

VII. SALVATION THROUGH GOD'S SERVANT  
CHAPTERS 40 - 53

A. PURPOSE OF THE LORD'S SERVANT  
CHAPTERS 40 - 43

1. COMFORT, CHAPTER 40

a. PREPARE FOR THE COMING OF THE LORD

TEXT: 40:1-11

- 1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.
- 2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem; and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she hath received of Jehovah's hand double for all her sins.
- 3 The voice of one that crieth, Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of Jehovah; make level in the desert a highway for our God.
- 4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the uneven shall be made level, and the rough places a plain:
- 5 and the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken it.
- 6 The voice of one saying, Cry. And one said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field:
- 7 the grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the breath of Jehovah bloweth upon it; surely the people is grass.
- 8 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand forever.
- 9 O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up on a high mountain; O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold, your God!
- 10 Behold, the Lord Jehovah will come as a mighty one, and his arm will rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.
- 11 He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the

lambs in his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and will gently lead those that have their young.

### QUERIES

- a. Who is to do the comforting in verses 1 - 27?
- b. Why cry, "All flesh is grass"?
- c. When is God going to feed his flock like a shepherd?

### PARAPHRASE

Encourage and strengthen my people says your God. Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call out to her that her warfare and her struggle is fulfilled—it is over; her iniquity is paid for; God's wrath is abundantly satisfied. Hark, a voice crying! In the wilderness prepare a way for Jehovah; make smooth and level in the desert a highway for our God. Every dark valley will have to be filled in and raised up and every mountain and hill scraped off and lowered. Everything that is uneven must be made level, and the rough places must be smoothed out like a plain. When the way is prepared then the glory of the Lord will be made manifest and all the human race will have His glory shown to them together. The Lord has promised this and it shall certainly come to pass. Hark, a second voice saying, Cry! And I said, What shall I cry? Cry out that all the human race is frail like grass and the flowers of the field. When the breath of God blows upon the grass in the hot, dry winds of summer, the grass withers and the flowers fade. That is just how fragile man is. He and grass and flowers wither and fade, but the word of our God stands forever.

O Zion, bringer of good news, get yourself up on a high mountain where you can really cry the good news to Jerusalem, as a bringer of good news and shout with a strong voice. Do not be afraid to cry loudly to all the cities of Judah, Behold, your God! Behold indeed! For the Lord Jehovah is coming like

a strong and powerful ruler and His arm will rule for Him. He is bringing His rewards and compensations with Him for His people. He is going to provide food for His people like a shepherd; He is going to provide safety and protection for His people like a shepherd; He is going to show compassion and gentleness to all those who need help.

### COMMENTS

v. 1-2 **STRENGTHEN:** There is definitely a division of Isaiah's book at chapter 40. This, however, does not mean the book has two different authors any more than there were two different authors for the Pentateuch (first five books of the O.T.). Moses, author of the Pentateuch, had different purposes in mind for his books and so used a different style. Isaiah has a different purpose in mind for the last half of his book and so uses a different style. For evidence of one authorship of Isaiah see Special Study, "Seventeen Arguments That The Book of Isaiah Was Written By One Author," pages 1-4. Isaiah's main purpose in chapters 1-39 was to preach against the sin of Israel and predict judgment. His main purpose in chapters 40-66 is to preach of peace and predict the nature of the future Israel of God, the Church. Edward J. Young calls chapters 40-66, "The Salvation and Future Blessing of The True Israel of God." These latter chapters are intensely Messianic! Isaiah 40:3-4; 40:6-8; 53:1-12; 55:1-3; 61:1-2 are specifically fulfilled in the New Testament. We have emphasized the Messianic nature of chapters 40-66 in our outline (see also the chart, Vol. I, pgs. 64-65).

These first two verses of chapter 40 form a prologue for the rest of the entire book. Some have outlined chapters 40-66 in a threefold division to correspond to the prologue thusly:

1. 40:1—48:22 — "her warfare is ended."
2. 49:1—57:21 — "her iniquity is pardoned."
3. 58:1—66:24 — "she hath received . . . double for all her sins."

*Nakhamu* is the Hebrew word translated *comfort*. It is also translated *repent* in many places in the O.T. The authors of the Septuagint (Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament) used the Greek word *parakaleo* which is the word *Paraclete* or *Comforter* comes from in John's Gospel. In Greek it means "one called alongside to help, aid or strengthen." The command in verse one is for someone to "strengthen, help or aid" God's people.

