

The Foundations of the Earth

Isaiah 40:21-31

SS Lesson for 09/18/2016

Devotional Scripture: Isaiah 51:12-16

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reminds us that our sovereign God created and controls **The Foundations of the Earth**. The study's aim is to see the sovereign Creator as the source of strength and power in our lives. The study's application is to wait on the Lord to provide the strength and help we need for life's situations.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Isa 40:28

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, The Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable.

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

GOD'S INCOMPARABLE KNOWLEDGE (40:12-17).

40:12-14. By five rhetorical questions Isaiah emphasized that God, in creating the universe (v. 12), did not need anyone to assist Him (vv. 13-14). He is such a great Creator that all **the waters** of the globe were held, as it were, in **His hand**. Figuratively, He can measure the vast starry universe **with the breadth of His hand**. Also all the earth's **dust** could be put **in a basket** of His; and **the mountains and hills**, though vast, are so small compared with Him that He, figuratively speaking, could weigh them all on small **scales**. Though the immensity of Creation is awe-inspiring, no one on **earth** is God's equal. In verses 13-14 Isaiah spoke of the infinite knowledge and skill **the LORD** possesses. No one on earth can claim to have **taught the LORD** anything. He did not need to **consult** anyone. Isaiah was probably thinking of the Creation account (Gen. 1) in which God spoke and Creation came into being. In irony God had also pointed out to Job by numerous questions that his knowledge was nothing compared with God's (Job 38:2-39:30).

40:15-17. Since God's Creation is so grandiose, the people of **the nations** are as **nothing** before Him (like a mere **drop** of water or **dust** particles on **scales**). All the wood and the animals in fertile, wooded **Lebanon**, north of Israel, would be inadequate for sacrifices that would be significant before the great God. **The nations** who do not know the Lord are **worthless and less than nothing** before Him.

GOD'S UNIQUENESS COMPARED WITH IDOLS.

40:18-20. With irony Isaiah wrote about two idols—one made of metal by a **craftsman** and then overlaid **with gold** and decorated with **silver** ornaments, and another selected by a **poor** man from **wood** and fashioned so that it **will not** fall over. (Other passages denouncing idols are 41:7; 44:9-20; 45:16, 20; 46:1-2, 6-7; Pss. 115:4-7; 135:15-18; Jer. 10:8-16; Hab. 2:19.) Both of these idol-makers used materials God created, and skills that God gave them! God, however, is unlike any idol. He is the Creator of **all** things including people. God is unique.

GOD'S SOVEREIGN CONTROL OVER THE WORLD (40:21-26).

40:21-22. From His sovereign position in heaven God watches over His created universe. **You** (used four times in v. 21) refers to people in general. The force of the first question, for example, is "Doesn't everyone know this?" (cf. v. 28) The Lord is like a king sitting **enthroned above the circle** (*hûg*, "horizon," which is circular; cf. Job 26:10; Prov. 8:27) **of the earth** and over His **people** who by comparison seem **like mere grasshoppers**. **The heavens** (the sky) are pictured as spread **out like a tent** for Him to live in (cf. Ps. 104:2). Isaiah was not presenting a detailed idea of God's abode. He was merely using imagery that his readers would easily understand.

40:23-24. In controlling history God establishes **rulers** and removes them (cf. Dan. 2:21). This truth would have been comforting to Isaiah's original readers who were living under the threat of the Assyrian Empire and who heard his prophecy that the Babylonian Empire would take them into captivity.

40:25-26. God, who cannot be compared to anyone or anything (cf. v. 18; 46:5) knows everything about His Creation and sustains it. In His **strength** He created and also controls and sustains millions upon millions of stars, **each** one of which He, amazingly, has named (cf. Ps. 147:4). In Isaiah 40-66, God is frequently referred to as Creator and Maker, probably as a polemic against the lifeless idols of Babylon. He created the heavens, the earth, people, Israel, and darkness, and will create the new heavens and new earth.

Further words of comfort: God watches over His people (40:27-31)

Isaiah's readers were under the threat of Assyria. Years later Isaiah's readers during the Babylonian Captivity were under the domination of a godless empire. So Isaiah encouraged the people to remember that God never relaxes; He is always watching His people.

40:27. God's people should never think He has forgotten them. **Jacob** and **Israel** are synonyms for all 12 tribes. In chapters 40-49, Isaiah used these two words together 16 times (40:27; 41:8, 14; 42:24; 43:1, 22, 28; 44:1, 5, 21, 23; 45:4; 46:3; 48:1; 49:5-6). Though the people of the Northern Kingdom were already exiled to Assyria, **God** was still watching over the few believers who remained true to Him. His covenant people should never think God did not see or remember them.

