

The Heart of Worship

Session 1

January 12, 2025

## The Focus of Our Worship

**Session Passage:** Isaiah 40:21-31

### Isaiah 40:21-24

**Connection to the Point.** God is all-powerful, and no one can match His power; therefore, He is the only One worthy of our worship.

**Isaiah: The Man.** *Isaiah* means “Yahweh is salvation” or “Yahweh saves.” Isaiah ministered “during the reigns in the days of Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah” (1:1). These were all kings of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Isaiah was the son of Amoz (v. 1), who, according to Jewish tradition, was a brother to King Amaziah, which means Isaiah would have been a cousin to King Uzziah. Isaiah was married to a prophetess (8:3). He had two sons named in his book (7:3; 8:1-4), both of whose names were symbolic and prophetic.

**Background of Isaiah 40.** Chapter 40 begins the second major section of Isaiah, moving from oracles of judgment (chaps. 1–39) to those predicting comfort and deliverance (chaps. 40–66). Bible students suggest two possible backgrounds for chapter 40 and its comfort. Many hold that these exhortations relate to the yet future Babylonian captivity and Judah’s promised return from that exile. Other Bible students suggest the background is the situation in Judah and Israel after the Assyrian Sennacherib’s 701 BC invasion and conquests until his death in 681 BC, and thus during Isaiah’s own lifetime.

**Do you not know? Have you not heard? Have ye not known? have ye not heard?** (v. 21). Isaiah used an imperfect tense for *known* and *heard*, emphasizing people should have known as it had been repeated continually. The first question concerning knowledge is not one of being uninformed or ignorant. Rather, it focuses on whether people had given credence to what they knew. Israel’s failure to know and understand is identified in 1:3. It is repeated at Isaiah’s commissioning (6:9-10) and again in 28:9-13. The implication of *not heard* is the possibility of hearing repeatedly, but not heeding what is heard.

**Has it not been declared to you . . . Have you not considered understood Hath it not been told you . . . have ye not understood** (v. 21). Perhaps Isaiah had his own declarations in mind as well as those of other prophets the Lord had sent. In the third and fourth questions Isaiah used the perfect verb tense, stressing that the truth of God as Creator had been told to them and should have had an ongoing impact on them and led to discernment.

**From the beginning** (v. 21). Isaiah did not state which *beginning* he intended. Probably, in light of the next phrase, he meant God had given this revelation from the beginning of creation (Gen. 1:1).

**The foundations of the earth The earth was founded** (v. 21). *Foundations Founded* emphasizes that *the earth* both had a Founder or Creator and that there was a time when it was not. Careful consideration of the cosmos points to a Creator beyond itself.

**God is He sits enthroned above it is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth** (v. 22). *Circle of the earth* probably indicates either the horizon or the dome of the heavens that appears to extend from horizon to horizon in a half-circle (as in Job 22:14). God is transcendent, and, as it were, sits above the

zenith of the world. From this high vantage point He has all-around vision and can see to distant ends in every direction. *EnthronedSitteth upon* pictures God seated as a king, the Ruler of the world.

**Its inhabitantspeople are like grasshoppersThe inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers** (v. 22). From God's lofty vantage point, people seem the size of grasshoppers, meaning they appear weak, powerless, and insignificant—even though they may be multitudinous.

**He stretches out the heavens like thin clotha canopyHe . . . that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain** (v. 22). Not only does God control the earth from His exalted throne, He controls the heavens. *Thin clothCanopyCurtain* probably refers to material as thin as gossamer. The emphasis is on the ease with which God stretched *out the heavens*—it took no more effort than spreading out a light veil.

**And spreadseth them out likeas a tent to livedwell in** (v. 22). The image of pitching a *tent*, a common practice, again pictures the mighty transcendent Lord preparing a place for people to dwell.

**He reduces princes to nothingHe brings princes to naughtThat bringeth the princes to nothing** (v. 23). Isaiah moved from God's transcendence over creation to His immanence within it—His control applies to nations and rulers. *Princes* refers to those invested in high positions or offices, people of great power and authority. *ReducesBringseth . . . to nothingnaught* involves a play on terms. The verb is the same one used for appointing someone to an official position. But rather than being appointed to a weighty position, God appoints them to nothingness. This is the same thought as in verse 17. By this point, Isaiah had seen many kings of Israel, Judah, and surrounding nations come and go. The Lord raised them up, determined the lengths of their rule, then brought them to nothing.

**And makes judges of the earth like a wastelandAnd reduces the rulers of this world to nothingHe maketh the judges of the earth as vanity** (v. 23). *JudgesRulers* should not be limited to those who pronounce judgments but rather to those who establish order and rule, as in the book of Judges. *WastelandNothingVanity* translates the same word used in Genesis 1:2 for the uninhabitable chaos of the earth. Thus God brings powerful people to a condition in which they are rendered useless.

**They are barely planted, barely sownNo sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sownYea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown** (v. 24). Repeating the point of verses 6-8, each of the opening three phrases begin with a Hebrew term meaning barely or hardly or not even. This gives the feel of the sadness with which the action happens. The emphasis is ironic.

