

# ISAIAH LESSON 34

Now for the Good News<sup>a</sup>  
(Isaiah 40:1-31)

Isaiah 40:1-31 Revised Standard Version (RSV)

## God's People Are Comforted

**40** Comfort, comfort my people,

says your God<sup>b, c</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,

and cry to her

that her warfare is ended,

that her iniquity is pardoned,

that she has received from the Lord<sup>d</sup>'s hand

double for all her sins.<sup>e</sup>

<sup>3</sup> A voice cries:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,

Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.<sup>f</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up,

and every mountain and hill be made low;

the uneven ground shall become level,

and the rough places a plain.<sup>g</sup>

<sup>5</sup> And the glory<sup>h</sup> of the Lord shall be revealed,

and all flesh shall see it together,

for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."<sup>i</sup>

<sup>6</sup> A voice says, "Cry!"

And I<sup>j</sup> said, "What shall I cry?"

All flesh is grass,

and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.<sup>k</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades,

when<sup>l</sup> the breath of the Lord blows upon it;

surely the people is grass.<sup>m</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades;

but the word of our God will stand for ever.<sup>n</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Get you up to a high mountain,

O Zion, herald of good tidings;

lift up your voice with strength,

O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,

lift it up, fear not;

say to the cities of Judah,

"Behold your God!"<sup>o</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Behold, the Lord God<sup>p</sup> comes with might,

and his arm rules for him;

behold, his reward is with him,

and his recompense before him.<sup>q</sup>

<sup>11</sup> He will feed his flock like a shepherd,

he will gather the lambs in his arms,

he will carry them in his bosom,  
 and gently lead those that are with young.<sup>r</sup>  
 12 Who has measured the waters<sup>s</sup> in the hollow of his hand<sup>t</sup>  
 and marked off the heavens with a span,  
 enclosed<sup>u</sup> the dust of the earth in a measure  
 and weighed the mountains in scales  
 and the hills in a balance?<sup>v</sup>  
 13 Who has directed<sup>w</sup> the Spirit of the Lord<sup>x</sup>,  
 or as his counselor has instructed him?<sup>y</sup>  
 14 Whom did he consult for his enlightenment,  
 and who taught him the path of justice,  
 and taught him knowledge,  
 and showed him the way of understanding?<sup>z</sup>  
 15 Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket,  
 and are accounted as the dust on the scales;  
 behold, he takes up the isles<sup>aa</sup> like fine dust.<sup>bb</sup>  
 16 Lebanon would not suffice for fuel,  
 nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering.<sup>cc</sup>  
 17 All the nations are as nothing before him,  
 they are accounted by him as less<sup>dd</sup> than nothing and emptiness<sup>ee</sup>.<sup>ff</sup>  
 18 To whom then will you liken God<sup>gg</sup>,  
 or what likeness compare with him?<sup>hh</sup>  
 19 The idol!<sup>ii</sup> a workman casts it,  
 and a goldsmith overlays it with gold,  
 and casts for it silver chains.<sup>jj</sup>  
 20 He who is impoverished chooses for an offering  
 wood that will not rot;  
 he seeks out a skilful craftsman  
 to set up<sup>kk</sup> an image that will not move.<sup>ll</sup>  
 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?<sup>mmm</sup>  
 22 It is he who sits<sup>nn</sup> 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 dwell in;<sup>oo</sup>  
 23 who brings princes to nought,  
 and makes the rulers<sup>pp</sup> of the earth as nothing.<sup>qq</sup>  
 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.<sup>rr</sup>  
 25 To whom then will you compare me,  
 that I should be like him? says the Holy One.<sup>ss</sup>  
 26 Lift up your eyes on high and see:  
 who created these?  
 He who brings out their host by number,  
 calling them all by name;