40:28-31. On the question **Do you not know?** see [comments](#) on [verse 21](#). Since **God**, who unlike pagan idols is eternal and **the Creator**, never grows **weary** (v. 28) **He** can give **strength** to those who are **weary** or **weak** (vv. 29-31). Among Isaiah's original readers **those who hope in the LORD** were believers who remained faithful to God. They were the ones who would be restored. For his readers in captivity Isaiah was probably speaking of a national refreshing when the captives would be released and would return to their land. Even though in captivity they were **weary** the **LORD** would help them endure and **soar... like eagles**, to be uplifted emotionally and spiritually.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Isaiah 40 shifts from a prophecy of judgment to one of comfort for God's people. Comfort is assured through the promise of a coming day of deliverance and blessing, when repentant Israel is forgiven. But that promise of comfort is based on the character of the Comforter. A major portion of Isaiah 40 is given to describing the Lord, especially in contrast to human beings and the pathetic substitutes (idols) they offer in God's place. Our text is given as a reply to dispirited Israelites who felt the Lord had forgotten them and would not render to them the justice they longed for. Such thinking is unwarranted for anyone who knows God, and the Israelites had no excuse not to know what their God was like, as suggested by the questions: "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard?" The answer to the people's fears was a reminder of God's attributes and omnipotent works. He is the everlasting God. He is eternal, and His "existence cannot be measured by time" (McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, Detroit Baptist Seminary). As such, He is far above man and even time. He knows the future and controls it; thus His people need not be concerned that He will not bring justice. God is also the Lord, or Yahweh, the Self-existent One. God exists independent of anything and everything else. The source of His existence is within Himself. Consequently, those who look to Him depend on One who is dependent on no one but Himself. He is perfectly capable of keeping His promises, and He will do so. The text also identifies God as the Creator. The "ends of the earth" is an expression that indicates all things. As the Creator of everything that exists, He is infinitely more powerful than the greatest of humans. His creative power assures us that He does not become faint or tired. What He has promised to do, He will do, for nothing can exhaust Him or frustrate His plans. Finally, the text tells us that God is beyond the full comprehension, or understanding, of finite human beings. He is knowable because He has revealed Himself to man, but man cannot know everything there is to know about God. Such a God cannot be compared to any person or creation of mankind. And only such a God can grant us lasting and sure comfort in a chaotic, unjust, and seemingly senseless world. As W. E. Vine says, "Any of us who are tempted to despondency because of the pressure of adverse circumstances should lay hold of the facts which we have accepted by faith . . . the Creator of all things . . . has the same power at our disposal as He manifested in His creative acts.... He never suffers from overexertion; and since His understanding is infinite, He knows... all about us. Our most trying experiences ... are not only known to Him, but are under His absolute control" (*Isaiah: Prophecies, Promises, Warnings*, Zondervan).

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Over the years, some students of the Bible have proposed that someone other than the prophet Isaiah wrote chapters 40-66. This position is taken because the tone and focus shift significantly in Isaiah 40. Assyria, so prominent in the first 39 chapters, is no longer a threat to God's people; Babylon is the new menace (Isaiah 47:1-7; 48:14-22). There is also a greater emphasis in chapters 40-66 on promises of hope and a brighter future for God's people in contrast with the theme of judgment that is so prevalent in the previous chapters. The book's focus does shift somewhat in the later chapters, but that does not require a different author. C. S. Lewis wrote books that differed markedly from one another in style and content (compare *Mere Christianity* with *The*

Chronicles of Narnia series). But no one seriously suggests that these materials could not have been written by the same person. Furthermore, the New Testament cites passages from throughout the book of Isaiah and never attributes authorship to anyone other than Isaiah. Note especially John 12:37-41, where two passages from Isaiah are quoted, one from chapter 6 and the other from the supposedly different section in chapter 53. Yet John attributed both to the prophet Isaiah. The testimony of Scripture itself is clear: the book of Isaiah is singular in nature, and one prophet is its author.