**Their stem hardly takes root in the groundNo sooner do they take root in the groundYea, their stock shall not take root in the earth** (v. 24). An agricultural metaphor, Isaiah contrasted God's permanence with humanity's frailty. No sooner than having come on the scene are such human authorities blown away.

**WhenThan he blows on them and they witherHe shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither** (v. 24). *He* refers to God. *Blows upon them* pictures the scorching Middle Eastern desert wind. Authorities *wither* or dry up. A mere breath by God is enough to remove them from their positions. It does not take Him any effort at all.

**And athe whirlwind carries them away like stubblesweeps them away like chaffshall take them away as stubble** (v. 24). *Stubble* or "chaff"Chaff or "stubble" is the worthless husks of grain left over after the good seed is separated from it by winnowing or threshing. It is indigestible by humans. Metaphorically the term refers to that which is worthless.

## Isaiah 40:25-28

**Connection to the Point.** God is the Creator of all, and no one is His equal; therefore, He is the only One worthy of our worship.

**“To whom will you compare me, o? Or who is my equal?”To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal?** (v. 25). The rhetorical question expects the response that there is no one to whom God can be compared or considered *equal* to God. These words repeat those of verse 18, except this time they come from the Lord Himself. His asking the questions emphasizes both the urgency of responding and the importance of getting the answer right.

**The Holy One** (v. 25). Hebrew has no definite article before *Holy One*, indicating it is a personal name, not merely a descriptor. This title is used thirty-five times in Isaiah in reference to God, testifying to the great impression the thrice holy God made on Isaiah (6:3). *Holy* and *holiness* describe God’s separateness from all that is unholy. God is holy in His essence as well as His moral perfection, rendering Him beyond compare or equal.

**Look up and see!Lift up your eyes and look to the heavensLift up your eyes on high, and behold** (v. 26). The Lord invited hearers to look to the heavens. Nations of that time and culture practiced astral worship. They viewed the stars as gods, a temptation Israel sometimes yielded to (2 Kings 17:16; Jer. 8:2; Amos 5:26). Moses warned Israel early on against this temptation (Deut. 4:19).

**Who created all theseWho hath created these things** (v. 26). *These things* refers to the heavenly bodies, especially the stars. *Created* renders the Hebrew word used exclusively for God’s creative work (Gen. 1–2). The stars are not self-existent, they were brought into existence by God.

**He brings out the stars by numberHe who brings out the starry host one by oneThat bringeth out their host by number** (v. 26). *He whoThat bringeth out* indicates the appearance of the stars is not merely a natural phenomenon. Rather, God is intimately involved in the working of His creation. Only God can bring out the stars. *By numberOne by one* is an expression used of a military commander mustering his troops (2 Sam. 24:2) or a shepherd bringing his sheep out of the fold. While stars may appear numberless to us, they are not to the Lord (Ps. 147:4-5).

**He calls all of them by name. . . calls forth each of them by nameHe calleth them all by names** (v. 26). Further, God knows each star’s name. One’s *nNames* referred to one’s essential nature. Knowing something’s or someone’s name meant you had power over it. The Lord knows the stars not just in their totality (number) but in their individuality (by name). God knows the essential nature, characteristics, and function of each star.

**Because of his great power and strength, not one of them is missingBecause of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missingBy the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth** (v. 26). The Hebrew word for *powermight* is plural, emphasizing the intensity and immensity of God’s strength. That no star *is missingfaileth* means God upholds them and keeps them in their places.

**Jacob . . . Israel** (v. 27). The dual name is a favorite for Isaiah, occurring twenty-two times in Isaiah, seventeen times in chapters 40–49, and possibly recalls how *Jacob* the swindler was changed to *Israel*, “the one who wrestled with God” (Gen. 32:22-32).

**Why do you say complain . . . why do you assert say Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest** (v. 27). The Lord may be the Great Creator, but is He a caring God? This was the question Isaiah's hearers had in mind: If God is so great, why didn't He do something about their situation? Isaiah's dual question is really a rebuke. Both verbs are in the imperfect tense, meaning the people had repeatedly and continuously said this.

**My way is hidden . . . my claim is ignored my cause is disregarded my judgment is passed over** (v. 27). This refers to the nation's situation, particularly their difficulties. *Hidden* is in the emphatic position. Isaiah's hearers asserted there were some things God did not know. *Ignored*, or disregarded *Disregarded* or ignored, literally is "passed over." It *Passed over* is in the imperfect tense, referring to a continuous act. They believed God kept on ignoring them. Thus they asserted that even if God did know, He did not care. The complaint implies Israel had her own plans and course, and God should have supported her direction.

**Do you not know? Have you not heard? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard** (v. 28). Isaiah's double question calls attention to the ridiculous nature of the people's despondent attitude. The wrong conclusion about God's utter transcendence is that He is too great and too far removed to care. *Known* and *heard*, unlike in verse 21, are in the perfect tense—the people should have known all Isaiah had just reminded them because the information had been available to them for a long time. The solution to Israel's despondency was to relearn truths they already knew.

