



# Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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# Outline of the Book of Isaiah

I. Warning of Judgment on Israel (1-39)

II. The Promise of Future Hope in the New Jerusalem (40-66)

A. The Announcement of Hope (40-48)

1. God's Promised Deliverance (40:1-11)

2. The Incomparable Greatness of the Lord (40:12-31)

B. The Servant Fulfills God's Mission (49-55)

C. Everlasting Deliverance and Everlasting Judgment (56-66)

# The Incomparable Greatness of the Lord (40:12-31)

- As we saw last week, the purpose of this section is to remind the people of who the LORD *is*, so that, no matter how large their problems or how formidable their foes, they can be *confident* that he is *able* to deliver them.
- The “*Holy One*” is the *sole ruler* of heaven and earth.
- To even *think* of comparing him to *anything* in creation is *utter* foolishness.
- Last week we examined the *first three* subsections which run from **verses 12-20**.
- Today we will be looking at the *last three* subsections which run from **verses 21-31**:
  - The LORD in Contrast to the Mighty of This Earth (40:21–24)
  - The LORD’s Masterful Control of the Stars (40:25–27)
  - The LORD – Source of All Power (40:28–31)

# The LORD in Contrast to the Mighty of This Earth (40:21–24)

*40:21 Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told to you since the very beginning? Have you not understood from the time the earth's foundations were made? <sup>22</sup> He is the one who sits on the earth's horizon; its inhabitants are like grasshoppers before him. He is the one who stretches out the sky like a thin curtain, and spreads it out like a pitched tent. <sup>23</sup> He is the one who reduces rulers to nothing; he makes the earth's leaders insignificant. <sup>24</sup> Indeed, they are barely planted; yes, they are barely sown; yes, they barely take root in the earth, and then he blows on them, causing them to dry up, and the wind carries them away like straw.*

**40:21** *Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told to you since the very beginning? Have you not understood from the time the earth's foundations were made?*

- As we saw last week in verse 12, Isaiah's appeal once again begins with a series of *rhetorical questions*, reminding his hearers of things they should *already know*.<sup>1</sup>
- The question, "*Do you not know?*", is amplified by the final clause, "*Have you not understood?*"<sup>1</sup>
- What Isaiah is looking for from his readers is *not mere acquaintance* with facts.
- Instead he is calling on them to have *discernment* and a willingness to accept the *implications* of what they should already know about the LORD.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Oswalt, John N.. *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66 (The NIC on the OT)* (p. 66). Eerdmans.

<sup>2</sup> Mackay, John L. – *A Study Commentary on Isaiah Volume 2: Chapters 40-66* – pp. 37–38.



**40:21** *Do you not know? **Do you not hear?** Has it not been told to you since the very beginning? Have you not understood from the time the earth's foundations were made?*

- The question, “***Do you not hear?***” challenges them not just to ***physically*** hear, but to ***listen*** and ***understand***.
- To fail to do this, is to risk ending up like those described back in Isaiah chapter 6, where the LORD said to Isaiah concerning the people of Judah:
  - *Go and tell these people: “**Listen continually, but don’t understand.** Look continually, but don’t perceive.’ Make the hearts of these people calloused; make their ears deaf and their eyes blind. Otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, their hearts might understand and they might repent and be healed.”* (Isaiah 6:9-10) <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Oswalt, John N.. *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66 (The NIC on the OT)* (p. 66). Eerdmans.

<sup>2</sup> Mackay, John L. – *A Study Commentary on Isaiah Volume 2: Chapters 40-66* – pp. 37–38.

**40:21** *Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told to you since the very beginning? Have you not understood from the time **the earth's foundations** were made?*

- From the questions of intent and response Isaiah moves to questions of fact: “*Has it not been told to you since the very beginning? Have you not understood from the time the earth's foundations were made?*”
- Although Isaiah does not specifically say which “*beginning*” he has in mind, the statement that follows makes it clear that he is referring to the beginning of our physical universe.
- “*the earth's foundations*” refers to the *beginnings* of the earth – a time when the world as we know it did not yet exist.