Isaiah 40 begins with words of comfort to God's people, specifically to Jerusalem. The "hard service" that "has been completed" (v. 2) likely describes the captivity predicted in 39:5-7. God's people are to be released to return home. That will show that "her sin has been paid for" (40:2). But there is more in the future than just that homecoming. Isaiah 40:3 speaks of "a voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord.'" This is fulfilled in the person and work of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-3), whose ministry prepared for the coming of Jesus. Isaiah, who spoke prophetically of Jesus, then continued his Spirit-guided foreshadowings across the rest of his book. Some are the most stirring messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. Isaiah 53 is a prime example, and another will be seen in next week's lesson. As though responding to skeptics about whether his words would come to pass, the prophet offered in Isaiah 40 a passionate defense of God's uniqueness and power. If Isaiah's predictions seemed too good to be true, then perhaps his hearers needed to reevaluate their view of the God for whom Isaiah spoke. God was more than capable of doing everything his prophet said he would do.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Since the beginning of time, human beings have tried unsuccessfully to comprehend the fullness of God's nature. Using their finite and fallen minds, they have fashioned concepts and images they can somehow understand. Thus, it has been said that as God created man in His image, men have turned around and created gods in their image. They insisted that their deities must fit into their limited and distorted understanding. The multiplicity of gods came about because unregenerate men refuse to acknowledge a single divine Being. Separate deities have to be assigned to all the forces of nature and all the functions of life. Only as we study the Bible can we begin to appreciate the transcendence of the one true God. He reveals Himself there as the Creator of all and the sovereign Lord over His creation. As this week's lesson reveals, He concerns Himself with the heavens, the earth, and all the details of life therein. The foundation of any building is of utmost importance. We Christians need to understand that our God, as the sovereign Ruler, is the foundation of the physical universe, of the rulers of the earth, and of our lives. As our foundation, He "giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength" (Isa. 40:29). The theory of evolution is not just a false view of the beginning and development of life. It is an insidious, satanic philosophy designed to remove God from people's lives and thereby release them from any accountability to Him. Many of the problems we see in society today really have their roots in evolutionary dogma. This study exalts God as the Creator to whom all are accountable.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Foundation of Creation (Isaiah 40:21-22)

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?

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 out like a tent to dwell in.

Creation of the earth (21)

A creation that was accomplished by the Word of God (Ps 33:6-9)

6 By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. 7 He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses. 8 Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him. 9 For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

A creation where the Trinity was present (John 1:1-3)

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

A creation in which from one man God created every nation (Acts 17:22-28)

22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. 24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. 27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

A creation where God's invisible qualities are displayed (Rom 1:19-20)

19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

A creation that was done through Jesus (Heb 1:1-3)

1 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

A creation that was formed out of water (2 Peter 3:3-7)

3 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

A creation formed by the Will of God (Rev 4:11)

11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

Creation of inhabitants (22)

Even the animals know that God created them (Job 12:7-10)

7 "But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; 8 or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. 9 Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? 10 In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

Each animal had its own kind (Gen 7:14)

14 They had with them every wild animal according to its kind, all livestock according to their kinds, every creature that moves along the ground according to its kind and every bird according to its kind, everything with wings.

God made creatures both large and small (Ps 104:24-25)

24 How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. 25 There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number — living things both large and small.

Created man in the likeness of God (Gen 5:1)

5 This is the written account of Adam's line. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.

Created man in the image and glory of God (1 Cor 11:7)

7 A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.

Created man to do good works (Eph 2:10)

10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Foundation of Mankind (Isaiah 40:23-24)

23 He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless.

24 Scarcely shall they be planted, Scarcely shall they be sown, Scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, When He will also blow on them, And they will wither, And the whirlwind will take them away like stubble.

Mankind's rulers (23)

God directs the heart of all rulers (Prov 21:1)

21 The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.

God established all authorities (Rom 13:1)

13 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

The rulers of the earth belong to God (Ps 47:9)

9 The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted.

It is God's plans and purposes that all nations must perform (Ps 33:10-11)

10 The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. 11 But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

When a ruler's heart becomes arrogant, God knows how to humble him (Dan 5:18-21)

18 "O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. 19 Because of the high position he gave him, all the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. 20 But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. 21 He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes.

Mankind's weaknesses (24)

In man's weakness, God demonstrates His strength (1 Cor 1:25)

25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

It is God who provides physical strength (Ps 18:32)

32 It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.

Events can prove human weaknesses and pride (Mark 14:70-72)

70 Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." 71 He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about." 72 Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.

God's knows man's weaknesses (Luke 19:41-42)

41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 42 and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes.

In man's natural state they are weak (Rom 6:19)

19 I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.

Foundation of the Heavens (Isaiah 40:25-26)

25 "To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes on high, And see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might and the strength of His power; Not one is missing.

