

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

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?

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:*

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

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.*

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

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.

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?

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.*

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

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

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.

NOTES

No One Is like God

Lesson Text: Isaiah 40:21-31

Related Scriptures: Psalms 2:1-12; 33:1-22; 83:1-18;
Jeremiah 51:15-19; 2 Corinthians 1:8-11

TIME: about 740-680 B.C.

PLACE: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—"To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One" (Isaiah 40:25).

Lesson Exposition

INTRODUCTION—Isa. 40:21

As Isaiah brings chapter 40 to a close, he addresses his audience directly (vs. 21). In four questions, he invites his listeners past and present to consider carefully his words. God is not merely one of many sources of hope. He alone is all our hope.

Isaiah beckons us to look both ahead and behind us. His message is fresh but hardly novel. Since time immemorial, God is our hope.

GOD OF CREATION—Isa. 40:22-26

Following its call to worship, Psalm 113 captures the universal praise God already receives. Creation worships God from east to west (vs. 3), and He is elevated over heaven and earth (vs. 4). From high above, He raises the lowly and needy, establishing them among the rulers (vss. 6-7). His authority over the universe does not come at the expense of His concern for humanity. For this reason, all creation praises Him.

Isaiah ends chapter 40 by appealing to the same marvel that captivates the psalmist. Amid imperial oppression, it is natural to assume the God over the universe cares little about humans. But this conclusion misunderstands God.

God of cosmic affairs (Isa. 40:22).

Verse 22 describes God as the royal craftsman. Sitting high above on His throne, God reigns over creation. From His vantage point, those dwelling below appear like grasshoppers. His dominion is over all.

Unlike most monarchs, however, God did not inherit His kingship. Like a master craftsman, God carefully constructed the cosmos He rules. He crafted the heavens that support His throne as a tentmaker makes a tent. The intimate care God takes to extend the fabric of the sky recalls God's creative act in Genesis 2. In the ancient world, gardens connoted royalty, making the garden an apt location for God to dwell with humans on earth. The divine King crafted the heavens and the earth it covers with skill and care.

God of human affairs (Isa. 40:23-24). God is not disinterested in human affairs. He concerns Himself with the societal operations and structures that afflict the weak. He will not let tyrants reign unchecked.

In verse 23, Isaiah states that God brings princes to nothing. Behind the Hebrew of this passage rests an irony. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the

he has already said into focus, Isaiah brings chapter 40 to its pastoral conclusion: have hope in God. He is the only solid ground one can stand on.

The question (Isa. 40:27). In verse 27, Isaiah asks why God's people claim their way is hidden from Him and their legal cause ignored. These statements are reminiscent of the Bible's lament poems and psalms.

In the Psalter, laments are cataloged as either community laments (cf. Ps. 44), which arose from a time of national crisis, and individual laments (cf. Pss. 42-43), which arose from a personal circumstance.

Behind the claim that the people's way is hidden from God is the assumption that He has turned His face away (cf. 13:16; 44:25). Likewise, the assertion that God ignores their cause suggests His allowance of legal cases going unjudged (cf. 35:23). Each of these are common motifs among laments.

At first glance, the people's lament appears appropriate. One of the most popular lament psalms arises from their very situation. Psalm 137 captures the exiles' lament over the destruction of Jerusalem. As they sit beside Babylon's rivers, their captors mocking ask for a song of Zion (vs. 3). But Isaiah calls them elsewhere. Their situation should not engender lament but hope.

The response (Isa. 40:28-31). Isaiah begins by highlighting God's authority over creation's dimensions. As the everlasting God, He is over time. As the Creator of the earth's ends, He is over space. And as the One who never grows tired, He is over power. Babylon considered itself a global and immortal empire, squashing everything and everyone in its way. But it was not. Isaiah concludes his survey of God's unparalleled standing with the proclamation that God's understanding is unsearchable—so why does his audi-

ence question? Despite the delay they perceive in God's deliverance, He is at work. The redemption He promised would come to fruition in His timing.

Therefore, the prophet concludes, God is the one in whom they can hope. Even young men suitable for battle will grow tired. There is no profit in trusting in them. Nine chapters earlier, Isaiah mourns those who seek an alliance with Egypt as Assyria drew near.

—Andrew Rudolf

QUESTIONS

1. In what tense are Isaiah's first questions written? What effect does this have on the reader?
2. According to Psalm 113, why does the cosmos worship God?
3. How does God's rule over the cosmic affairs of the universe affect His attendance to societal events?
4. In Genesis 2, what two crafts does God adopt to create humanity and the Garden of Eden?
5. How did Isaiah heighten the claims of the psalmist in Psalm 113?
6. What word does Isaiah use in 40:23 to allude to the earth's state before God began to order the cosmos in Genesis 1?
7. What is Amos's message, and to whom does the prophet proclaim it?
8. What did ancient Babylonian science believe about the stars and their celestial movements across the night sky?
9. What are laments? In which biblical books are they most common?
10. Why did Isaiah consider it foolish to trust in foreign military strength? In what or whom should the people trust instead?

—Andrew Rudolf

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Christians should recall what God has done in the past (Isa. 40:21).
2. Recognize that God created the universe and reigns over it (vs. 22).
3. God has authority over human rulers (vss. 23-24).
4. God alone stands above the fates of humans and kingdoms (vss. 25-26).
5. In times of doubt, remember that God is the Creator of all (vss. 27-28).
6. Christians should hope in God alone (vss. 29-31).

—Andrew Rudolf

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What are the implications of God sitting enthroned above the earth? What does that say about His royalty and creative power (Isa. 40:22)?
2. Isaiah said that God brings princes and judges to nothing. Yet many tyrants continue to dominate over people across the world. How can Christians reconcile these facts (vss. 23-24)?
3. The Babylonians believed they could learn about the future by studying the stars. How does Isaiah's assertion that God is the Creator of the stars and the One who names them contradict the Babylonian idea (vs. 26)?
4. Isaiah said that God is the everlasting God who created the earth. What attributes of God can we draw from this statement (vs. 28)?

—Andrew Rudolf

Golden Text Illuminated

“To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One” (Isaiah 40:25).

This verse evokes a sense of wonder at the uniqueness and supremacy of God and prompts us to examine how this truth impacts both life and faith.

God's attributes and character are unparalleled and cannot be replicated or compared to any created being or worldly power. No other being possesses the unchanging nature, the perfect wisdom, and the infinite love that define our God. There is no other.

These truths have profound implications for our lives. First, acknowledging that no one is like our God instills a deep sense of reverence and worship.

Moreover, embracing God's unparalleled place encourages us to put our trust and hope in Him alone. We live in a world saturated with false idols and worldly temptations, but this truth reminds us that God alone is worthy of our full devotion and allegiance. It prompts us to seek Him above all else, placing our faith in His unfailing love and unending power.

Finally, embracing this truth leads us to share the good news of God's uniqueness and salvation with others. As ambassadors of Christ, we have the privilege and responsibility to proclaim the truth that there is no one like our God.

As we embrace the truth of God's incomparable nature, we are transformed and empowered to live as faithful followers of Christ, sharing His love and truth with a world that desperately needs to know that no one is like our God.

—Page Brooks