

International Bible Lessons Commentary
Isaiah 40:21-31

New Revised Standard Version

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, September 18, 2016

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, September 18, 2016**, is from **Isaiah 40:21-31**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the **International Bible Lesson Forum**.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Isaiah 40:21-31

(Isaiah 40:21) Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

When Isaiah asked these questions, he expected a “Yes” answer. His people had no excuse for not knowing and not having heard about the true God. They had the Books of Moses, the Psalms, the Proverbs, and perhaps other Bible books that declared in great detail the nature and character of God as the Creator and Ruler over all. Even if they had not heard about God from the Scriptures, they had no excuses for not knowing God — as Paul explained in Romans chapter 1.

(Isaiah 40:22) It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in;

Isaiah wrote poetically; however, he may have been inspired to write that the earth was round, “a circle” (if not a globe). According to Job, “He spreads out the northern skies over empty space; he suspends the earth over nothing” Job 26:7). God is the King of creation, and when we think of the great (infinite) distance between God and ourselves we are as small as grasshoppers are to us. Yet, God cares for and thinks of each one of us personally, and even sent Jesus Christ to live and die for us. God is far

greater than any earthly king for He spreads out the heavens like a camper would a tent for shelter, and God gives us space to “live and move and have our being” (Acts 28:17). “Heavens” may mean our own atmosphere and the vast universe beyond that includes stars and galaxies in addition to the dwelling place of God and the angels. Amazingly, before the invention of the telescope, God revealed through the Bible that He had created heavens beyond our own immediate atmosphere or heaven.

(Isaiah 40:23) who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.

When we think of world leaders and those who aspire to places of leadership all the world over, whether they are honorable or dishonorable, God the King is greater than all of them put together. As a matter of fact, their lives are in God’s hands. When they have ruled immorally and unjustly for too long, God will bring them to nothing. In similar fashion, as Isaiah learned, God can extend the life and reign of rulers who honor Him (see especially 2 Kings 20:1-6). God has even saved some rulers from assassination.

(Isaiah 40:24) Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

Think of the time and expense that some have given to rule over the earth; in a split second the Great King of the universe can remove them from the earth. In spite of the giant egos of some leaders and those who want to be leaders, those who are immoral and unjust are nothing more than “chaff”— “waste material separated from a seed after a harvest” and fit were nothing but to be blown away.

(Isaiah 40:25) To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

When we read the Old Testament, there is no idol that is equal to God, and God wins every contest against every idol and their priests, just as Elijah called down fire from heaven: “Elijah answered the captain, ‘If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!’ Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men” (2 Kings 1:10). Unlike false gods and the practices of those who worship them, God is morally pure or holy. If we compare the God of the Bible to the idols and false gods of today, the God of the Bible and the life and ministry of Jesus the Son of God remains far superior to any of them in holiness, power, justice and mercy.

(Isaiah 40:26) Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name;

because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing.

Isaiah encourages us to look up at the stars and remember that God created the heavenly host. Speaking poetically, Isaiah says that the stars come out and shine when God calls them by name and brings them out in great numbers on a starry night. Many of God's attributes are listed in this verse. Isaiah's words emphasize the strength and power of God who as the Creator of all will comfort us personally and meet our individual needs, by name, just as every star has a name and God calls them to shine by name. Though we cannot see and number all of them with our naked eyes (and astronomers seem to find new stars often through developing technologies that make atheism a giant leap of disbelief in spite of all the evidence), God knows the number of the stars in the heavens and keeps count whenever He creates a new star.

(Isaiah 40:27) Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"?

Not all of the Jews recognized that they were suffering just punishment for their sins, and that God had told them in advance through the Law of Moses and the prophets that He would punish them (as He was doing) if they broke His law and practiced what the nations did in the Promised Land before He destroyed them and helped the Jews

establish themselves in the land. They thought God did not see them suffering. Some thought God was unjust. Some thought God was disregarding their rights as the children of God. In the following verses, God responds to their complaint through His prophet.

(Isaiah 40:28) Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

Through Isaiah, God continues to encourage His people throughout all generations by telling them about God's attributes. God is everlasting, so He cannot and will not pass out of existence. God is the Creator of the earth from end to end. God is not like a human being, because God will never faint or grow weary. God will never let us down, because He will not faint in a distressing situation. God will never be unable to help us because He will never grow weary; for, as Isaiah said, God is great in strength and mighty in power. If we are suffering, we might not understand why; but God understands why and His understanding (with many reasons only God can understand) is unsearchable. We can pray, and He will explain — when He knows we are ready to understand more of His ways and the whys of them. The first place to go for understanding is always to the Bible, and the most important things to understand are the many truths about

God that the Bible reveals.

(Isaiah 40:29) He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.

Because of who God is, with all of the attributes and more that Isaiah listed, we know that God is capable of giving us the power and wisdom we need in any situation. We may faint because we are in distress, but God will not faint and He will give us power. We may feel powerless in a situation; if so, we can pray, because God strengthens the powerless and the Holy Spirit and Jesus pray for us. We may feel faint before we need to do something for God; such as, teach a Bible class or counsel someone in need. We can remember that God's Spirit will inspire our prayers and after our prayers for help, God's power will get us through somehow; furthermore, God will use us in ways we may never understand to help others (and not always exactly as we expected).

(Isaiah 40:30) Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;

We associate strength and vitality with young people. Young men in battle or shortly afterward will often feel faint and be weary. It is obvious that we can become weary after serving the Lord without rest or in arduous and trying circumstances. No matter what our physical makeup or age, there will be times when we are exhausted. These are special times when we should call upon the Lord

for help, because He has promised to help us and He never fails to keep His promises.

(Isaiah 40:31) but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

God promises us that if we trust in and rely on Him then He will renew our strength. Often we will need to wait patiently, knowing the needed strength will be given, perhaps after a long rest (as God helped Elijah rest and fed him). God will lift us up so we will be able to serve Him once again and not be weary until our tasks are done. We may not run, but perhaps we can walk in serving God, and not faint or quit before our work for God is done. Through Isaiah, God gives hope to His people as they serve Him.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How might Isaiah's words comfort the Jews after they were led into exile and began suffering?
2. What effect might these words of Isaiah have had on those who returned to Jerusalem after their exile?
3. Compare and contrast the attributes Isaiah mentions with the idols of the Old Testament and the false gods some people worship today?

4. What do you feel comforting about these words from Isaiah? In what ways can you apply this Bible lesson to your needs — mentally, physically, and spiritually?
5. Pray for someone that may need the comfort and encouragement of these words from Isaiah. Pray about sharing what you have learned from this lesson with someone who needs encouragement.

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly
International Bible Lesson.

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