Control of the heavens (25)

God was the One who marked off the boundaries of the universe (Isa 40:12-14)

12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? 13 Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed him as his counselor? 14 Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?

Just as God told Job, He laid the earth's foundations (Job 38:4-5)

4 "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. 5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it?

By His strength God controls the heavens (Isa 40:26)

26 Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

God controls the heavens by stretching them out (Ps 104:2-3)

2 He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent 3 and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind.

Creation of the heavens (26)

God created just by the Word of His mouth (Ps 33:6)

6 By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.

God created the heavens in their array (Gen 2:1)

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

God created the heavens but they should not be worshipped (Deut 4:19)

19 And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars — all the heavenly array — do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping things the Lord your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.

By faith we understand that God created the universe (Heb 11:3)

3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

Foundation of Strength (Isaiah 40:27-31)

27 Why do you say, O Jacob, And speak, O Israel: "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God"?

28 Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, The Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable.

29 He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength.

30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall,

31 But those who wait on 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.

Strength that is eternal (27-28)

Eternal strength to fulfill His purposes (Ps 138:8)

8 The Lord will fulfill [his purpose] for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever — do not abandon the works of your hands.

Eternal strength to always work (John 5:17)

17 Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."

Eternal strength to complete His work in us (Phil 1:6)

6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Eternal strength through His everlasting arms (Deut 33:27)

27 The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemy before you, saying, 'Destroy him!'

Strength to the weak (29-30)

Strength to His people who are weak (Ps 29:11)

11 The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.

Strength to the weak through His righteous right hand (Isa 41:10)

10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Strength to the weak according to His glorious might (Col 1:11)

11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully

Strength to the weak to do all things (Phil 4:13)

13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Strength for those who wait (31)

Waiting to be made strong in heart (Ps 27:14)

14 Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

Waiting to be exalted by keeping His way (Ps 37:34)

34 Wait for the Lord and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see it.

Waiting for answered prayer (Ps 40:1)

40 I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry.

Waiting by putting our trust in God (Isa 8:17)

17 I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob. I will put my trust in him.

Waiting while seeking God and putting our hope in Him (Lam 3:25-26)

25 The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; 26 it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Thomas Constable

Verses 12-26

The incomparable Lord (40:12-26)

The preceding section answered the question that the people of Isaiah's day had about God's *desire* to deliver them. Yes, He *wanted* to deliver them. This section answered their question about whether He *could* save them. Yes, He *could* save them. Isaiah used the doctrine of God to assure the Judahites of their security and of God's faithfulness. He is the sole Creator, and He is infinitely greater than the created world. The passage has two parts (Isaiah 40:12-26), each introduced by several questions.

Verse 13-14

The questions in these verses call for the same response. God was not only alone in the work of creation, but He is alone in the wisdom needed to execute it (cf. Job 38:2 to Job 39:30).

"He who has measured the creation cannot be measured by the creation."

"In Babylonian mythology, the creator god Marduk could not proceed with creation without consulting "Ea, the all-wise", but the Lord works with unaided wisdom. In both Babylonian and Canaanite creation stories the creator must overcome opposing forces before the way opens for the work of creation."

The Spirit of the Lord was the executive of God in creation (cf. Genesis 1:2). It is very difficult to tell how much of the triune nature of the Godhead the ancient Israelites understood. In Jesus' day (and in ours) Jews resisted the idea that God exists in three persons, as do Moslems today. It is the New Testament that clarifies the relationships of the persons within the Trinity. In Old Testament times, monotheism as opposed to polytheism was the distinctive belief of the Jews and the emphasis of the prophets. The issue for them was not how many persons compose the Godhead. So when they read references to "the spirit of the Lord," they did not think of a Person in the Godhead who was distinct from the Father and the Son of Solomon, but of an aspect of God in a more general sense. Moslems also reject Trinitarianism.

We could interpret "Spirit" as the mind of the Lord (cf. Romans 11:34; 1 Corinthians 2:16). This is how the Septuagint translators rendered *ruah* here and in 1 Chronicles 28:12 and Ezekiel 20:32. It may refer to the volitional, effective, and cognitive aspects of God's intelligence, in other words, His inner workings. God alone saw to the heart of things in creation and made the correct decisions at the proper time. No one advised Him in His creation or in His administration of the world. Now His omniscience is in view.