Who is to do this "strengthening"? It is all the prophets from Isaiah to the Messiah. It is probably correct to say that the initial comforting was for the Israel of Isaiah's day or the Israel of the captivities (although the captivity in Babylon has not yet occurred). However, the ultimate target is the Messianic Israel. The fulfillment is for the days of John the Baptist and the Messiah. The true Israel's warfare was not ended and her iniquity pardoned until accomplished in Christ (cf. Lk. 1:67-79) and John the Baptist was born especially to announce this. In 40:1-11 there are two texts specifically quoted in the New Testament as finding their fulfillment there (40:3-4 and 40:6-8). The prophets from Isaiah to Malachi must strengthen Israel that those who believe may prepare a remnant through which the Incarnate Son may come and establish His kingdom. John the Baptist was the one who was "more than a prophet" (Mt. 11:9), the one whose crying in the wilderness signaled the fulfillment of "the law and the prophets" (Mt. 11:13). The Messiah-Servant was the one to whom this prophecy pointed. (See Isa. 49:13.)

The Hebrew phrase *dabberu 'al—lev* translated "speak ye comfortably" or "speak tenderly" means literally, "speak upon the heart." It is a phrase meaning to "win someone over" in Gen. 34:3 and Judges 19:3. In Gen. 50:21 Joseph "spoke upon the heart" of his brothers to build their confidence in his kind intentions toward them. This is the manner in which the strengthening is to be done. The comforting is not something to be done superficially—it is to be lodged in the heart of the people.

What is to be planted on Jerusalem's heart is that her warfare

is ended, her iniquity is pardoned and she has received double from Jehovah for all her sins. This cannot have the return from the Babylonian captivity for its essential goal for the nation of Israel enjoyed only a brief respite from conflict and struggle after their restoration. Daniel predicts 490 years of "trouble" to follow the restoration from captivity in minute detail (see our commentary on *Daniel*, College Press). Daniel also predicts that Israel's iniquity will not be pardoned until the end of those 490 years (Dan. 9:24-27 in our commentary). So, the comforting or strengthening of Jerusalem is predicted on the promise of cessation of warfare and pardoning of iniquity in the great Messianic era of the future. That era will be announced by "The Voice" who was none other than John the Baptist. Jerusalem "received of Jehovah's hand double for all her sins." This may mean either her punishment was abundant or her blessing was abundant. In either case, once again, it can find its ultimate fulfillment only in the Messiah (cf. Isa. 53:1-2 for abundant punishment and Isa. 61:1-11 for abundant blessing—both in the Messiah).

v. 3-8 STRAIGHTEN: The Hebrew construction is interesting. Literally it is *qol qorea*, "voice, one crying." The first three gospel writers all confirm this found its fulfillment in John the Baptist (Mt. 3:3; Mk. 1:2-3; Lk. 3:4-6).

Certainly, all the prophets from Isaiah to Malachi were commissioned by this command to "prepare" the way for the coming of the Lord. Unquestionably, a faithful remnant needed to be continually "prepared" so that new generations of a messianic nucleus might be preserved through the centuries from Isaiah to Christ. But it was John the Baptist who had the climactic job of preparing an *immediate* nucleus for the coming of God in the flesh—Jesus Christ. It was John the Baptist who first immersed men and women in water for repentance unto the remission of sins (Mt. 3:1-2; Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:1-3). It was the Immerser who pointed some of his principal disciples to Jesus (Jn. 1:29-51) and these men became apostles—evangelists and missionaries of the Messianic kingdom, the church. Indeed, even the Lord Himself said of John the Immerser,

“. . . among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist,” (Mt. 11:11).

