

Isaiah 40:21-31

LESSON: THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE EARTH — September 18, 2016

INTRODUCTION:

¹Isaiah speaks by inspiration to a people who have lost hope. In this passage, He describes God's power to create, His provision to sustain, and His presence to help. Human idolatry is pictured as being utterly ridiculous by the prophet. Through a series of questions he brings his readers into the very presence of the one true God. He shows that no graven image shall compare to the likeness of God (40:18). How can we describe God? With what can we compare him? With an idol? An idol is a god created in the image of man. It is nothing more than a man-made statue covered with gold and chained down with silver chains (40:19). The very first commandment warns us not to worship other gods. It specifically speaks against graven images. A man may try to make his own god. But an idol cannot live. And it has no possible use. Its maker even has to fix it firmly in position. Otherwise it will fall. This leads to verse 21.

LESSON: I. THE LORD'S SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE EARTH Isaiah 40:21-26

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?—Isaiah asks are you ignorant? Are you death to the Words of God; the words God gave before the world began? Meaning they never heard nor understood? What have they not understood? That it was God who created the world. And God created all that is in the world.

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:—God sits on the outer horizon encircling the earth (*revealing the earth being round*). The inhabitants are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the skies like a curtain (*the atmosphere surrounding the earth*), and spreads out like a tent (*a shelter of protection*) to dwell in.

40:23 That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. God brings dignitaries to nothing and make the rulers of the world like empty boxes. ²High position in society means nothing to God. It is God who elevates a person to high authority and brings another down. The highest position any of us can have is to be sons of God.

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. They are like plants that are planted in the ground. But before they can send their roots into the ground, God blows on the "plants"; they become dead and dry, and the wind blows them away like straw (ERV). The idea of the passage: all of man's efforts, no matter how powerful he may think he is, in his opposition to God, sow the seed of his own destruction.

¹ <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/sustaining-power-of-god/>

² <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/isaiah/45.html>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>

PITWM VERSE BY VERSE

40:25 To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. We have been looking at God's greatness as He reaches down to us in Power. This is a summary to conclude from verse 18. If God is paramount over idols, over nature, and over humanity, to whom can He be likened /equal? Is He not altogether unique and incomparable? The Prophet having thus set forth the majesty and glory of God asks now with great emphasis, what could be an adequate and proper representation of such a God? There is nothing whatsoever that is a fit likeness and similitude, by which to represent the Lord. He is called the "*Holy One*" and is pictured as controlling the heavens on high, even as He providentially controls the events on earth. No one or thing can be compared to God, and He has proven Himself time and time again.

40:26 Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these?— He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing. Direct your eyes toward heaven. God appeals to the starry heavens as proof of His existence and perfections, and as the most awe-inspiring exhibition of His greatness and power (i.e. moon, stars, sun...).

Some 50 years ago, it was claimed by Astronomers that there were over 40 sextillion stars in the Universe. If every one of these stars were named, there would be enough names to fill approximately 80 quadrillion books of this size. Not one fails to fulfill its Will; not one has failed to fulfill its purpose from when it was first spoken into being. To understand that the Supreme Being has created all of these stars, and calls them each by name, is beyond our comprehension! He is still taking care of His covenant people by His awesome Power.

II. THE LORD'S CARE FOR HIS PEOPLE Isaiah 40:27-31

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. The nation Israel was having trouble, and Isaiah hears the complaints of the exiles, who think that God has forsaken them. Jacob and Israel refer to the descendants of Jacob whose name was changed to Israel. Jacob, in the verse above, is speaking of the Hebrew descendants of Jacob (Israel). Israel, in the verse above, is speaking of the spiritual house of Israel (the believers in Christ). They thought their troubles were hid from God or that He had passed over them; ignored their cause.

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. Isaiah comes back again to remind them as he did in verse 21. We all wonder and complain at times when God does not come readily when we expect Him, but we really should know our God by now. We really should know and have heard who God is. He is the Everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He is the God who does not faint, nor does He get weary. He has clear understanding about all things, so there is no need for us to wonder about Him rescuing us. He is an on-time God!