**40:21** *Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told to you since the very beginning? Have you not understood from the time the earth's foundations were made?*

- What he is saying is that careful thought about the origins of the world points to a creator **beyond** the cosmos itself.
- Carl Sagan, a famous atheist astronomer who lived in recent times is famous for saying “*The Cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be.*”  
(<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/178439-the-cosmos-is-all-that-is-or-was-or-ever>)
- He was gravely mistaken.
- Isaiah points out here, that if the cosmos had a “**beginning**”, it has to have been brought into existence by something **outside** of itself.
- Even the early philosophers recognized this.



**40:21** *Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told to you since the very beginning? Have you not understood from the time the earth's foundations were made?*

- Aristotle, for example, refers to God (as he understood him) as the “Unmoved Mover” – “who moves other things, but is not himself moved by any prior action” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unmoved\\_mover](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unmoved_mover)).
- The current theory of a “big bang” for the origin of the universe still does not address the question of where the stuff that produced this “big bang” came from!
- Isaiah boldly asserts that behind it all is a **person**— the LORD — and that **nothing** which is part of his creation, whether gods or humans, can thwart his plans.

40:22 *He is the one who sits on the **earth's horizon**; its inhabitants are **like grasshoppers** before him. He is the one who stretches out the sky **like a thin curtain**, and spreads it out like a pitched tent.*

- As the transcendent one, the LORD sits enthroned above “*the earth's horizon*” or, as it puts it in the NASB, “*above the vault of the earth*”.
- In other words, he is **above** the world, not part of it.
- From that vantage point the people of earth with their often monumental egos are very small indeed: “*like grasshoppers*”.
- As for “*the sky*”, which to us seems so vast and permanent, what is it to the LORD?
- To him it is just a tent canopy “*like a thin curtain*”, which he has stretched out as a shelter for his people.

**40:23** *He is the one who reduces **rulers** to nothing; he makes the earth's leaders insignificant.*

- Furthermore, the Creator of the world is not an **absent deity** – his control of the processes of history is **ongoing**.
- The “**rulers**” of the world are under his jurisdiction.
- He is able to bring down those who elevate themselves to positions of authority, **regardless** of where they come from—Assyria, Babylon, or wherever.
- Isaiah’s contemporaries had just witnessed an **example** of this when they saw the LORD bring down the Assyrian king, Sennacherib (see Isaiah 37:36-37).
- The LORD is able to throw all the strategies of human rulers into disarray, so that they and their plans are rendered ineffective.

**40:24** *Indeed, they are barely planted; yes, they are barely sown; yes, they barely take root in the earth, and then he **blows on them**, causing them to **dry up**, and **the wind** carries them away **like straw**.*

- The same point is made again here using an *analogy*.
- The rulers of the nations are compared here to plants just sown by a farmer, which “*dry up*” when the LORD “*blows on them*”.
- After that, “*like straw*”, the dried-up remains of the plants left in the fields are carried away by “*the wind*”.
- This image of divine judgement is similar to Isaiah 40:6-7 where it says “*All people are like grass*” which “*dries up... when the wind sent by the LORD blows on them.*”
- Except that *here* the primary emphasis is on the transience of even the **strongest** and **most prominent** human figures.

# The LORD's Masterful Control of the Stars (40:25–27)

40:25 *“To whom can you compare me? Whom do I resemble?” says the Holy One.* <sup>26</sup> *Look up at the sky! Who created all these heavenly lights? He is the one who leads out their ranks; he calls them all by name. Because of his absolute power and awesome strength, not one of them is missing.* <sup>27</sup> *Why do you say, Jacob, Why do you say, Israel, “The LORD is not aware of what is happening to me; my God is not concerned with my vindication”?*

40:25 *“To whom can you compare me? Whom do I resemble?” says the Holy One.*

- The conclusion is drawn once again (cf. 40:18 – *“To whom can you compare God?”*) – this time in the words of God himself – that there is **nothing** in all of creation – especially among mankind – that compares to the LORD.<sup>1</sup>
- The term *“the Holy One”* used here is an even **more distinctive** than the term *“God”* used in Isaiah 40:18.<sup>1</sup>
- “Holiness” describes the **otherness** of God, that which separates him from all his creatures.<sup>2</sup>
- But this “otherness” of God is not merely an otherness in character – i.e., being morally perfect.<sup>2</sup>
- But this otherness of God extends to his **very essence**.<sup>2</sup>
- Isaiah’s use of this term here emphasizes the **transcendence** of God that he has been highlighting in this entire section.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mackay, John L. – *A Study Commentary on Isaiah Volume 2: Chapters 40-66* – p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Oswalt, John N.. *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66 (The NIC on the OT)* (p. 69). Eerdmans.