The Hebrew word *ba'aerabah* means “in the desert.” It is the same word from which we have *Arabia*. The people are in the “wilderness” and God is going to come to them. They must prepare Him a way. The “desert” or “wilderness” was not necessarily an endless, flat sea of sand as we think of a desert today. A wilderness or desert could be any type of terrain which was uninhabited by people. The river banks of the Jordan, cluttered with reeds, brush and rocks was a wilderness. The barren mountains of southern Judea were a wilderness (“desert”). These wildernesses with their brush, mountains, valleys, rocks, and wild animals presented formidable obstacles to travel in ancient times. When kings and potentates wished to journey and it involved traversing such an unlikely territory, they sent great companies of slaves and workers on ahead of them to fill in valleys and lower hills and generally prepare a safe and easy pathway for them to travel. The desert is a figure of the obstacles and impediments that have kept God from His people. It was their sinful rebellion (Isa. 59:1-3) as depicted in the first 39 chapters that was keeping God from His people. This rebellious attitude in the majority will intensify in the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel until God leaves them (Ezek. 10:18; 11:23). God wants to come to them in Person—Incarnate—in the flesh. He wants to reveal His glory to all mankind (v. 5). And when they have a remnant fully prepared—when some believe Him enough to remove all obstacles into their hearts—when some are willing to obey Him completely (like Mary, mother of Jesus), then He will come! Isaiah is emphatically the missionary book of the Old Testament. He begins his prophecy (2:2-3) by stating that “all the nations” shall flow to Zion. He ends it by stating that “all flesh” shall come to worship before the Lord (66:23). One has only to take a concordance and look for “peoples” and “nations” in Isaiah to observe how often the prophet predicts that people from all nations will eventually become citizens of the Messianic kingdom of God.

A Voice is saying, Cry out. The Voice of verse six is evidently the Lord calling upon His messengers to add more exhortation to the message of "strengthening." First, there is the exhortation to "prepare a way" for the Lord to come. The N.T. applies this to John the Baptist as the one who would prepare the hearts of people to receive the Messiah (Lk. 1:16-17). Further preparation to receive God is proclaiming the message that "all flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field": and the N.T. applies this to man's inability to save himself, the redemption that is in Christ, and man's access to that redemption through obedience to the gospel (I Pet. 1:13-24). Now the prophets from Isaiah to Malachi were charged to preach man's frailty and his inability to save himself, and the redemption of God provided by grace in some future era. And all their contemporaries who believed this and trusted in Jehovah were straightened out in their view of man and God. But only the substitutionary death of Christ and His resurrection (the gospel) validated once and for all man's lostness and God's faithfulness. Only the gospel straightens man out so God can come to him. Only the gospel demonstrated ultimately that the word of God shall stand forever. The New Testament is the fulfillment of the entire "strengthening" half of Isaiah's prophecy (ch. 40-66)!

v. 9-11 SURRENDER: The construction of the Hebrew in verse nine does not necessitate the "tidings" to be told "to" Zion. Literally translated the verse would read, "So, a mountain high go you to, you bringer of good tidings, Zion." We have indicated this in our paraphrase. In other words, Zion is the bringer of good tidings—not the one to whom good tidings are brought. Zion and Jerusalem are personified as proclaimers of good news. Isaiah predicted earlier that the law and the word of the Lord would "go forth" out of Zion and Jerusalem (Isa. 2:3). The good tidings are to be proclaimed *koakh*, powerfully, and, *tiyraaiy*, fearlessly.

What is Zion to proclaim? Behold! God is coming in mightiness! *Adonai-Yaweh*, the Lord-Jehovah is coming. *Zeroau*, arm, usually symbolizes a characteristic—power. It may also

symbolize the Messiah who came as God's "Arm" to rule (cf. Isa. 51:4-5; 52:7-10; 53:1; Luke 1:51). Isaiah 52:7-10 also predicts the "good tidings" by which the covenant people are to be "comforted" involving the Lord "baring His holy arm before the eyes of all the nations." It is apparent that "arm" here and in 52:7-10 refers to the Messiah.

There could hardly be a better climax to this great Messianic prologue of the "comfort" section in Isaiah's book than verse 11. The "shepherd" can be none other than Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. The Messiah-shepherd is one of the greatest concepts of Old Testament prophecy (cf. Ezek. 34:20-34; Micah 5:1-4; Zech. 11:7-14; 13:7, etc.). Jesus called Himself, The Good Shepherd (Lk. 15:3-7; Jn. 10:1-30) and His audience as a "flock" that needed shepherding (Mt. 9:36-38; Jn. 10:1-30).

If Isaiah and those prophets who come after him are to prepare mankind for the coming of the Lord, they must get men to prepare their wicked, desert-like hearts like a smooth, straight highway; they must straighten out their evaluation of man's ability to save himself and decide that man is capable of abiding forever only if he abides in the eternal word of God; they must surrender to the good tidings that God is going to send His "Arm"—the tender, Good Shepherd—to rule for Him.

