

Isaiah Lesson 40

Isaiah Chapter 40

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Introduction: Chapter 39 covered the error that Hezekiah made in revealing the wealth of Judah to the Babylonian ambassadors. Beginning with the 40th chapter, the book of Isaiah now largely shifts its focus to the time beyond the chastening of God by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. This portion of the book primarily speaks of redeemed Israel, the coming of the Messiah, and additional details of the Millennium.

Here, the ministry of John the Baptist is foretold. Then the prophet moves on to a magnificent comparison, contrasting the greatness of God and the weakness of man. The chapter concludes with a promise.

I. Comfort for God's People

Isa 40:1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

Isa 40:2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.

The tone of the book changes dramatically here. Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. The initial portion of the book is one of prophecy and impending judgment, whether by Assyria or in the Day of the Lord. Now the message is of comfort and encouragement for God's people, Israel. The vision is altogether of the Day of the Lord for, on that day, the warfare of Jerusalem will be accomplished (i.e., fulfilled).

On that day, the sin of Israel will have been pardoned and she will now be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. With the completion of the Tribulation, Israel will have been chastened in double portion for her sins. The thought may be how that God had chastened Israel through the centuries and then again in the Tribulation. Or the thought maybe how that the chastening of God during the Tribulation was a double portion for their sin. In any event, come that day, God's chastisement of their sin will be over and now it is a time for God's people to be encouraged.

Isa 40:3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Isa 40:4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

Isa 40:5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see *it* together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.

The prophet now shifts to the announcement of the coming Messiah. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. The New Testament leaves no question that the one so described is none other than John the Baptist. See Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:1,5,6; and John 1:23.

Luk 3:1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene,

Luk 3:2 Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

Luk 3:3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;

Luk 3:4 As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Luk 3:5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth;

Luk 3:6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

John did precisely as noted here. He came preaching repentance for the King and His kingdom was at hand. Such repentance indeed would be in preparation for the arrival of the Messiah. Sadly, blind Israel ignored that call. There may be additional fulfillment in the two witnesses of Revelation 11 and their preaching during the Tribulation. The New Testament fulfillment in John the Baptist demonstrates that the way and highway of the Lord were spiritual and not physical.

Making straight in the desert a highway for our God refers to the spiritual preparation for His coming. Of further interest is that the Messiah is referred to as God. Indeed, Jesus Christ is Deity. He is God. Verse 4, without doubt, refers to the coming of the Messiah. Though the ministry of John was altogether spiritual, verse 4 here refers to the physical changes in and about Jerusalem when Christ returns the second time. Zechariah 14:10 speaks of all the land

being turned into a plain when Christ returns. Ezekiel 45 describes a fifty-mile-square plateau upon which the millennial Temple will be built.

In any event, there will be major topographical changes in the land of Israel when Christ returns. Isaiah foretells how this will be in preparation for the coming of the great King. It may be that the mighty earthquakes described in Revelation 16:18 and elsewhere are used by God to restructure the land in preparation for the Millennial reign of Christ.

Verse 5 refers to the second coming of Christ at the end of the Tribulation. Both Matthew 24:30 and Luke 21:27 speak of Christ returning in power and great glory at the end of the Tribulation just before the beginning of the Millennium.

Moreover, the remaining population of the earth after the Tribulation will see the King in His glory as He rides across the heavens. God through the prophet had spoken it. It will happen. Here is also a clear view of inspiration. Though Isaiah was the penman, the text makes it exceedingly clear that the mouth of the Lord had spoken it. Isaiah certainly was a holy man of old who was moved by the Holy Ghost.

II. The Word of God Stands Forever

Isa 40:6 The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field:

Isa 40:7 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass.

Isa 40:8 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

The 'voice' noted is that of the Lord Himself. He directed Isaiah to cry out. Isaiah asked, "What shall I cry?" God replied that his message was to be: All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field. A theme found throughout the Bible is the contrast of the frailty of man versus the power of God.

The Apostle Peter quotes this portion in I Peter 1:24. Jesus as well alluded to the same in Matthew 6:30 and Luke 12:28. See also James 1:10-11.

Jas 1:10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

Jas 1:11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

In the Middle East, grass and wildflowers will grow up in the springtime, then the searing summer heat will cause them to wilt away. The Scripture here likens mankind to withering grass. Mankind springs up and yet after a short season of life, passes away. Our lives are as a watch in the night (Psalm 90:4).

Psa 90:4 For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.

