



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The LORD Almighty--Incomparable (Isaiah 40:15-20)

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Weekly Bible Study Schedule

- **Tuesday, February 7, 7 AM in HHR #5**
-Breakfast Provided
- **Tuesday, February 7, 8:30 PM in Room #301**
(Speaker Pro-Tem's office)

A staple of this country's principles is the freedom of religion. The government does not dictate an official church or religion to which all faithful citizens must adhere. In the USA, one can be a Baptist (American, Southern, Bible, Independent, General, General Regular, Free-Will, etc), Methodist, Amish, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Catholic, Episcopalian, or Non-Denominational. One can be Mormon, Buddhist, Hindu, Hare Krishna, Jewish, or even be a member of the 1st Presleytarian Church (following Elvis). One can be an atheist. One can just be "spiritual", if he or she desires; or one can be unspiritual. It seems the only rule in our society is that you can believe whatever you want to believe—just do not be so arrogant to believe that you are the only one with the truth and do not dare tell others that they are wrong.

It is not unlike the society in which the Israelites found themselves when they were disciplined by God and removed from their home country and settled in the land of Babylon. They were a people exiled far from home. They did not live in slavery like their forefathers in Egypt. Some were doing quite well in their new land; so much so that some did not leave when Cyrus the king gave them permission to return home (Ezra 1). But they were living in a nation that worshipped a multitude of gods. Cyrus the king wanted happy subjects so he allowed a freedom of religion and he encouraged the various captive peoples to practice the belief of whatever god they desired to worship. Therefore, with this freedom of worship, the Israelites found themselves surrounded by many forms of worship to various and sundry gods.

Thus, the people of Israel, just like the church in the USA, needed a study in Theology Proper—an introduction to the true characteristics and attributes of the One and Only true God of the universe.

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah proclaimed that a time will come when God will victoriously return to be with His people again, after a time of judgment and discipline (Isaiah 40:1-9). He declared of God's mighty arm of victory; which was also found to be gentle in taking tender, merciful care of His people (40:10-11). And Isaiah reminded them that *Yabweh*, their God, is the all-powerful and all-wise Creator of the universe (40:12-14). All this leads to the passage for today.

Isaiah 40:15-20 Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, And are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales; Behold, He lifts up the islands like fine dust. ¹⁶Even Lebanon is not enough to burn, nor its beasts enough for a burnt offering. ¹⁷All the nations are as nothing before Him, They are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless. ¹⁸To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him? ¹⁹As for the idol, a craftsman casts it, a goldsmith plates it with gold, and a silversmith fashions chains of silver. ²⁰He 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.

The key to this section, as well as all of Isaiah 40, is the rhetorical questions in verse 18—"To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him?" It is repeated in the first person later in verse 25—"To whom then will you liken Me, That I would be *his* equal?" says the Holy One."

Isaiah has already shown God to be incomparable in mercy and compassion (40:10-11), power (40:12) and wisdom (40:13-14). He continued his lesson in Theology Proper by laying out three comparisons in verses 15-20 which show that God is incomparable.

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS & STAFF: TUESDAYS @ 7AM, HEARING ROOM #5

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS @ 8:30PM, ROOM #301

TRUMAN BUILDING: THURSDAYS @ 7AM, 4THFLOOR CAFETERIA

PROCLAIMING THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF GOD IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL

Missouri

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I. GOD—INCOMPARABLE TO THE NATIONS (40:15)

The first of these incomparable comparisons is the contrast between God and the nations. In verse 15, he declares, “Behold” or “pay attention,” “look at this,” “listen up.” The nations are like drops and like dust when compared to the immenseness and power of God.

If one has a bucket of water and a drop is lost over the side, it is really of no concern to him or her. If someone weighs vegetables on the scale at the local grocery store, he or she does not get out a feather duster to wipe out the particles of dust that may be on it because the dust will not affect the weight of the vegetables. In a similar manner, all the nations of the world, stacked together, are nothing compared with the Creator God of the universe. They have no more of an affect on God and His sovereign plans than dust would affect the weight of an object on the scale.