Isaiah was writing of the glorious future for the benefit of the people of his day. Isaiah's task was to preserve a remnant of faithful Israelites who would be able to endure the disintegration of their nation, go into captivity and return to carry on the Messianic destiny. This remnant was to pass on their faith in the prophetic promises that this destiny would be preserved by God and ultimately fulfilled—if not in their lives, in some glorious era to come. There may be an initial reference in this prologue to the restoration of the Jews to Palestine in the days of Ezra, Zerubbabel and Nehemiah.

But, unquestionably, the ultimate focus of the great redemption promised here—the coming of God to His people who are prepared—is to the Messiah and His kingdom—the



church. We have inspired documentation in the New Testament that this is so!

### QUIZ

1. Give as many arguments as you can that Isaiah is the author of the entire book by his name.
2. What does the word "comfort" mean?
3. Why cannot the ending of warfare, etc., be applied to the Israel returned from Babylonian captivity?
4. Who is the "voice" that was to cry, "Prepare"?
5. What does the figure of speech, "make level in the desert a highway" refer to?
6. How much emphasis does Isaiah place on a missionary task?
7. What do men need to straighten out about "all flesh"?
8. What message is Zion to proclaim as good tidings?
9. What proof do we have that these eleven verses are Messianic?

### b. PERCEIVE THE NATURE OF THE LORD

TEXT: 40:12-26

- 12 Who hath measured the water 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?
- 13 Who hath directed the Spirit of Jehovah, or being his counsellor hath taught him?
- 14 With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding?
- 15 Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are accounted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.
- 16 And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof

- sufficient for a burnt-offering.
- 17 All the nations are as nothing before him; they are accounted by him as less than nothing, and vanity.
  - 18 To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?
  - 19 The image, a workman hath cast it, and the goldsmith overlayeth it with gold, and casteth for it silver chains.
  - 20 He that is too impoverished for such an oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a skilful workman to set up a graven image, that shall not be moved.
  - 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 above the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out of the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in;
  - 23 that bringeth princes to nothing; that maketh the judges of the earth as vanity.
  - 24 Yea, they have not been planted; yea, they have not been sown; yea, their stock hath not taken root in the earth: moreover he bloweth upon them, and they wither, and the whirlwind taketh them away as stubble.
  - 25 To whom then will ye liken me, that I should be equal to him? saith the Holy One.
  - 26 Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath created these, that bringeth out their host by number; he calleth them all by name; by the greatness of his might, and for that he is strong in power, not one is lacking.

### QUERIES

- a. What is meant by the mountains being "weighed"?
- b. What is the "circle of the earth"?
- c. What does God call "by name"?

## PARAPHRASE

Who else has measured all the oceans, lakes and rivers in the infinite palm of His hand and measured off the heavens with His yardstick? Who else is able to measure the land of the earth in its proper one-third portion? Who else is able to weigh accurately the mountains and hills in the proportion needed upon the earth? Who regulated the Spirit of the Lord with rules or directions according to which all this was to be done? With whom did He consult? Who instructed Him how to create all this and who taught Him what to do with it? Who gave Him this omniscient understanding? Indeed, the great masses of people over whom the Lord rules are no more burden to Him than a drop in a bucket is a burden to the man who carries it and no more than a tiny speck of dust would tip the balance of a scale. Indeed, the islands and continents may be carried by Him as if they were an infinitesimal atom. All the wood of Lebanon's forests is not enough to provide a sacrificial fire, nor all Lebanon's animals enough to provide a sacrifice sufficient to His majesty. Compared to His greatness, the masses of humanity and the power of man's empires are as nothing—as if they did not even exist.

To whom then will you compare God? Who or what resembles Him? Will you be so foolish as to liken God to one of your man-made images? These are made by men, in the likeness of man, from earthen metals and with man-made ornamentations. Even your poor people, who cannot afford gold and silver, will not be outdone in foolishness. They select a tree they think will not rot and hire skilled artisans to carve them an idol they think will be permanent. Why do you continually refuse to acknowledge who the real God is? Why do you continually refuse to listen to His prophets tell you who the real God is? It is not because you have not had the truth about God preached to you, is it? It is not because you have not been able to understand what His creative works say about Him, is it? What you have heard and what you have seen should have taught you that it is Jehovah who is enthroned upon the zenith of the earth

and upholds His creation by His almighty power. Men and their idols are as weak and powerless as grasshoppers when compared to Him. He stretches out the heavens as easily as man would a curtain and makes a tent of all the heavens for His own dwelling place. He is the One who deposes princely rulers from their thrones, and brings down high and mighty human judges to nothingness. In fact, many of these pretended potentates scarcely come to power before Jehovah sees fit to remove them. Rulers are one moment upon the throne; the next they are gone like stubble in a whirlwind.