40:29 He giveth power to the faint; and to [them that have] no might he increaseth strength. After explaining all the greatness and glory of God, now Isaiah explains another benefit we can receive from God. God takes care of us by renewing our strength. Notice who God gives power to:

1. the faint;
2. those who have no might

Even the strongest people get tired at times, but God's power and strength never diminish. He is never too tired or too

PITWM VERSE BY VERSE

busy to help and listen. He increases our strength; "...when I am weak, then am I strong" 2Corth.12:10c. Those who are proud and confident in their own wisdom and strength will receive no strength from God.

Wiersbe tells us, "We can never obey God in our own strength, but we can always trust Him to provide the strength we need. If we trust ourselves, we will faint and fall; but if we wait on the Lord by faith, we will receive strength for the journey."

God's strength is reserved for those who know they are weak, and know they have no might.

God gives us strength when we are weak

40:30 Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall utterly fall. Two categories used here: youth and young men. They "*shall faint and be weary*" and they "*shall utterly fall.*" "Weak" means "*failure through loss of inherent strength.*" Youth have so much energy that we wished we had a tenth of it, yet even the little ones get tired and crash. The most vigorous young men whom we expect manly strength, also, become weary by labor. There may be a time when you are weakened by disease and sink under with discouragement – exhausted. God is able to give strength when you thought you couldn't go on any further. The Israelites needed to know that God would be with them in captivity, be with them when they get faint or exhausted. And the next verse helps us to understand.

God gives us strength when we are exhausted.

God gives us strength when we can't go on.

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. When we are powerless to continue, then the Lord says to wait. I think this is the one thing we hate more than anything else – to wait on God. We don't like waiting. We are an impatient people. But God says we must learn to wait. It is only in that place of waiting we find the promises of God:

1. renew their strength **2. mount** up as eagles **3. run** and not be weary **4. walk** and not faint

Waiting is designed to make an exchange.

I. "**Wait**" – "*qavah*" – wait, hope, expect; to look eagerly for; to lie in wait for; linger for. The idea behind wait on the Lord is not a passive sitting around until the Lord does something. It is a feeling that is as consistent with the most strenuous endeavors to secure the object; it is a seeking with a clinging expectant trust and hope in Him.

Here, it properly refers to those who were suffering a long and grievous captivity in Babylon, and who had no prospect of deliverance, but in Him. The phrase is applicable also to all who feel that they are weak, feeble, guilty, and helpless, and who in view of this, put their confident trust in "*Yahweh.*"

- 1. "Shall renew their strength"** – That trust in "*Yahweh*" brings about a change; it will cause a change in your life.
 - "**Renew**" – "*chalaph*" – means to pass on or away; to change, substitute, to alter, change for better; and then to revive, to renew, to cause to flourish again. It's the idea of changing clothes, taking off the old stuff and putting on new ones.

PITWM VERSE BY VERSE

- **"Strength"** — It's taking "our weakness" and exchanging it for "God's strength." The people of God who trust in Him shall become strong in faith; able to contend with their spiritual foes, to gain the victory over their sins. They shall lay aside their strength and put on, as a garment, strength from God.

Exchange your strength for God's strength.

2. **"They shall mount up with wings as eagles"** – It has been a common and popular opinion that the eagle lives and retains his vigor and lives to a very advanced age. And in shedding his feathers, his youth is renewed with his new feathers.

Eagles and other raptors (bird of prey) generally do not pluck their feathers. All birds, including raptors do go through a process of losing feathers, and this is called a molt. A bird's feathers do suffer regular wear and tear so, ultimately, the quality of the feathers will decrease and they will need to be replaced. The feathers are not lost all at the same time. If this were true, the bird would be unprotected from natural elements and more importantly it would not be able to fly. Raptors and all other birds molt in a symmetrical pattern. If a primary feather is molted, simultaneously it is also on the right wing. This can ensure balance in flight for the bird while it hunts during this molting period.