Verses 15-17

The product as well as the process of creation reflect on God's immensity. He is larger than human collective strength, than the inanimate creation, than human worship, larger even than the totality of humankind. The creation is no challenge to the Creator. Now His sovereignty is in view.

Verse 18

The transcendent God (Heb. *"el"*) is incomparable; no one and nothing approaches Him in His greatness and glory.

Verse 19-20

How ridiculous, then, it is to practice idolatry (cf. Isaiah 41:6-7; Isaiah 44:9-20; Isaiah 46:5-7). Idols were likenesses of gods, but Yahweh is beyond compare. The value of an idol depended on the financial condition of the devotee. Idols are less impressive than the metals that people use to make them and less strong than the trees from which they fashion them. The best idols are immobile; they will not topple over (cf. 1 Samuel 5:2-5). But the living God is active in life, not just a product of the earth. Isaiah poured on the irony in these verses.

"Right now two idols dominate our world. One idol is enormous. The other is smaller but influential. The big idol is secularism. I mean not only naturalism as a technical philosophy but also a general outlook that makes man the measure of all things.... The other rival to God, the smaller idol, is alternative spiritualities.... Secularism and superstition-despite their obvious differences, they're both allied against the God who loves rationalists and pagans and is inviting them into his glorious kingdom with open arms. The door stands open to both atheists and witches and everyone in between."

Verse 21

There are lessons that people should draw from the uniqueness of God as Creator that He has revealed. God has given both the objective revelation of Himself and the ability to understand its implications to human beings. The Israelites possessed this knowledge of God because He revealed it to them. Special revelation is in view here rather than natural revelation.

"According to this verse there are two reasons why men who practice idolatry are without excuse. On the one hand, the very foundation of the earth is a testimony that God is the Creator. On the other, from the beginning the truth has been taught by word of mouth, so that those who have not been willing to hear it are without excuse [cf. Romans 1]."

Verses 21-26

The incomparable Sovereign (40:21-26)

The prophet's emphasis shifted from God as Creator to God as Ruler, but still the point is His incomparability.

Verse 22

The same God who created the world presides over its affairs. He creates history as well as the material universe. The "vault" or "circle" of the earth probably refers to the heavens above as people perceive them (cf. Job 22:14) or, perhaps, to the horizon (cf. Job 26:10; Proverbs 8:27). Isaiah was not revealing that the earth is round. God sits above them both. He is so great that people are as small as grasshoppers in comparison. The whole of the universe, the heavens and the earth, are as a tent to Him because He is so immense.

Verse 23-24

People of position and office, as well as the decision-makers of the world, may appear to wield power, but they are really under the enthroned God's authority. He can dispose of any human leader because He is over all of them. He can dispense with them just as easily as He can make flowers wither and blow chaff away (cf. Isaiah 40:6-8). He can reduce them to a state of comparative nothingness (Heb. *tohu*; cf. Genesis 1:2). Thus He is not only superior but sovereign. Furthermore, He is imminent as well as transcendent. God did not just create the world and then abandon it, as deism teaches.

Verse 25

This verse restates the question in Isaiah 40:18, but puts it in the mouth of God this time. Not only is God infinitely superior to anyone else-in power, Wisdom of Solomon, dignity, sovereignty, and authority-but, far more significantly, in His holiness. He is unattainable and unassailable in His moral perfections; He is wholly other.

Verse 26

The stars were objects of worship and signs of divine activity in Babylonian and Canaanite worship (cf. 2 Kings 17:16; 2 Kings 21:3). But they were only creations. The pagan cults assigned them names, but the Lord summons and directs them using their real names, the names that He as their sovereign assigns them. In the ancient world, to know the name of something was to know its essence and so to have power over it. Innumerable as they may be to humans, the Lord knows and controls each one of the heavenly bodies.

"Isaiah has insisted on the absolute transcendence of God: he is not part of the cosmos in any way, and the cosmos is not part of him [in contrast to pantheism and panentheism]. But to carry that line to its logical conclusion as Aristotle did is to end with a passionless, colorless force as the source of everything. It is to say that personality is an accident in time. Isaiah will not go that way. He insists on transcendence, but leaves no doubt that the Transcendent is a person with all that that means. When all is said and done, the combination of these two may be Israel's greatest contribution to human thought."

"Why does the glory of God sit lightly on believers today? It may be the fault of those of us who are preachers. Is our constant message to the people, "Behold your God"? Or have we changed the subject? We seem to have sunk to the level of quick-stop churches where God is expected to lubricate the vehicle of American selfishness."