So, there is no one to whom you may compare Me, is there? There is nothing that is equal to Me, is there? Look up into the heavens! Understand that Jehovah is Creator of all the universe. He brought every single star into being and knows exactly how many stars there are. He has named every one of them and calls the roll like a military commander. Because of His great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

### COMMENTS

v. 12-17 SOVEREIGN CREATOR: If God's covenant people are to be strengthened (comforted) in order to fulfill their messianic destiny they must prepare themselves to receive God's coming to them in the flesh. This is announced in 40:1-11. But they are not prepared. They have made for themselves gods of wood and metal. They do not know the God who speaks to them through the prophets because they have rejected His word for that of the "mediums and the wizards" (Isa. 8:19). They *think* they know him. But they have compared Him to their idols and pronounced Him impotent, unable to carry out His promises (cf. Isa. 5:18-20; 29:15-16; 48:1-5; Jer. 17:15, etc.). In fact, Isaiah's contemporaries have already told him *they do not want to know* the Holy One of Israel! (Isa. 30:9-11).

It is interesting that Isaiah, attempting to prepare the people for the messianic destiny, does not spend his time in elaborate

plans for organization, entertainment, chicken-dinners, welfare programs, singing, or emotion-packed stories. He preached a logical, reasonable sermon on the nature and character of God. Mankind is not going to be saved by human programs but by *perceiving* the Person of God (see Special Study, "The Faith Once Delivered For All Time," *Isaiah, Vol. II*, pg. 250-257, College Press).

Who is the God whose coming the prophet has predicted? He is the Sovereign Creator. He has created the earth and its physical features in perfect proportion necessary to maintain the intricate balance of life. The fundamental principle of geophysics known as *isostasy* ("equal weights") is announced in verse 12. The waters of the earth's surface, the land-mass and the atmosphere were created with the preciseness necessary to cause the proper gravitational and hydrological functions to sustain life on this planet. The Hebrew word *shalish* is translated *measure* referring to "the dust of the earth . . ." and means literally *a third*. The surface of the earth consists of land and water. Land, the solid part, covers about 57,584,000 square miles, or about three tenths ( $\frac{1}{3}$ ) of the earth's surface! Amazing! How did Isaiah know that "the dust of the earth" was *a third* 2700 years ago? The only accounting for it is that it was divinely revealed to him!

The God who is coming is not only omnipotent, He is omniscient. The verb translated *directed* in verse 13 is the Hebrew *tikken* and may also be translated *measured*. He who has measured the creation cannot be measured by the creation. He is unmeasurable and unsearchable (cf. Job 5:9; Psa. 145:3; Isa. 55:8-9; Rom. 11:33).

Creation required infinite, supernatural knowledge. Look wherever he will—into the vastness of outer space or into the minuteness of biological space or into the labyrinthine space of human personality—man reaches limits to his knowledge. But God knows. This was demonstrated once for all in Jesus Christ who calmed the seas, raised the dead, cast out demons, read the minds of His disciples and enemies, and predicted the future behavior of men and women. God knows—but no

one taught God this knowledge, for no creature possesses such knowledge.

How did Isaiah come to such a lofty concept of God? Not by human speculation. One has only to read ancient literature of the Chaldeans, Persians, Greeks and Romans to understand that the great thinkers of history never reached such sublime heights as these in their speculations about origins and gods. Isaiah's knowledge of God came by revelation (Isa. 64:4; I Cor. 2:1-13).

Not only is Jehovah infinitely supreme to individuals, He is sovereign to and independent of nations. Powerful world empires consolidate human wisdom, human power and natural resources, and seem to be able to exercise and execute the will of man in opposition to the will of God. World empires appear at times to have the power to usurp the sovereignty of God upon the earth. But compared to the power and wisdom of God they are as infinitesimal as a "drop in a bucket." It is not that God has no concern for the nations. The Bible is His love letter to the world. But as far as their opposition to the fulfilling of His purposes, it is "less than nothing—vanity." His Being and His Sovereignty is not dependent upon them. They do not create Him—He creates them. He does not need them. If all creation were a temple, Lebanon an altar, its lordly woods the fire-wood, and its countless beasts the sacrifice, it would not be an offering sufficient to make Jehovah dependent upon man. If God were hungry He would not need to depend upon man (Psa. 50:3-15). If He needed a house He would not need to depend upon man (Isa. 66:1-2).

