



ISAIAH Session 2/5  
Isaiah chapter 40  
A way through the wilderness

## To begin

Share your experiences with one another of how the teaching from last week has shaped your thoughts & actions in the past week.

## Opening prayer

- You might want to light a candle and then open this time together with the prayer below, or use your own.

God of all comfort,  
where we are stuck, release us,  
where we have given up hope, inspire us.  
Where we focus only on ourselves,  
help us to see the needs of others;  
transform us by your Spirit to be the people you have called us to be,  
spreading your love and proclaiming your presence throughout the world.  
We ask this through your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

## Hearing and understanding God's word

- **Ask someone in the group to read, or share the reading of Isaiah chapter 40**

During the exile in Babylon, the deported Israelites had some deep questions to ask about why this disaster had happened. Was it because Marduk, the chief God of Babylon, had defeated Yahweh, usually translated 'the Lord', the God of Israel? Or had God been unfaithful to his promises? Or, had he rejected his people for ever? The prophecies in chapters 40 to 55 give answers to these questions.

Had the Lord been defeated? No. He was the creator of the heavens and the earth (40.12-31 is a matchless account of this). As the prophet points out several times, the Lord had predicted that Emperor Cyrus of Persia would overcome many nations, including Babylon, so their God directed history. And anyway, no other god existed. The idols are nothing, and 'there is no God apart from me'. These chapters contain the clearest statements of 'monotheism', belief in only one God, to be found in the Bible. So if all these things were true, the Lord could never be defeated.

Had God been unfaithful, then? No, Israel had. The exile was God's just response to Israel's sins. As chapter 43 verses 22 to 28 make clear, the people had failed even to offer proper sacrifices, and their leaders had disobeyed God. That is why the nation had been destroyed. God himself was not unfaithful.

Did this mean God had rejected Israel for ever? The prophet had words of comfort for people who thought so. 'Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed ...' God had forgiven them; he would no longer remember their sins. He would make his 'servant' Israel 'a light to the nations', who would save both those Israelites left in their homeland and those foreign nations that submitted to Israel.

These answers and the whole message of these chapters should encourage us still today. God is the greatest power in the universe and he keeps his promises. He is always ready to forgive us. Armed with this comfort, we are being called to serve God by bringing the comfort of God in word and action.

## Word and Spirit

In this study of Isaiah you are invited to let the Holy Spirit be your teacher, asking the Spirit to

1. highlight the scriptures
2. show you what you need to do
3. give you his strength to fulfil what he shows you

- **Reread Isaiah 40 ready to answer the following questions**

- Share with each other what vision of God this passage gives us.
- Is there a phrase or a sentence that especially speaks to you? You may like to share it with the group and if you can say why you like it.

## Praying and acting on God's word

1. The people to whom this prophecy was addressed were in dire need of comfort: their city had been destroyed, their leaders taken away to another country and, probably worst of all, God seemed to have abandoned them. There seems to be no hope at all for the future. People today are in a similar need of comfort, but the causes of their distress are more varied.  
Spend some time talking about the major causes of stress and distress that affect people who live and work near you.
2. What opportunities do you have to bring comfort to others?
3. Is there someone, something or some people who you can pray for this next week who needs comfort? Is there anything you can do as well as pray?
4. Spend some time in silence or out loud bringing to God in prayer the people or things you have just been talking about.

Close if you wish by saying together the prayer you began with and then blow the candle out.

## Suggestions for follow-up

Here are some ideas .....

Let Isaiah (who was so creative and imaginative) inspire a written prayer, a song or some instrumental music, a picture, painting, drawing, a poster or banner design, a card to give to someone to encourage them ....  
You might want to share it in your group.

A website to inspire: [www.craftivist-collective.com](http://www.craftivist-collective.com)

Films that catch something of the whole of Isaiah's message: 'Babette's feast' & 'It's a wonderful life'