40:26 *Look up at the sky! **Who created all these heavenly lights?** He is the one who leads out their ranks; he calls them all by name. Because of his absolute power and awesome strength, not one of them is missing.*

- One of the realms that is under the LORD's control is the "*heavenly lights*" (i.e., stars and planets)
- What makes this comparison all the more meaningful is the fact that especially in the land of the Babylonians, where the children of Israel would be held in bondage, the heavenly bodies were regarded astrologically as controlling the affairs of men that took place down here on earth.
- As the Babylonians saw it, the control exerted by these heavenly bodies was **absolute**, far beyond that of the gods themselves.
- Not so in the religion of Israel.
- The vast heavenly bodies are merely a part of the creation of God.
- "*Who created all these?*" allows for only one answer: the God whom Israel worshipped.

**40:26** *Look up at the sky! Who created all these heavenly lights? He is the one who leads out their ranks; he calls them all by name. Because of his absolute power and awesome strength, not one of them is missing.*

- And as heavenly bodies once originated with him, so they forever remain under his control, his *“who leads out their ranks.”*
- The spectacle of the starry skies that we see displayed night after night, is nothing other than the Almighty Maker of the universe bringing them out as a shepherd brings his flock out into a field.
- He is intimately familiar with each of these heavenly bodies and *“calls them all by name”*.
- And it is only *“because of his absolute power and awesome strength”* that *“not one of them is missing.”*

40:27 *Why do you say, Jacob, Why do you say, Israel, “The LORD is not aware of what is happening to me; my God is not concerned with my vindication”?*

- Isaiah now turns to give specific application of what he has been saying to the situation in which he finds the people.
- In their intense suffering and dismay they have mistakenly concluded that “*the LORD is not aware of what is happening*” to them.
- It’s clear they have lapsed into self-pity because of their suffering and that they think that the LORD is neglecting them.

40:27 *Why do you say, Jacob, Why do you say, Israel, “The LORD is not aware of what is happening to me; my God is not concerned with my vindication”?*

- Furthermore they complain: “*my God is not concerned with my vindication.*”
- By that they meant: we have certain rights as nation, particularly in view of God’s election of Israel as his people; and yet God disregards them.
- Isaiah **challenges** these statements, exclaiming: “*Why do you say, Jacob, Why do you say, Israel?*”
- Lack of faith and failure to think things through is the reason for your attitude, charges the prophet.

# The LORD – Source of All Power (40:28–31)

*40:28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is an eternal God, the Creator of the whole earth. He does not get tired or weary; there is no limit to his wisdom. <sup>29</sup> He gives strength to those who are tired; to the ones who lack power, he gives renewed energy. <sup>30</sup> Even youths get tired and weary; even strong young men clumsily stumble. <sup>31</sup> But those who wait for the LORD's help find renewed strength; they rise up as if they had eagles' wings, they run without growing weary, they walk without getting tired.*

**40:28** *Do you not know? Have you not heard? **The LORD is an eternal God, the Creator of the whole earth.** He does not get tired or weary; there is no limit to his wisdom.*

- The prophet's response involves a measure of frustration that they have not already grasped these fundamental perceptions of faith.
- It is clear they have to relearn old lessons about the one with whom raise these complaints.
- "*The LORD*", the covenant God, is "*an eternal God*", the one true God who is not constrained by limitations of time.
- As "*the Creator of the whole earth*", there is nothing that lies outside his knowledge and control.



**40:28** *Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is an eternal God, the Creator of the whole earth. He does not get **tired** or **weary**; there is no limit to **his wisdom**.*

- Furthermore, his power will not fade because he becomes “*tired*” through lack of inner resilience, or “*weary*” because of the pressure of external factors.
- Therefore he can be relied upon to be of help in *every situation*.
- Also, “*his wisdom*” is limitless, and so their complaints against his way of acting are misguided because they are based on incomplete information.