Perhaps Christians today need this sermon of Isaiah! Perhaps we sometimes flirt with the same arrogance of the Jews of Isaiah's day—that God could not do without us! God is not dependent upon our goodness, our offerings, our wisdom, our buildings. It is we who need His goodness. We need to make offerings to Him. The Jews were not ready for God to come to them until they perceived this. No man is ready to receive God, His Son or His Spirit, until he perceives the same thing.

v. 18-20 STUPID CREATURES: Since God is infinitely powerful,

infinitely wise and unsearchable, it is sheer stupidity for the creature to attempt, in his finite limitations, to carve a likeness in wood or stone and think he has reproduced the totality of God. It is also sheer stupidity for men to devise political, ethical and philosophical systems and assume they have reproduced the totality of God. Man is limited to the experienced. God is beyond the experienced. The only possibility of man reaching beyond the experienced is that the Unexperienceable One shall reveal Himself in man's experience. This He did in Jesus Christ. God can create man in His image—but man cannot create God in his image. Edward J. Young says it succinctly, "Isaiah's question (v. 18) brings us to the heart of genuine theism. There can be no comparison between the living, eternal God ('*el*) and any man, for man is but a creature. Man is limited, finite, temporal; God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in all His attributes and perfections. In our thinking about God the infinite distance between God and the creature must ever be kept in mind. To break down this distinction is to fall into the sin of idolatry."

The Hebrew word *pesel* is translated *image* or *graven image* and is the thing Israel was forbidden to have in the Decalogue (Ex. 20:4). Moses was warned that God cannot be represented by any "form" (Deut. 4:12-24). Men seem to have an insatiable desire to "see" some "form" of God (Jn. 14:8-11), yet no one has ever "seen" Him (Jn. 1:18; 6:46; Col. 1:15; I Tim. 1:17; 6:16; Mt. 11:27; I Jn. 4:20). Christians are to be "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29; II Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10), but this does not mean the flesh and blood body of Jesus (cf. I Cor. 15:49-50). It is therefore a dangerous practice to make statues and pictures of Jesus and depend upon them for our concept of the Son of God (besides the fact no one actually knows today the precise physical features of Jesus). It is the thinking and acting of Jesus we are to adore and recreate in us—not His human body. Perhaps this is why God saw fit to obliterate from history any exact description of Jesus. Perhaps this is why God has seen fit to erase any precise location of Jesus' birth, home, etc., lest men be more tempted than they

are to worship things and places rather than the Person.

The silliness of attempting to fashion a Creator out of that which is created is best exemplified by Isaiah 44:9-20. There the idol-maker cuts down a tree and with half he builds a fire and cooks his food and with the other half he makes himself a god. How ridiculous! It is a fundamental principle of life that men take on the character of that which they worship (Psa. 115:3-8; Hosea 9:10; Rom. 1:18-32). Idolatry produces stupidity, degradation and death. Carving images of men and animals from wood and stone to adore and worship is not the only form of idolatry. Disobedience and rebellion against God's commands (I Sam. 15:23) and covetousness (Col. 3:5) are both forms of idolatry.

Even the poor people of Isaiah's day refused to be deprived of indulging in idolatry. They could not afford gold and silver so they had a craftsman carve them an idol from hard wood. Making of idols was taken seriously by those who worshipped them. Only the best craftsmen fashioned them lest the production be an unworthy representation of the god or goddess. They must be made substantially of enduring materials. The larger they were and the longer lasting, the more prestige and power the idols supposedly retained.

v. 21-26 **SENSIBLE CONSIDERATION:** There are two sources from which these stupid people should have perceived the sovereignty of Jehovah and prepared for His coming—the *word* of God and the *world* of God. Isaiah's questions are rhetorical. Only one answer is possible—yes! Over and over, through His spokesmen (the patriarchs and the prophets), the existence and nature of the Creator was proclaimed to Israel. Day by day Israel could see the Creator in nature and providence. Have they heard? have they known? Yes! There is no excuse for their stupidity. They could not plead ignorance as the cause for their idolatry. Their sin is deliberate and in spite of their knowledge (see Special Study, "Unbelief is Deliberate," *Isaiah Vol. II*, pg. 99, College Press).

