

32 The Symphonic Structure

We shall look at chapter 40 in detail a little later. At present we shall merely glance at a few of its verses as illustrating this important principle of symphonic structure.

The first five verses of chapter 40 look far beyond deliverance from exile, promising that the real cause of exile will be removed by the promised redemption from sin and predicting the work of John the Baptist. Verse 5 declares that the glory of the LORD will be revealed and all flesh will see it together. In the light of later understanding, it is easy to recognize that this looks forward to the incarnation; but the Israelites in the time of Isaiah might have taken it as promising a great manifestation of God's glory in the near future. Perhaps this declaration in verse 5 about the revelation of God's power and glory would arouse skepticism in the minds of many listeners. They would say to themselves: "Such promises are indeed wonderful, but look at the irresistible power of the Babylonian oppressors. See the great force that holds us in subjection! How can we believe that these things will actually occur?"

In answer, verses 6 and 8 proclaim the weakness of humanity and the shortness of human life. Human forces will wither, like the grass, but the Word of God will stand forever.

A similar transition occurs between verses 11 and 12. In verse 11 the Lord's gentle care for His people is beautifully described. Then it is as if the listener were to say: "These are wonderful promises. It is lovely to think of the Lord treating His people in this way, but we are faced with powerful enemies who are oppressing many nations. Can God actually do these things?"

In answer to this unexpressed objection, verses 12-17 stress the great power and wisdom of God. Compared to Him, all the forces of nature are tiny and insignificant. This theme of God's power occurs frequently in these chapters.

Verse 18 introduces a different theme, that of idolatry. Careless Israelites would be tempted to turn to the heathen rites of the Canaanites or to adopt the religion of their conquerors. Human nature often seeks an easy way to satisfy its religious needs without having to submit to God's moral law. In the first