(The Speculation): It is said that the eagle sheds his feathers in the beginning of spring, and with fresh plumage assumes the appearance of youth. The belief that an eagle renews its strength and youthful appearance after shedding its feathers gave rise to Psalm 103:5 and Isaiah 40:31. Eagles do have a long lifespan, living 20 to 30 years in the wild, and longer in captivity [Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary].

- **"Mount up"** – "alah" – to go up, ascend, climb. Their climb is swift and strongly.

What does that mean? Why as eagles? Why not with wings as doves? The eagle is the king of birds. It soars the highest into the Heavens. Believers are to live a heavenly life, in the very presence and love and joy of God. They are to live where God lives and they need God's strength to rise there. We see a metaphor of an eagle used to describe how we can soar through and above difficulty with God.

Eagles are able to cover incredible distances, rising thousand of feet into the sky, reaching speeds of 60 miles per hour. But these beautiful birds may flap their wings only once or twice over the course of hours in doing so. They let the thermal updrafts carry them along.

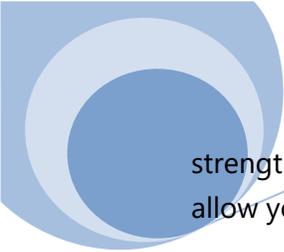
It's hard to mount up, climb, or go up higher if you try to go before your time of renewal. That period of waiting on God is a must. It's always best to soar under the shadow of the Almighty as He covers you with His feathers and under His wings you will find refuge while you trust in Him.

Ascending under His wings is a spiritual freedom without hindrance.

3. **"They shall run and not be weary."** "Running" is a continual going, and a continual execution in spite of. Yes, you sometimes get weary when you run. "Weary" means exhaustion because of the hardness of life (Motyer). However, this passage is expressing the idea that they who trust in God would be vigorous, elevated, and unwearied; knowing that God would sustain and uphold them during the process.

Without hindrance in hard times you can endure to run further.

4. **"And they shall walk and not faint."** This was at first designed to be applied to the Jews in captivity in Babylon to induce them to put their trust in God. But it is as true now as it was at that time. This is the purpose of the strength the Lord gives us - strength to move forward and progress in Him. It isn't



PITWM VERSE BY VERSE

strength to show off, but strength to go forward in Him. Walk in Him, take one step at a time in Him; allow your actions to be controlled by Him so you won't become weak along the way and give-up.

Your steps are ordered by the Lord because your lifestyle /walk have changed.

Notice what happens when we wait on the Lord. God says He will renew our strength. We will begin to take flight like the eagle. We will run and not be weary. We will walk and not faint. Notice the order, because it seems strange. But remember how it was when you first came to Christ. You were "gong-hoe" and ready to do it all. There was such a change in your life; you were soaring to new heights. First we mount up with wings like eagles. Then we run. Finally we walk. Does it seem out of order? - Not at all. As things go up; they come down. God wants the landing to be smooth. First, we recognize that we soar up into heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6). Then we set ourselves on the course to run the race (Hebrews 12:1). Then we are in the good place to walk the walk (Colossians 2:6).

SUMMARY:

³Those who were in exile lost hope, and because of that they lost their strength and desire to go on. God is greater than anything in heaven (**40:20-26**). He founded the earth and sits on the throne in heaven and nothing is equal to Him, let alone greater than He is. Anyone who looks at the greatness of nature and the complexity of the universe and fails to see the hand of God is without excuse. The phrase "He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth" (**40: 22**) refers to the Lord God and clearly indicates that the earth is round and not flat.

In the light of God's omniscience, as well as His omnipresence, the prophet asks Israel why it is that she thinks her way is hid from the Lord (**40: 27**). Rather than being able to give to Him, He is the one who must give to us in order for our needs to be met. God, who unlike pagan idols, is eternal and the creator never grows weary (**40: 28**). Instead, He gives strength to those who are weary and weak (**40:29-31**).

³ <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/sustaining-power-of-god/>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>