prophecies that follow. It stresses the principal themes that will be developed in later chapters. As is quite natural in an overture, it starts at the end of the development rather than at its beginning. It pictures ultimate goals before reverting to consideration of the immediate situation.

Although it is not our purpose to examine every verse in this section of Isaiah but rather to stress the interconnections, to explain the great themes, and to show the development of thought, certain chapters are so important that they will be translated and presented in detail. One of the most important of these is chapter 40.