40:29 *He gives strength to those who are tired; to the ones who lack power, **he gives** renewed energy.*

- **Far** from becoming *diminished* in power, the LORD has an **excess** of energy to give to those who lack it.
- He never suffers lack; instead, he helps those who do.
- The Hebrew grammar of the phrase, “*he gives*” emphasizes that this giving is characteristic of God at all times.
- It is only those who feel and admit their weakness who can benefit from the kind of “*energy*” mentioned here that God “*gives*”
- Compare this to what the Apostle Paul says in 2 Cor 12:9:
  - *But [the LORD] said to me: “My grace is enough for you, for **my power is made perfect in weakness.**” So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me. (2 Cor 12:9)*

40:30 Even *youths* get tired and weary; even strong young men clumsily *stumble*.

- God does not become weary, but men do.
- Furthermore, not only do men *in general* become tired, but even the *strongest* of men can become weary.
- “*youths*” are by nature the strongest and most fit for athletic contests or military service.
- Despite their strength and training, they nevertheless become weary.
- Their strength is not available at all times, and hence, due to exhaustion, they “*stumble*”.
- Youths of robust strength are often cut off even in early life.

**40:31** *But those who wait for the LORD's help find renewed strength; they rise up as if they had eagles' wings, they run without growing weary, they walk without getting tired.*

- Now comes the practical thought: How may men come to have a share in this boundless power of the Lord? <sup>1</sup>
- They shall have it if they will learn to “*wait for the LORD's help.*” <sup>1</sup>
- This expression implies two things: complete dependence on God and a willingness to allow him to decide the terms. <sup>2</sup>
- To wait on him is to admit that we have no other help, either in ourselves or in another. <sup>2</sup>
- Therefore we are helpless until he acts. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Leupold, H. C. *Exposition of Isaiah, Volume 2* – p. 39

<sup>2</sup> Oswalt, John N.. *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66 (The NIC on the OT)* (p. 74). Eerdmans.

**40:31** *But those who **wait for the LORD's help** find renewed strength; they rise up as if they had eagles' wings, they run without growing weary, they walk without getting tired.*

- By the same token, to wait on him is to declare our confidence in his eventual action on our behalf.
- Waiting is not merely killing time but a life of confident expectation.
- Those who give up their own frantic efforts to save themselves and turn expectantly to God will be able to replace or exchange their worn-out strength for new strength.

**40:31** *But those who wait for the LORD's help find renewed strength; they rise up as if they had eagles' wings, they run without growing weary, they walk without getting tired.*

- Such persons will have the experience that “*they rise up as if they had eagles' wings*” above the difficulties they encounter.
- For that matter they shall even be able to go on miraculously, if need be, running and not wearying, walking and not growing faint.



# Next Time

I plan to look at the Work of the Servant of the LORD beginning in **Isaiah 42:1-12**

# Class Discussion Time



# Class Discussion Time

- We saw in today's lesson that careful thought about the origins of the world points to a creator beyond the cosmos itself.
- Nothing can come from nothing!
- We furthermore pointed out that the current theory of a "big bang" for the origin of the universe still does not address the question of where the stuff that produced this "big bang" came from!
- Do you agree with this? How might an atheist like Carl Sagan respond to this assertion? What would you say in response?

# Class Discussion Time

- We saw in today's lesson that men come to have a share in this boundless power of the Lord only if they will learn to "wait for the LORD's help."
- I pointed out that this expression implies two things: complete dependence on God and a willingness to allow him to decide the terms. That to wait on him is to admit that we have no other help, either in ourselves or in another.
- What does this look like in practical terms? Is there a place for us to be active as Christians?



# Class Discussion Time

- There is a well known prayer used by AA known as “the serenity prayer”. It says:

*God, grant me*

*the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,*

*the courage to change the things I can,*

*and the wisdom to know the difference.*

- This prayer is not from scripture, so it is not authoritative.
- But is there wisdom in it? Does it accurately address the question of when we act and when we wait? Why or why not?