Verse 17 goes further. The Hebrew language literally states that the nations “are less than non-existent.” The comment may not be a logical possibility, but it shows the absurdity of making a comparison between the “greatness, majesty and power” of earthly kingdoms and the greatness, majesty and power of God.

In other words, God is not awed by the nations.

THE WORSHIP OFFERED WOULD NOT BE WORTHY OF THE ONE BEING WORSHIPPED BECAUSE THE GREATNESS OF GOD IS SO GREAT, NOTHING THAT MAN CAN BRING TO HIM IS WORTHY OF HIM.

Nations instill in people an abnormal fear, OR an abnormal sense of security. At times in the U.S., its citizens can have a sense that nothing can take the country down for it has the greatest military, work ethic, resolve, and unity when it counts. But, at times, throughout its history there has been a fear of other nations—in the late 1930s and 40s, it was a rearmend Germany; during the Cold War, it was the Russians; and today, a nuclear armed Iran and North Korea.

So while nations can produce a sense of fear or security in men, they have no affect on God. Isaiah is not saying here that God cares not for the

nations or the individuals in a nation (for them He sent His Son) but rather they are not significant compared to Him and He has no need of them. Thus the Psalm writer penned:

Psalm 146:3-6 Do not trust in princes, in mortal man, in whom there is no salvation. His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. How blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, Whose hope is in the LORD his God, Who made heaven and earth, The sea and all that is in them; Who keeps faith forever...

II. GOD—INCOMPARABLE IN WORSHIP (40:16-17)

The second incomparable comparison is in the manner in which He is worthy to be worshipped.

Verse 16 states “Even Lebanon is not enough to burn, nor its beasts enough for a burnt offering.” The area of Old Testament Lebanon is located in the same vicinity as the modern day nation by the same name; north of Israel. There is a mountain range, known on maps as Mt. Lebanon, which serves as the headwaters of the Jordan River.

The cedar trees of Lebanon grew in abundance in Biblical times. They were known as the glory of Lebanon (Isaiah 35:2; 60:13). Solomon used them in construction of the first temple (2 Chronicles 2:8) and Ezra used them in the construction of the second temple (Ezra 3:7). They were stately (Ezekiel 31:3-5), long-branched (Psalm 80:10; 92:12; Ezekiel 31:6-9), odoriferous (Hosea 14:6), durable, and therefore much used for boards, pillars, and ceilings (1 Kings 6:9, 10; 7:2; Jeremiah 22:14), for masts (Ezekiel 27:5), and for carved images (Isaiah 44:14). Today, the highest of the trees are 70 to 80 feet tall and approximately 800-1000 years old (some estimated at 2500 years old). The trunks have a diameter of 40 feet or more and the lateral spread of the branches many times exceeds its height.

So what is Isaiah teaching? He proclaimed that even if the whole of the great Lebanon cedar forest with all its wildlife were offered up as a sacrifice of worship to God, it would still be lacking in its worthiness. He used this hyperbolic language to illustrate that “...everything by which man could express his adoration of the exalted One comes incomparably short of His exaltation.”²¹

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In other words, the worship offered would not be worthy of the one being worshipped since the greatness of God is so great. Therefore, nothing man can bring to Him is worthy of Him.

III. GOD—INCOMPARABLE TO IDOLS (40:18-20)

The last incomparable comparison in this passage is the laughable comparison with idols. Isaiah posed the rhetorical question with the obvious answer, “To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him?” (40:18). He then proceeded to mock the foolishness of mankind who attempt to form something of God.

Isaiah tells the story of one who desires to make a god. This person who wants to create an idol takes it very seriously. He wants to create the best god; one who will answer prayers, accept offerings and provide for him and protect him. So he gets a craftsman (it is better to hire a professional who can do it better) to pour an image and has it covered with gold by a goldsmith and further adorns it with silver jewelry by a silversmith. This man does not go cheap.

The poor man, though, who does not have the financial capabilities to go with the gold and silver, finds a nice piece of wood—something that will not likely rot. He finds an excellent wood carver to carve out an image and has him create an image that won't fall over (for it is bad if the god one is worshipping and praying keeps falling over).

