

"Faith in the Power of God"

Devotional Reading: Romans 4:9-22 **Background Scriptures:** Isaiah 40:12-31

Isaiah 40:12–13, 25–31 (NIV)

¹² Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? ¹³ Who can fathom the Spirit of the LORD, or instruct the LORD as his counselor?

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²⁵ "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. ²⁶ Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. ²⁷ Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"? ²⁸ Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. ²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. ³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹ but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Fact:** To list characteristics of the Creator that are uniquely His.
- **Biblical Principle:** To know that God is our source of power and strength.
- **Daily Application:** To suggest ideas for a worship service that focuses on God as Creator.

LESSON CONTEXT

The lesson comes from the writings of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. His text is the first in a group of five referred to as the Major Prophets; those five are the books known as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

The value of the Old Testament books of the prophets today is firmly established in how many times Jesus and the authors of the New Testament cited them. One clue to their value today is to be aware of how often these books are quoted in the New Testament. By one count, the tallies are Isaiah (67 times), Jeremiah (5 times), Lamentations (0 times), Ezekiel (2 times), and Daniel (5 times).

These figures reveal the continuing relevance of the book of Isaiah. It has been called "the fifth Gospel" because of its numerous prophecies declared as fulfilled in the messianic era of the New Testament (examples: Isaiah 6:9–10 in Matthew 13:14–15 and Mark 4:12; Isaiah 53:7–8 in Acts 8:32–33).

Isaiah prophesied during some very dismal times for God's people. His prophetic call came "in the year that king Uzziah died" (Isaiah 6:1; compare 2 Chronicles 26:22), which would have been 740 B.C. (see 2 Chronicles 26; Uzziah is also known as Azariah in 2 Kings 15:1–7). The final historical event recorded by the prophet is the death of Sennacherib, which occurred in 681 B.C. (Isaiah 37:37, 38). That makes for a lengthy period of ministry!

The text under consideration in the lesson follows a prophecy that warns King Hezekiah of Judah regarding a time when Babylon would carry away Judah's wealth and people to Babylon (Isaiah 39:5–7); more than 100 years would pass before that happened, but it indeed *did* happen. This was a punishment from the Lord for the people's sins, followed by "comfort" in declaring that that punishment would eventually end (40:1–2). The predictions that immediately follow in Isaiah 40:3–5 shift forward more than five centuries for fulfillment, quoted in Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4–6; and John 1:23.

The passage of time from pronouncement to fulfillment of these prophecies makes for valuable study. But the study in the lesson takes us beyond time-bound prophecies in considering the timeless nature of God Himself.

Supreme Ruler: Isaiah 40:12–13

These verses emphasize the incomparable majesty of the Lord as the pre-existent Creator who is transcendent over His creation. When Isaiah asked, “who has measured,” it raised an exclusive interrogative question to which the only answer can be “none but God!” The rhetorical questions raised in this verse do not deal exclusively with scientific measurement, which man may one day be able to calculate with his God-given abilities, but to the understanding of the *magnitude* and *intricacy* of that creation. Therefore, the immeasurable God alone is the One who can measure His creation.

1. How did the Prophet Isaiah describe the majesty of God? (Isaiah 40:12)

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you be more attentive to God’s power and creativity in the natural environment surrounding you?

Digging Deeper

In what ways can your caring for creation be an act of worship to God?

The importance of Isaiah 40:13 for the New Testament era is seen in the fact that the apostle Paul quotes it twice (see Romans 11:34 and 1 Corinthians 2:16). Paul uses the word *mind* rather than *Spirit* because he is quoting from the Greek version known as the Septuagint. Even so, his understanding of what the passage says about God is entirely consistent with Isaiah’s: God has never had to learn anything from anyone. God is omniscient, meaning “all-knowing.”

Here in verse 13 of today’s lesson not only is God pictured as being greater than His creation and distinct from it, but it is He alone who has the wisdom to sustain it. Again, the prophet uses a series of rhetorical questions to emphasize that no one has given counsel or judgment to the all-wise God.

Here Isaiah reminded the people of the greatness of Jehovah. When you behold the greatness of God, then you will see everything else in life in its proper perspective.

Isaiah 40:14–24, which comes between the two segments of the lesson text, continues the prophet’s confrontational questions. These include declarations of the Lord’s superiority to the nations (Isaiah 40:15–17), idols (40:18–20), and earthly rulers (40:23–24).