Verse 27

The Judahites kept saying: "How can God do this to us? He has forgotten us and no longer cares about us." They questioned God's nature (He could not see them) and His dealings with them (He would not defend them).

Perhaps the double names "Jacob" and "Israel" are more than poetic synonyms. Isaiah may have been implying that the Judahites, God's covenant people, were in a position as desperate in their own eyes as was Jacob, when he came to the end of himself, and God changed his name (Genesis 32:22-32). This happened, they would remember, after his exile in Mesopotamia.

God is not too great to care. He is too great not to care (cf. Genesis 18:25).

Verses 27-31

The dependable Lord 40:27-31

Isaiah now applied this knowledge of God to the discouraging prospect that the Judahites faced, namely: Babylonian captivity (cf. Isaiah 39:6). Even though Isaiah spoke to the nation from the perspective of the captivity being past, he still addressed his pre-exilic contemporaries. He encouraged them by pointing to the sufficiency of their God. Since the Creator knows the name of everything in His complex creation, how could Hebrews, the God of Israel, possibly forget His covenant people? Since He is as powerful as He Isaiah, how could He be incapable of helping them?

Verse 28

The people needed to open their eyes and ears to what they already knew about their God (cf. Isaiah 40:21). He is eternal, not bound to the present, as we are. He is Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God. He is the Creator of all the earth, not restricted to only one locale at a time. He does not grow tired, because He is omnipotent. He is inscrutable, because He is omniscient. He is unlimited by time, space, power, and understanding.

"Their God is such (eternal, Creator, untiring) that they need never doubt his capacity; he is also such (possessing unfathomable wisdom) that they must never expect to understand all his ways."

"Everything that matters in life hangs on who God is."

Verse 29

God does not just possess all these qualities, but He shares His strength with those who need it. He has all energy, and He has energy to spare and to share. Whether we buckle under life's pressures or lack innate strength, He provides durable, stable power (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:9).

Verse 30-31

Circumstances may overcome even the strongest young people in their prime, either through lack of inner resources or because of the hardness of life. Yet those who continually rest on, trust in, and wait for Yahweh will receive renewed and different-divine-strength. The Hebrew verb translated "gain" suggests an exchange of strength, our inadequate strength for His abundant strength.

"This expression ["those who wait for the Lord"] implies two things: complete dependence on God and a willingness to allow him to decide the terms."

". . . the Old Testament applies to faith a number of synonyms denoting trust, hope, and longing, and thus describes it according to its inmost nature, as *fiducia* and as hope, directed to the manifestation and completion of that which is hoped for."

They who wait on the Lord will be able to overcome natural drawbacks, endure with energy to spare, and keep on living without becoming excessively tired.

"The threefold description forms a climax, not its opposite; for the exceptional flying and the occasional running do not require, as does the constant walking, an ever-flowing stream of grace."

(Adapted from URL:<http://www.studyight.org/commentaries/dcc/isaiah-40.html>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Adrenaline (also called epinephrine) is a hormone and a neurotransmitter produced by the body in response to stressful situations. Adrenaline production results in an additional burst of energy. Occasionally we hear of a person who lifts a car off of someone pinned beneath it, and adrenaline is the key to being able to do so. The rescuer, though not very big or strong, suddenly finds a rush of strength to accomplish the rescue. Today's lesson highlights what might be called spiritual adrenaline—the strength God provides to those who become weary and overwhelmed by circumstances. We all suffer the repercussions of life in a fallen world. Some suffer these more personally and painfully than others. But to all who become faint of heart and who feel they have no strength to continue, there is a strength available that is not their own. It is a strength that cannot be found in this world's resources. It is a strength that does not require any kind of self-help manual, surgical procedure, or dietary supplement. The requirement is merely to place one's hope in the Lord. Those who do, promised Isaiah, find the help they need. Whenever we study the book of Isaiah, we often focus on what he has to say about the messianic future, as in our first two lessons. But the prophet also has much to say about the messy present that people experience daily. Never forget that everything Isaiah says about the Lord in today's passage is still true.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. All creation pales in comparison to God's vastness (Isa. 40:21 -24)
2. There is no one who can compare to God (vs. 25)
3. God knows all creatures and people that have ever existed (vs. 26)
4. We should not doubt that God still cares about us even when life is very hard (vs. 27)
5. God's strength and power do not dissipate like ours (vs. 28)
6. God can give us strength when we become tired (vss. 29-30)
7. Patiently waiting on the Lord brings us strength (vs. 31)