Isaiah's sarcasm is not difficult to identify. He will pick up this holy mockery again in chapters 44 and 46. Comparing Yahweh, the Creator God of the universe is absurd. Forming Him into something men have made with their hands is truly absurd. This is the substance behind the second of the Ten Commandments, “You shall not make for yourself an idol or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth” (Exodus 20:4). Anything designed by man naturally falls short of the glory and magnificence of God; and therefore, not worthy of worship.

Psalm 115:2-8 Why should the nations say, "Where, now, is their God?" But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of man's hands. They have mouths, but they cannot speak; They have eyes, but they cannot see; They have ears, but they cannot hear; They have noses, but they cannot smell; They have

hands, but they cannot feel; They have feet, but they cannot walk; They cannot make a sound with their throat. Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them.

APPLICATION/CONCLUSION

The above passage leads right into the first application. The exhortation that follows in Psalm 115:9-15 is simply to put your trust in the LORD. Don't trust anything else—only Yahweh... “for He is their help and shield.”

Do not put your total trust in other people for they will let you down (if you haven't experienced that already, just wait). Do not trust in money for it will decrease in value, be stolen, or you can lose it (no need to expand on this in light of our economic times). Do not trust in government for it does not always know or do what is best for its people (it may also be powerless to do what is best if it did know what was best). And do not trust in your own resources—strength, wisdom, abilities, health, knowledge (none of which is eternal, it is all fleeting; Isa. 40:7-8).

Anything one may set up above God and trust more is an idol. And that person has just placed himself in the category of the foolish idol maker and worshipper in Psalm 115 and Isaiah 40, 44, 46.

The second point of application is that the incomparability of God is the power and support behind the Apostle Paul's praise of Romans 8. He writes,

Romans 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You see, Paul asked the question “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Rom. 8:35). But since the nations are as “less than non-existent” to God and since He is the Sovereign Creator of the universe, the Apostle can boldly declare of that which he is “convinced”—Nothing can separate us from the love of God; everything pales in comparison with Him.

Our third point of application is truly good news. As stated earlier, no sacrifice made by man is sufficient in worship of God and in the

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proclamation of His glory. But a sacrifice has been made that was worthy of God and thus, no more will be needed since it was made. No sacrifice from man to God is worthy, but a sacrifice by God to God is worthy.

In Hebrews 10, the author writes that the sacrifices commanded in the Old Testament law cannot take away the sins of man (10:1-4) and that God finds no pleasure in those burnt offerings, especially in relation to the forgiveness of sins (10:5-8; cf. Isaiah 40:16). But the offering that Jesus Christ, who was both man and God, gave to the Father was sufficient for all and sufficient to offer only once for all time (10:9-14). It is true that all the offerings burnt on all the wood found in the forests of Lebanon were severely lacking, but the offering of the body and life of Jesus was acceptable; for it was a sacrifice worthy of the One to whom it was presented.

Friend, we are created beings. Therefore, there is nothing we can put together to offer as a gift to our Creator that is worthy of Him. We are also rebellious, sin-filled creatures so anything we offer is tainted with this stain and thus unworthy to be accepted by a holy and pure God. So, in and of ourselves, we are in a hopeless state as we stand before God.

But praise be to God for He furnished on our behalf that which we cannot furnish ourselves--a sacrifice that will remove our sins from our account (2 Cor. 5:21). The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ covers the sinful account of those whose faith and trust is placed in that sacrifice and not placed in their own feeble offerings.

Friend, you have no hope outside of Christ and His sacrifice. No other religion, belief, or work will provide a covering for your sin. ONLY in Christ is salvation found (Acts 4:12). Repent of your sins and place your trust in His work. I plead with you as the Apostle Paul did--"be reconciled to God" for He has provided the way of reconciliation.²

God can forgive your sins--are you interested?

¹ C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament Vol. 7: Isaiah*, Trans. by James Martin (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989), 149.

² If you have questions or would like to further discuss this reconciliation, please call (573-418-2077) or email (paul.meinsen@capitolcom.org).