**The Lord is the everlasting God The everlasting God, the Lord** (v. 28). *The Lord* has no beginning or end. He is not limited by time, neither does He get diminished over time. *Everlasting God* literally is "God of an age." The implication is that God takes the long view. He does not focus merely on the moment, but on the ages.

**The Creator of the whole ends of the earth** (v. 28). Just as God is not limited by time, neither is He limited by space. That God is *the Creator* Jacob/Israel should have known from such passages as Genesis 1–2; Psalms 90; and Amos 4:13; 5:8. *The whole earth*, literally "the ends of the earth," *The ends of the earth* assures there is no place where they may have been scattered that their Lord is not the sovereign Ruler. This emphasizes the reach of His power.

**Never becomes faint Will not grow tired or weary Fainteth not, neither is weary** (v. 28). Because we grow *weary* from lack of nourishment or rest, we tend to project that onto God. God never has to rest, postpone His plans, or abandon His purposes. God is capable of the long-haul—His plan does not just focus on the immediate but on the whole course of time, and He won't grow exhausted carrying it out.

**There is no limit to his understanding His understanding no one can fathom There is no searching of his understanding** (v. 28). The Lord had not lost His wisdom to handle their needs, but He does everything according to His own wisdom (vv. 12-14). A delay in the Lord's response does not mean He is unaware or lacks ability or concern. If the people only would have focused on who God is, they would have had the answer to their questions.

#### **Isaiah 40:29-31**

**Connection to the Point.** When we trust God, He alone renews and strengthens us; therefore, He is the only One worthy of our worship.

**Faint and weary** (vv. 29-31). *Faint* refers to a lack of inner strength, the will to continue on. *Weary* refers to breaking down under pressure and being overcome by circumstances, especially in a physical sense. These words are used repeatedly in verses 28-31. In verse 28 they are used of God in the negative, that is, that such do not apply to Him. In verse 30 they are used of youths, those whom one would expect to epitomize the opposite. In verse 31 they are used, again in the negative, of those who trust in and wait on the Lord.

**He gives strength . . . and strengthens the powerless increases the power of the weak He giveth power . . . and to them that have no might he increaseth strength** (v. 29). The verb form of the word *giveth* is active, implying that God is in the process of continuously and abundantly giving. Giving characterizes God. God does not lack strength or power, thus He stands in position to supply it to *them powerless weak that have no might*—and He has more than enough to give it to those in need of it. *Strengthens Increases Increaseth* is imperfect, meaning the action is not complete. As with His giving, His strengthen is an ongoing reality to those who trust Him.

**Youths and young men stumble and fall shall utterly fall** (v. 30). *Youths* and *young men* are in the emphatic position to stress that even the most virile and capable eventually become worn down—none will escape the need for God’s strengthening. The broad term *youths* refers to young males and includes everyone from an unweaned child (1 Sam. 1:22) to assistants to kings (Isa. 37:6) to soldiers’ armor bearers (1 Sam. 14:6) and, on occasion, even to the soldiers themselves (21:5). *Young men* refers to those males in the prime of their lives—warriors prepared for battle (Isa. 31:8) or athletes—those in peak physical condition. *Stumble and fall utterly fall* literally is “stumble, stumbling” and refers to collapsing (Dan. 11:19).

**But those who trust hope in But they that wait upon the Lord** (v. 31). *But* contrasts the people referenced in verse 31 with those under consideration in verse 30. Seeing God’s greatness and power requires trusting or hoping in Him, waiting on Him. To *trust hope wait upon in the Lord* is to admit there is no other who can help. It also points to the confidence that eventually God will act on one’s behalf. The word translated as *trust hope wait upon* could also be rendered “hope” or “wait.” It involves waiting on the Lord’s plan and timing rather than rushing ahead. Isaiah also emphasized the theme of waiting on the Lord in 8:17; 25:9; 26:8; and 33:2.

**Will Shall renew their strength** (v. 31). The word rendered *renew* can mean “exchange” or “replace.” To renew one’s strength, then, means both that they will substitute the Lord’s strength for their own natural strength and that they will keep putting on the new strength from Him—a different strength, a divine strength.

**They will soar on wings like eagles They shall mount up with wings as eagles** (v. 31). A similar promise is also stated in Psalm 103:5. *Eagles* were considered the greatest of the birds (Ezek. 1:10; Rev. 4:7). The Hebrew word for *wings* refers to wing feathers and renders a picture of the ease and effectiveness with which eagles rise up on wind currents. Those who put their trust in the Lord will fly high above whatever difficulties they face.

**Soar Mount up . . . run . . . walk** (v. 31). This series shows the steady progress of those who receive renewed strength from the Lord. *Soar Mount up* implies riding high above whatever difficulties and circumstances happen to be found below. *Run* pictures those in a race who have the endurance to finish the course and win. *Walk* indicates that such renewed strength is not merely a temporary burst of energy but an on-going ability to go on in the strength the Lord gives.

