

Waiting for the Lord to Save

This article on Isaiah 40:12–31 is edited from the Ligonier Ministries

Dr. R.C. Sproul of the Ligonier Ministries often recommends that Christians should try to put themselves in the historical context of the Biblical characters and the Scripture's original audience, because doing so can help believers better understand God's message. Today, let us put ourselves in the shoes of Isaiah's original audience—the exiles of Israel and Judah who lived just before and during their return to the Promised Land. This was a future generation for Isaiah, who wrote nearly two hundred years earlier. He knew this would be a demoralized people consisting mainly of the descendants of the people who had been captured by Assyria and Babylon. It would be hard for them to imagine that they would ever go home, as they had grown up outside of the Holy Land. They would find it difficult to believe their covenant Lord could rescue them, for He had not prevented Assyria or Babylon from capturing their forefathers. Of course, Isaiah knew they should recognize that sin led to their captivity; still, as God's prophet, he was sensitive to their circumstances.

This people had two main questions for the Lord: was He willing to save? And was He able to save? Isaiah 40:1–11 affirms the Almighty's willingness to save, concluding with the promise that He would lead His people like a loving shepherd (v. 11). Isaiah 40:12–31 addresses God's ability to save. As much as it is obvious to us that the Lord has the power to redeem His children, it was certainly not self-evident to the exiles that God could save them. They were small in number and lived among those who seemed to have stronger gods—after all, these nations had conquered both Israel and Judah.

Isaiah answers the question as to the Lord's power to save with a resounding declaration of monotheism. God is not one deity who exists alongside many others; rather, He is the only God, the Creator of the universe. None other has held the oceans in his hands or weighed the mountains (v. 12). He consulted no one in creating the world, and before Him the nations are nothing (vv. 13–15). The Lord is no mere idol of wood and gold, and earth's inhabitants are “like grasshoppers” in His eyes (vv. 16–23). Consequently, God's people should never doubt His power to redeem or believe that He grows weary. They are, instead, to believe His Word, trust His power, and wait on Him to save. Though the Lord seems to tarry, He renews the strength of His children as they wait for His mighty arm to be revealed (vv. 24–31).

The delay in God's redemption that the exiles felt was due in part to their continued sin. The Lord would have to intervene in a powerful way to make His people the holy servants He intended them to be. God finally did this in Christ Jesus, but we still wait to receive the benefits of the redemption He purchased in all their fullness in the new heaven and earth (Rev. 21). But these benefits are surely ours, and we must wait in faith for their full revelation.