The prophet implores his people to come back to a sensible consideration of the sovereignty of Jehovah based on more



evidence from creation and history. One thing is certain from man's experience—man is not supernatural and omnipotent. Compared to the eternal, sovereign Jehovah, who sits enthroned upon the "circle" (zenith) of the earth, men are like grasshoppers. Get all the millions and millions of grasshoppers together and they cannot hold the world in its course. All the men of the world are like that. Some interpreters see in the word *hkoog* ("circle") an indication that ancient people knew the world was round. Others think it merely means the highest part of the horizon or the zenith. God is pictured as sitting over the highest part of the earth to watch over His creation. The emphasis of the context is on comparing the power of God and the weakness of man. God also stretched out the heavens as effortlessly and quickly as a man in Isaiah's day would stretch out a curtain. These vast, endless, majestic heavens are His dwelling place. Light travels at approximately 186,000 miles per second. The estimated distance to the extent of the *known* universe is 6,000,000 light years! Multiply the number of seconds in a year by six million and you get the estimate of the *known* universe. But there are areas beyond that!

Proud, haughty, presumptuous human potentates and rulers strut through history pretending they rule the earth. But it is Jehovah who gives and takes away (cf. Dan. 2:20-23; Jer. 27:5-11; Isa. 45:1-7). God plants and sows and lets them take root only as long as He wishes. Some men scarcely are sown and hardly take root before He takes them away like the whirlwind takes chaff away. All flesh is like grass (I Pet. 1:24-25). Our years are "soon gone and we fly away" (cf. Psa. 90:9-10; Mt. 6:27; Jas. 4:13-17), but God is forever.

The prophet repeats his challenge. There is no being to whom one may liken Jehovah. No one in all His creation is His equal. He is the Incomparable One. He has created the stars and planets. He knows how many there are and has a name for each of them. Man cannot even count the stars, let alone create one. Someone has pointed out that while God formed other animals to look downwards for pasture and prey, he made man alone erect, and told him to look at what may be

regarded as his own habitation, the starry heavens. When man seriously contemplates the heavens he is pointed to the Creator (Psa. 19:1-6). Charles A. Lindbergh was 25 years old when he took off from Roosevelt Field, New York, at 7:52 a.m. on May 20, 1927. After more than 3600 miles and 33½ hours, he landed at Le Bourget Field near Paris, France. When he had flown his trusted plane, "Spirit of St. Louis," midway on its transatlantic flight he began to think of the smallness of man and the deficiency of his devices, and the greatness and marvels of God's universe. He mused, "It's hard to be an agnostic here in the 'Spirit of St. Louis' when so aware of the frailty of man's devices. If one dies, all God's creation goes on existing in a plan so perfectly balanced, so wondrously simple and yet so incredibly complex that it is beyond our comprehension. There's the infinite detail, and man's consciousness of it all—a world audience to what, if not to God."

### QUIZ

1. Why must Isaiah's people know about the nature of God?
2. How does Isaiah proceed to bring the people to this knowledge?
3. What is interesting about Isaiah's statement about the dust of the earth having been measured by God?
4. How did Isaiah come to such a lofty concept of God?
5. What can Christians learn from this emphasis on the nature of God?
6. Why is making graven images stupid?
7. What other forms of idolatry are there?
8. Why should the contemplation of the heavens point man to God?

## c. PERSEVERE IN WAITING FOR THE LORD

TEXT: 40:27-31

- 27 Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from Jehovah, and the justice due to me is passed away from my God?
- 28 Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard? The everlasting God, Jehovah, 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 him that hath 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 for Jehovah shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.

## QUERIES

- a. Why did Israel have such an attitude toward Jehovah?
- b. When would Jerusalem come to "renew their strength"?

## PARAPHRASE

O Jacob, O Israel, how can you say, The difficult way I must travel is hidden from Jehovah, and God does not notice my trouble and take up my cause and defend my rights? You certainly have had plenty of opportunity to know this is not true of Jehovah, haven't you? You have certainly heard the truth about Jehovah, haven't you? Jehovah is the God of eternity. He was before creation and He is the Creator. He is eternal in all His attributes and eternally powerful and strong and vigilant. He never tires or grows weary. Finite men will not

understand this eternity because it is impossible for men to fully comprehend the infinite. There is abundant evidence of God's eternal power so men may believe even if they cannot understand it. Jehovah is the One who gives power and strength to everyone else! All men eventually grow weak and exhaust their strength, even the young, virile athletic-type men tire and grow weary. But those who believe in Jehovah will be given fresh strength, will rise up from their difficulties as if they were eagles soaring upward to the heavens, will run upon their course of life as steadily as a racer who never tires or as one who walks for miles and miles and never grows weary. Jehovah will give those who believe in Him a measure of the divine strength that He Himself has.

