

Verses 28-29. Reproof for complaining. How different the Living God is from all those idols!

Q-4 How could they have heard? What is the cardinal truth they should realize?

Q-5 How might God accomplish the promise of verse 29? It helps us to remember Philippians 4:13 and to know that it is not of ourselves that we go out to do his great work.

Verse 30-31. The young are the most vigorous and capable for hard work or for enduring a hardship, but on their own the strongest couldn't make it.

The contrast is between what man can do and what God can accomplish through those who have their trust in Him.

Q-6 What does "waiting" on the Lord encompass?

What a beautiful majestic picture the prophet paints here. The eagle is often a metaphor for strength and vitality (Psalms 103:5). Rising swiftly and soaring into the sun with ease. Those in God will soar! They will run without tiring. We have the same idea repeated three times, those who faithfully commit themselves to the Lord and his word will find a great source of strength the world doesn't have.

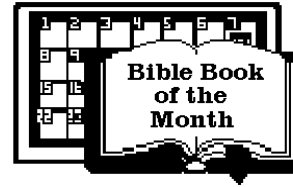
Some Lessons:

1. The greatness of the Living God is so incomparable that idolatry is simply ridiculous.
2. The Mighty God controls whether rulers will remain a while or be swept away.
3. The Everlasting God will give strength to those whose hope is in Him.

SUPPLEMENT QUESTIONS:

1. Considering predominate subject matter, into what three parts can the book of Isaiah be divided?
2. Isaiah is referred to as the _____ prophet?
3. Politically, what did Isaiah foresee happening to the nation of Judah?
4. What important discovery helped to refute liberal critics who tried to fragment the book of Isaiah and attribute late dates to parts of it?
5. Why did liberal critics try to reject the unity of Isaiah?
6. What are the four great themes of Isaiah's preaching?
7. That is the primary message.
8. What would a man too poor to have gods of gold do?
9. What are some pictures in this chapter of God's greatness?
10. What verses show that God will sweep away all rulers who oppose Him?
11. How does the prophet poetically describe the renewed strength of those who hope in God?

-- Windell Gann



ISAIAH

Lesson # 4

Text: Isaiah 40:18-31

“Visions of Comfort”

Introduction

The book of Isaiah is easily divided into three sections.

- Part 1 Visions of Coming Judgments - chs. 1-35
- Part 2 Historical Narrative concerning Hezekiah - chs. 36-39
- Part 3 Visions of Comfort - chs. 40-66

Throughout all sections Isaiah portrays the coming of the Messiah. Some of the favorite passages of this last section include: 40:3; 48:16; 53; 55:1; 57:15; 59:1-2; and 61:1-2.

Judah was to be spared the fate of Israel; that of falling into the hands of the Assyrians. She was however, to reap the reward of her iniquity at the hand of the Babylonians then be delivered from exile through the instrument of Cyrus, the Lord's Shepherd (44:28 - 45:25).

The "*Visions of Comfort*" section of Isaiah deals primarily with the blessings God has for his people after that great captivity. Many of these blessings reach down to the Messianic age and have their fulfillment in Christ and the new Kingdom he would establish. Many spiritual blessings God has for his people are clothed in the terms of the first covenant (with which they would be familiar) and in the metaphors of physical blessings ("*the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it*").

These clear prophecies of Isaiah of the Babylonian exile and return gave problems to skeptical critics of the last century. They denied the unity of Isaiah in order to avoid this predictive element. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls showing that the book of Isaiah existed as we now have it hundreds of years before the time of Christ has been, I think, the most remarkable archaeological discovery of this generation.

Four Themes of Isaiah's Preaching

Basically there are four great themes that run throughout the book:

- 1) The Jewish nation in its proud self-reliance and corruption;
- 2) The faithful remnant, the true people of God, considered as the object of the Lord's favor and protection;
- 3) The Babylonian exile and return stood as the most important intermediate point between Isaiah and the coming of the Messiah;
- 4) The advent of the Messiah, his person, character and the redemption he brings.

The Setting

In the section of Isaiah called "*Visions of Comfort*" is a wonderful passage about the greatness of God. The one God of heaven is contrasted with the multiple idols made and worshiped by men. The account of the fashioning of a graven image (Isaiah 40:18-31) eloquently reminds men that these gods are mere creatures of man's imagination.

Isaiah 40:18-31

18 To whom then will you liken God?
Or what likeness will you compare with Him?

19 *As for* the idol, a craftsman casts it,
A goldsmith plates it with gold,
And a silversmith *fashions* chains of silver.

20 He who is too impoverished for *such*
an offering

Selects a tree that does not rot;
He seeks out for himself a skillful craftsman

To prepare an idol that will not totter.

21 Do you not know? Have you not heard?

Has it not been declared to you from the beginning?

Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

22 It is He who sits above the vault of the earth,

And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers,
Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain

And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.

23 He *it is* who reduces rulers to nothing,
Who makes the judges of the earth

meaningless.

24 Scarcely have they been planted,
Scarcely have they been sown,
Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth,

But He merely blows on them, and they wither,
And the storm carries them away like stubble.

25 "To whom then will you liken Me
That I should be *his* equal?" says the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes on high
And see who has created these *stars*,
The One who leads forth their host by number,

He calls them all by name;
Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of *His* power
Not one of *them* is missing.

27 Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert,
O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD,

And the justice due me escapes the notice of my God"?

28 Do you not know? Have you not heard?

The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth
Does not become weary or tired.

His understanding is inscrutable.

29 He gives strength to the weary,
And to *him who* lacks might He increases power.

30 Though youths grow weary and tired,
And vigorous young men stumble badly,

31 Yet those who wait for the LORD

Will gain new strength;

They will mount up *with* wings like eagles,

They will run and not get tired,

They will walk and not become weary.
[NASV]

The Text

Verses 18-20. God who is the creator of heaven, earth and man cannot be compared to a god who is created by man! The rich make their gods out of gold and silver, and even the poor man will use the best wood he can afford.

Q-1 Thought Question: What is so foolish about an idol?

Verses 21-24. During the time of Manasseh, Hezekiah's son, the nation was given so wholly to idolatry. Yet they had been taught the truth by the ancients.

The real God doesn't just rule a valley, or a mountain, but the whole earth is his and the universe his dwelling place. The "curtain" refers to the fabric of a tent.

Q-2 What does verse 23 indicate about God?

Kings and rulers who oppose God will easily be subdued and come to naught.

Verses 25-26. This entire discourse (ch. 40) by Isaiah reveals the power of God in that he:

1. Measures the ocean in his hands (v. 12)
2. Measures out heaven with a short "tape-measure" (v. 12)
3. Measures out the dust of the earth (v. 12)
4. Weighs the mountains in a scale (v. 12b)
5. Cannot be instructed (v. 13-14)
6. Is incomparable (v. 15, 17, 18ff)
7. Names each star (omniscience) (v. 26)

Verse 27. The names Jacob and Israel are parallelism and used to refer to the whole of God's chosen people. They should not think God doesn't notice them or has forgotten them. The replies of verses 28-31 show God can and will remember them.

Q-3 Do we sometimes act as though we think God does not notice? Do we sometime think He doesn't care?