We grow up like grass and then wither away. See Psalm 90:5-7.

Psa 90:5 Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up.

Psa 90:6 In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.

Psa 90:7 For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled.

The point is that God is eternal. We are frail and very finite. Even as the grass and wildflowers of Israel wither under the middle-eastern sun, so mankind will dissolve before the judgment of God. We are like grass when compared to His great power. Though grass and mankind certainly fade into oblivion, the Word of God will stand forever! Herein is one of the great promises in the Bible of the preservation of the Word of God.

God has not only inspired His Word, but He has also preserved it through the centuries. The Apostle Peter quoted this self-same verse in I Peter 1:24-25.

1Pe 1:24 For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:

1Pe 1:25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

The greater thought is the finite frailty of man compared to the infinite power of God. Mankind comes and goes, but God's Word is forever. It never fails nor will it disappear.

III. The Greatness of God

Isa 40:9 O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift *it* up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

Isa 40:10 Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong *hand*, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward *is* with him, and his work before him.

Isa 40:11 He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry *them* in his bosom, *and* shall gently lead those that are with young.

Because of the greatness and eternity of God and His Word, the prophet, therefore, directs God's people to rejoice. Good tidings are synonymous with the gospel. Zion is a broad synonym for Israel and more specifically Jerusalem, the capital city thereof. In the day when Jesus Christ returns, the primary recipients of the gospel will be Israel. Many believe that this is where the 144,000 after being converted during the Tribulation will preach the gospel across the world. God's people on that day are directed to lift their voices in praise to their Savior and King.

When Jesus returns, redeemed Israel will proclaim to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" The day is soon coming when God in the person of the Messiah will sit upon His throne at Jerusalem. The context in verse 10 clearly is of the Messiah. He is directly described as the Lord God. The Deity of Christ is in view. Notice that when He returns, it will be in power and strength. Though Jesus came the first time in humiliation and submission, His second coming will be in power and great glory.

His reward will be with Him to reward His servants who have faithfully served Him in this life.

Rev 22:12 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

Being King over the entire earth will be before Him as well as the building of the millennial Jerusalem and the millennial Temple. Not only is Jesus Christ returning to rule and reign as King of kings, but He also will be a Shepherd to His people, tenderly taking care of them and meeting their every need. Spiritually,

He surely does that even at this hour. As the Chief Shepherd today, He is always present spiritually to meet the needs of His people.

On that day, He will be physically present to do the same. Today, He is only a prayer away. Then, we will see Him as He is.

Isa 40:12 Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?

Isa 40:13 Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or *being* his counsellor hath taught him?

Isa 40:14 With whom took he counsel, and *who* instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?

The prophet now sets forth several great rhetorical questions. The answers are clear and evident. The answer to these questions is singular. It is Jehovah God who has measured the waters of the oceans in His hand. It is He who has measured the galactic heavens with His own measuring stick. It is He who has calculated the grains of soil upon the face of the earth.

It is He who has weighed the mountains and their foothills of the earth. The power and infinite character of God are apparent. There is none like Him. Another profound question is asked. Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? The answer to these questions is again apparent. No one has taught or instructed the Spirit of the Lord. He is infinitely higher than all human intelligence combined.

Man's intelligence when compared to His is as nothing. Who counsels God? Who teaches Him? Who taught Him in the path of judgment? Who showed God the way of understanding? God has conferred with no one in making His righteous decisions. No one has educated Him. No one has taught Him. The infinite omniscience and omnipotence of God are clearly in view. The greater thought in all of this is the immeasurable difference between the Creator and the creature. Though mankind will exalt himself and consider himself wise and powerful, compared to the infinite greatness of God, we are as nothing.

IV. Nations are as Small Dust

Isa 40:15 Behold, the nations *are* as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.

Isa 40:16 And Lebanon *is* not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering.

Isa 40:17 All nations before him *are* as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.

Another profound analogy is presented. In the preceding verses, the prophet has portrayed the contrast between God and man. Now he expands the comparison of the collective nations of the earth to God. When all the power and might of the united nations of the world are combined, they are like a drop in a bucket when compared to God. They are like specks of dust upon a balance beam scale—they do not even register. The various regions (perhaps continents) of the world are like nothing to God.

Again, the greatness and infinite power of God is emphatically set forth. It was true on that day. It remains true to this day. As far as God is concerned, All the wood of the forests of Lebanon and all the animals in that nation are not sufficient to make one decent burnt offering before God. God is so great that entire nations are as nothing before Him. All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. The entire united nations of the entire earth are as nothing before God. They are less than nothing as far as He is concerned. They are vanity—an empty shell.

