

Faith in the Power of God

Devotional Reading: Romans 4:9-22

Background Scripture: Isaiah 40:12-31

Today's Scripture: Isaiah 40:12-13, 25-31

I. Supreme Ruler Isaiah 40:12-13

12 Who hath measured the waters 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 the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him?

12a. Today's text comes to us in the form of Hebrew poetry. This style often involves balanced lines known as *parallelism*. This means expressing the same thoughts across different lines using different words (synonyms).

We see that parallelism here regarding the verbs *measured* and *meted out*. Both expressions deal with calculating something. See Isaiah 65:7, where the word translated *meted out* is translated "measure." Additional parallelism occurs with the phrases *hollow of his hand* and *the span*. The latter refers to the distance from the end of the thumb to that of the little finger when these are extended—in other words, about nine inches.

Through rhetorical questions, the prophet provides his reader with the proper perspective of God. The human mind cannot fathom the amount of wa-

ter in the ocean or the distance of one galaxy to another. However, the Creator can measure the distance using His hand. In this verse, Isaiah declares the greatness of God and lays down the basis of the criteria by which the Israelites may compare their God to the gods of other nations.

12b. Isaiah's question has an answer so obvious that it should not have to be stated. The verb translated *comprehended* implies something like "hold" or "contain." Parallelism continues between *mountains* and *hills* as well as *scales* and *balance*.

13. The Hebrew word translated *Spirit* has a range of meanings. It can mean "wind" (Isaiah 7:2), "breath" (11:4), or what might be called "attitude" (4:4), among other meanings. Context determines what the writer means at any given point.

The importance of this verse 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."

II. Sustaining Ruler Isaiah 40:25-31

25 To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.

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?

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.

29 He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have 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 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.

25. The prophet raised this question earlier, in Isaiah 40:18. It reminds us that we should be extremely cautious with statements that start with “God is like . . .” because the next word will result in the Creator’s being compared to something He has created.

Even so, Isaiah’s question *To whom then will ye liken me* does not forbid certain figurative language from being used as illustrations of God’s various roles. These roles include His being a shepherd (Psalm 23:1), a rock (2 Samuel 22:32), a shield and a sword (Deuteronomy 33:29),

a fortress (Psalm 18:2), and even that of a winged and feathered creature (91:4). These are not saying that God’s essence is similar or *equal* to any of those; rather, such texts illustrate various functions that God exercises.

26a. Isaiah calls attention to the heavens as he did previously in Isaiah 40:12 and will do again in 51:6. The *host by number* refers to the stars. Worship of these was explicitly forbidden, but it happened anyway, with promised punishment that followed. Avoiding such idolatry begins with realizing that there’s a Creator behind these stars.

26b. Elsewhere, the Bible records the *names* of some stars and their constellations (Job 9:9; 38:31-32; Amos 5:8). Whether covered by clouds or not, they are in the night sky every night without fail.

And even these may have involved stars invisible to the naked eye before their demise; thus, the ancients would not have perceived any stars that failed to appear.

27. Again we have the parallelism that typifies Hebrew poetry: the verbs *sayest* and *speakest* parallel one another, as do the proper names *Jacob* and *Israel*. The parallelism continues with the phrase *my way is hid* mirroring *my judgment is passed over*; then the phrase *from the Lord* echoes *from my God*. Thus one overall thought is expressed, not two. Nothing is hidden from God’s sight.

28. *Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard* are favorite expressions of the prophet Isaiah (see Isaiah 37:26; 40:21). In this case, they respond to the rhetorical questions of the verse previous to this one. The implication is that nothing is ever concealed from God. It’s inconceivable that the reader should plead ignorance to the facts that follow. Even without having the benefit of Scripture, God’s characteristics are discernible from

nature itself. Thus, Isaiah should not have to remind the people of truths with which they are already familiar.

The writer offers a rare collection of terms in using different Hebrew words for *God*, *Lord*, and *Creator*. This collection is the only place in the Old Testament where the three words are seen together as nouns; it seems that the writer wants no mistake to be made regarding the identity of the subject! God is not susceptible to human limitations. He does not tire; He never becomes exhausted; He neither slumbers nor sleeps. That God rested on the seventh day following the six days of creation does not imply that He became *wearry*; it simply means that He ceased His creative activity.

These truths expressed in this passage and throughout the Scriptures concerning the Lord and His uniqueness are why prophets such as Isaiah speak so passionately against the sin of idolatry (example: Isaiah 40:18-20). Idol worshipers do no harm whatsoever to God, who remains the same *everlasting* God described by Isaiah. They harm only themselves by following such delusions.

29. The promise of *strength* from the Lord, especially during times of human frailty and weakness, resonates throughout Isaiah (Isaiah 12:2; 25:4; 26:4; 41:10; 45:24; 49:5). The issue is one of trust since God has His own timetable for replacing our weakness with His strength. Trust requires waiting.

Few have experienced more acutely the need for—and receiving of—strength from the Lord as did the apostle Paul. His declaration, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13) rings true for us today.

30. Youth is often associated with vigor and endurance, something that diminishes with age. But certain situations arise that leave even *youths* disheartened

and fearful of what lies ahead. Physical strength is an asset that can prove useful in numerous situations. The ability to do more than expected can last only as long as the adrenaline does. But inner spiritual strength from the Lord is what provides the endurance to resist the temptations frequently encountered in a world broken by sin. Thus could Paul boldly declare, “We faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16).

31. We now come to some of the most well-known declarations in all of Scripture. We see them displayed artistically on coffee mugs, tapestries, desk mementos, etc. The need to *wait upon the Lord* is found in many places (examples: Psalms 37:9; 123:2; Isaiah 8:13; Romans 8:25). To *wait* implies trust in the *Lord*. An example of impatience and failure to wait is Abraham in Genesis 16. When we wait, we keep faith that He will work His purpose in our circumstances, even when—or especially when!—the way forward is not obvious to us. But waiting does not come easily in our fast-paced society that often demands instant results. Our tendency all too frequently is to act on our own timing and by our own judgment; we want to keep things moving!

The imagery of mounting up *with wings as eagles* pictures an ability to soar into the sky, oblivious to any distractions below. The Lord used that same imagery when He established His covenant with the nation of Israel. He contrasted what He did to the Egyptians with “how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself” (Exodus 19:4). Later, Moses used similar imagery to remind the people of God’s care (Deuteronomy 32:11-12).

The concluding *they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint* offers yet more instances of parallelism in expression.

Involvement Learning

Faith in the Power of God

Into the Lesson

Finish the following sentence, then justify your answer:

*If I could spend more time in nature,
I'd want to be in . . .*

Throughout history, people have experienced God through the marvelous sights, sounds, and smells found in the world. Today's Scripture is an example of such an occurrence. As we study, consider how the prophet uses nature to point His listeners to the trustworthiness of God.

Key Verse

He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.
—Isaiah 40:29

Into the Word

Read Isaiah 40:12-13, 25-31, then fill out the following headers with the appropriate words or phrases based on the Scripture.

Who God Is

What God Has Done

Questions God Asks

What God Promises

How do you think Isaiah's prophecy comforted the original audience?

What promises and prophecies of God give you the most comfort?

What keeps us from hearing or receiving that comfort?

Into Life

Write down ideas for a worship service that would focus on praising God for His creativity, especially as seen in the beauty of His creation. Consider visual arts, music, spoken word, and other creative incorporations!

How would these elements encourage worshippers to remain faithful despite their circumstances?

Thought to Remember

There is never any power shortage with God.