2. What other important fact about God did the prophet Isaiah bring out? (Isaiah 40:13)

Sustaining Ruler: Isaiah 40:25–31

God is greater than anything on earth (vs. 12-20) or anything in heaven (vs. 21-26). Creation shows His wisdom, power, and immensity.

He is greater than the nations and their gods. He founded the earth and sits on the throne of heaven, and nothing is equal to our God, let alone greater than our God. The next time you are tempted to think that the world is out of control, remember the “drop in a bucket” (v. 15), and the “grasshoppers” (v. 22; see Num. 13:33). And if you ever feel so small that you wonder if God really cares about you personally, remember that He knows the name of every star (Isa. 40:26) and your name as well! (See John 10:3, 27.) The same God who numbers and names the stars can heal your broken heart (Ps. 147:3-4).

3. Why did Isaiah caution us when attempting to compare God to anything, or better yet take our “eyes” off Him? (Isaiah 40:25-26)

What Do You Think?

How can you prevent present circumstances as well as past experiences from negatively influencing the way you view God?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to transform any misguided and distorted perceptions of God?

Instead of praising the Lord, the nation was complaining to Him that He acted as though He did not know their situation or have any concern for their problems (v. 27; 49:14). Instead of seeing the open door, the Jews saw only the long road before them, and they complained that they did not have strength for the journey. That God was asking them to do the impossible.

But God knows how we feel and how we fear, and He is adequate to meet our every need. We can never obey God in our own strength, but we can always trust Him to provide the strength we need (Phil. 4:13). 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.

4. What were Israel's feelings towards God at this time? (Isaiah 40:27-29)

What Do You Think?

How should we respond when people say that God doesn't care about them and their problems?

Digging Deeper

What Scriptures come to mind addressing this concern?

The chapter closes with the contrast between youths, and those that "hope in the Lord."

The word "hope" means to look to God for all that we need (Isa. 26:3; 30:15). This involves meditating on His character and His promises, praying, and seeking to glorify Him.

The word "renew" means "to exchange," as taking off old clothing and putting on new. We exchange our weakness for His power (2 Cor. 12:1-10). As we wait before Him, God enables us to soar when there is a crisis, to run when the challenges are many, and to walk faithfully in the day-by-day demands of life. It is much harder to walk in the ordinary pressures of life than to fly like the eagle in a time of crisis.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. The greatest heroes of faith are not always those who seem to be soaring; often it is they who are patiently grinding (working faithfully). As we wait on the Lord, He enables us not only to fly higher and *run* faster, but also to *walk* longer. Blessed are the grinders, for they eventually arrive at their destination!

5. What does God promise us during times of frailty and weakness? (Isaiah 40:30-31)

What Do You Think?

How do you seek strength from the Lord when you feel most weary?

Digging Deeper

Who has God placed in your life to whom you can be a source of encouragement in the upcoming week?

CONCLUSION

No Shortage Here!

When the impact of the coronavirus pandemic began to be felt during the spring of 2020, one result was shortages in various commodities. Issues with business closings and logistical limitations meant that goods were not as readily available as before. Stores simply ran out of certain items, even after limiting purchases per customer. Many consumers found themselves frustrated at being unable to purchase the things they wanted (or outright *needed*) with the convenience to which they were accustomed.

The lesson passage reminds us that the God we worship and serve has never been subject to any kind of weakness, attrition, or scarcity in His resources. The prophet's affirmations of God's incomparable sustaining power and of His promise to provide strength to those who grow tired or weary have no expiration date. God's power and strength are indeed available to us today! But here, a caution must be interjected concerning what the Chronicler records: "The Lord is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chronicles 15:2). The only restriction regarding our access to God's resources is our own sin and unwillingness to trust Him.

PRAYER

Father, we thank You for the record left to us by the prophet Isaiah! May we realize fully that, with the New Testament, we now have immeasurably more insight into Your nature than Isaiah did! Help us to take neither You nor Your Word for granted. Renew our strength as only You are able to do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

There is never any power shortage with God.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson is "**Faith in the Fiery Furnace**" and summarizes the consequence faced by three young Hebrew men who refused to bend their faith in God at the demands of a king. Study Daniel 3:1-30.