Isa 40:18 To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?

Isa 40:19 The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains.

Isa 40:20 He that *is* so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree *that* will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, *that* shall not be moved.

To whom or to what can we liken to God? The answer is again apparent. There is no likeness or analogy to illustrate His greatness. Yet foolish men try to do so anyway. The idea is how a craftsman pours molten metal into a mold to make an idol. Then a goldsmith overlays it with gold. He then adds silver chains perhaps as ornamentation or perhaps to hold it up so that it does not fall down.

Others of lesser means have a piece of wood carved into an idol, stable enough that it will not fall over. It is foolish to liken the eternal God to such is wickedness. Wicked men all around the world have done so ever since man transgressed God's law.

Isa 40:21 Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth?

Isa 40:22 *It is* he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof *are* as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:

Isa 40:23 That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity.

Isa 40:24 Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble.

God asks spiritually blind mankind if they in fact have not heard the truth. Clearly implied is that all men once knew and do know the truth concerning the existence of God. The account of creation has been passed to all nations not only in oral tradition but in the written Word of God as well. Furthermore, the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament of His handiwork! The general revelation of God has been clearly seen by all generations in all places.

The God of heaven is He who rules the affairs of men. It is He who is infinitely powerful and omniscient. Of interest is that the sphere of the earth is clearly implied. Nowhere has the Bible ever taught the flat earth idea. Dead theologians came up with that idea. Again, the greatness of God is presented. The population of the earth before Him are like so many grasshoppers. In contrast, the God of the heavens has stretched out the galactic stellar universe like one would hang a curtain or unfold a tent to set up.

As the psalmist had cried out earlier, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" One of the great mysteries of all time is how the infinite God of the universe would bow down to consider sinners such as us. The high and mighty of this earth are reduced to nothing by His infinite power.

The elite and powerful of this world will come to naught before Him. With the breath of His lips will He slay the wicked. Before His breath, they will wither. Like a tornado, He will scatter the high and mighty of this world like straw. That certainly will find its ultimate fulfillment during the Tribulation. God has ways of dealing with arrogant men at any time. Though they may scoff at Him now, the day comes soon enough when they wake up in hell on the receiving end of the judgment of God.

Isa 40:25 To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.

Isa 40:26 Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these *things*, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that *he is* strong in power; not one faileth.

The question is repeated in verse 18. The world around has long stooped to idolatry. Sadly, even Judah had followed suit. Some in Judah had wickedly portrayed their God as a dead, mute, impotent graven image. God called them on it. Notice also that He calls Himself the Holy One. On at least fifty occasions, God so likens Himself. Indeed, He is holy!

Sinful mankind is called to look to the heavens and consider Him who made them. He has not only created the stellar heavens, He has even named the various heavenly bodies.

(1) The major heavenly bodies have never failed.

(2) The sun rises each morning as does the moon on its regular schedule.

(3) Men build their calendars around the predictability of the heavenly circuits. Yet, they forget the God who created it all.

Isa 40:27 Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?

Isa 40:28 Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, *that* the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? *there is* no searching of his understanding.

Isa 40:29 He giveth power to the faint; and to *them that have* no might he increaseth strength.

Though the greater focus of this chapter has been to the world at large, the prophet now focuses on His chosen people. At this point, the northern kingdom had been deported for their sin. Judah, the southern kingdom, was facing God's chastening by Assyria. Many in Israel had therefore concluded that their troubles were hidden from God. God had neglected them, so they thought. They alleged that God no longer cared for them. It was one thing for the gentile world to ignore God. But now God asks Israel and Judah, have not you known God? Have not you heard of His greatness?

He is the everlasting God, Jehovah. He has not gone away. He is eternal. He is the Creator of the ends of the earth. He never gets tired (faints). He is never weary. Moreover, His understanding is immeasurable. Though Israel and Judah had been chastened by God for their sin, God took them to task for contemplating that He either could not or would not deliver them. He was still their God. God is always the champion of the humble of spirit. But more specifically, He will someday restore Israel and Judah to strength and prominence.

Isa 40:30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

Isa 40:31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint.

With that preface, God proceeds (through the prophet) to utter one of the greatest promises of the entire Bible. As God's people of that day (and this as well) would wait upon Him, He has promised to restore their strength.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be blessed.