### COMMENTS

v. 27-28 POWER IN JEHOVAH: If the people of the Lord (in this case Israel) are to receive the comfort He offers through the promised Servant, they must prepare, perceive and persevere. The people have, either unconsciously or deliberately, mentally reduced Jehovah to the level of their idol-gods. The influence of Baalism in Judah from the days of Isaiah to the captivity grew until the people practically called Jehovah Baal, and Baal Jehovah (cf. Isa. 66:17; Jer. 2:8; 12:16; 23:13; 23:27; Hosea 9:10; 13:1-2). When one reduces his concept of God to a wooden statue or a human philosophical system, one cannot help feeling his god is powerless to help him—for his god is nothing more than a creation of his own futility and frustration! Isaiah's people, however, had abundant teaching and evidence that Jehovah was eternal (see comments 40:21, etc.). Their complaint that Jehovah was unconcerned or unaware of their struggles was inexcusable. What their problems were at this time we are not told. It may refer to the political and military pressures being felt by the whole world as a result of the life-and-death struggle between the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Judah had become a political "pawn" on the

geographical chess-board of these two great world empires. So Judah was complaining that Jehovah was either incapable of protecting her rights (Heb. *mishepatyi*; *cause*) or impervious to her situation.

Isaiah reminds the people that historically they have had prophet after prophet teach them of Jehovah's omnipotence and omniscience. Generation after generation they have had demonstrations of His constant concern for them and His repeated miraculous deliverances. Their fault was that of so many of us—letting circumstances overwhelm us. Peter would have walked on water—until he saw the waves (Lk. 14:22-33). The people of Judah had another problem—they could not understand eternity, deity, supernaturalness. They understood (they thought) only the natural, experienceable. Like so many today, what cannot be understood or reduced to the experienceable cannot be believed. Isaiah confirms that Jehovah, being Eternal Creator, is fully understood by no human being. But that does not keep man from believing when he has sufficient evidence to believe. Man does not fully understand all the physical and material things he knows about (gravity, nuclear physics, tornados, etc.), but he forms certain fundamental beliefs from what evidence he does have and functions toward a purpose on that basis.

v. 29-31 PARTICIPATION BY FAITH: God is the source of all strength, physical and spiritual. But it is the spiritual, moral strength that is most important. God is able to fashion any kind of physical body He wishes (I Cor. 15:35-58). But the glorified, immortal body will house only a demon if the spiritual is not reborn, renewed. That renewal, though supplied by God, is participated in only by faith on the part of man.

The promise of renewal here then looks forward to the coming of the Messiah (the "consolation of Israel") (cf. Lk. 1:51-55; 2:25-32, etc.). The Hebrew word *kivvah* is translated *wait* but also means *trust*, *hope*. It seems paradoxical but the one who depends upon the Lord is the one who is strong (cf. II Cor. 12:9-10; Eph. 3:16; Col. 1:11; Phil. 4:13; II Tim. 4:17; I Pet. 5:10, etc.). The most perfect specimen of human strength

sooner or later exhausts his human resources. But the man who waits upon the Lord is strong and unmovable even when the physical body begins to deteriorate. Of course, the Lord is calling upon the people of Judah to trust Him presently in the midst of the circumstances which have caused them to doubt. They must believe now that He will fulfill what He has promised. Although they cannot understand His ways He is cognizant of their way and will supply spiritual and moral strength to them if they will participate by faith. He will not take away their circumstances, necessarily, but will supply them the spiritual strength to conquer their difficulties.

### QUIZ

1. Why did the people think Jehovah was unconcerned with their problems?
2. Did they have a right to such an attitude?
3. What was really their problem?
4. When was the promise of renewed strength to be ultimately fulfilled?
5. What is another meaning of "wait for Jehovah"?

## 2. CONQUEST, CHAPTER 41

### a. GENTILES SILENCED

TEXT: 41:1-7

1. Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the peoples renew their strength; let them come near; then let them speak; let us come near together to judgment.
2. Who hath raised up one from the east, whom he calleth in righteousness to his foot? he giveth nations before him, and maketh him rule over kings; he giveth them as the dust to his sword, as the driven stubble to his bow.