by the greatness of his might,  
 and because he is strong in power  
 not one is missing.<sup>tt</sup>  
 27 Why do you say, O Jacob,  
 and speak, O Israel,  
 “My way is hid from the Lord,  
 and my right is disregarded<sup>uu</sup> by my God”?<sup>vv</sup>  
 28 Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
 The Lord is the everlasting<sup>ww</sup> God,  
 the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
 He does not faint or grow weary,  
 his understanding is unsearchable.<sup>xx</sup>  
 29 He gives power to the faint,  
 and to him who has no might he increases strength.<sup>yy</sup>  
 30 Even youths shall faint and be weary,  
 and young men shall fall exhausted;<sup>zz</sup>  
 31 but they who wait for<sup>aaa</sup> the Lord shall renew their strength,  
 they shall mount up with wings<sup>bbb</sup> like eagles,  
 they shall run and not be weary,  
 they shall walk and not faint.<sup>ccc</sup>

**Revised Standard Version (RSV)**

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<sup>a</sup> **Now for the Good News** – After Isaiah, Judah would have 100 years of ill-rule and trouble before finally falling to Babylon in 586 B.C. After that, there would be 70 years of exile until Babylon itself fell and its new Persian rulers permitted the Exiles to return to the Land in 538 B.C. The second half of Isaiah would include many words of comfort and hope for the Jewish people in their Exile. Chapters 40–55 are viewed by some scholars as having been written by Second Isaiah (or Deutero-Isaiah), an anonymous prophet living the end of the Babylonian Exile. Isaiah, who is named frequently in Chapters 1–39, does not appear in these chapters by name. The Assyrians, the great threat during the eighth century, hardly appear at all. The Jews are in Babylon, having been taken there by the victorious Babylonians. Cyrus, the Persian king, is named. He will defeat Babylon and release the Exiles. The Prophet, who sees this not as a happy circumstance but as part of God’s age-old plan, exhorts the Jews to resist the Babylonian religion and provides hope of an imminent return to Judah, where the Lord will again be acknowledged as King (Is 52:7). Because the Prophet proclaimed the triumph of Persia over Babylon, his message would have been considered seditious if written during the Exile. If it were composed during the Exile, it would likely explain why the collection would have circulated anonymously. Under this theory, these chapters were later appended to Isaiah 1–39 and considered the work of Isaiah or perhaps his disciples. However, if these chapters were first written and circulated during the later years of Exile, and if they contain the name of Babylon’s conqueror before the conquest, there would be no reason that the original Isaiah, author of Chapters 1-39, could not have predicted what would happen during the Exile as well. Indeed, since all of Isaiah, and particularly the second half, are considered to be a primary prophecy regarding the coming Messiah, there would be no reason to exclude the Isaiah of Chapters 1-39 as the author of the remainder of the Book merely because it speaks of events that were not known to Isaiah’s contemporaries. Nor does the mere fact that Isaiah himself, or Assyria, are not mentioned in these chapters dispositive since they were written about a later time period in which neither of these were actors. Whether written by Isaiah, Isaiah’s disciples or Second Isaiah, the author of these chapters works within the tradition of Isaiah and develops themes found in the earlier chapters, such as the holiness of the Lord (Is 6:1-8) and his lordship of history (Is 7:14, 14:24-27, 26:4). These chapters also develop other themes common in the Hebrew Scriptures, such as the Lord as Israel’s redeemer or deliverer (Ex 3:8, 6:6, 15:13, 18:8). Chapters 40-55 are frequently referred to as the Book of the Consolation of Israel and contain the so-called “Servant Songs” which Christians interpret as speaking of the coming Messiah. The initial chapters of this section also contain predictions concerning the role of Cyrus II (559-530 B.C.), the founder of the Persian Empire, in the return of the Exiles to the Land. Chapter 40 is about

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God's plan for His People and, in an echo of the first half of the Book, how they should trust the Lord, and His plan, for their salvation.

<sup>b</sup> **God - Elohim** (אֱלֹהִים), the plural form of the generic *el* (אֱל). See Note in the Introduction to this Study. **בְּאֱלֹהֵי** appears here and in verses 3, 8, 9 and 27.

<sup>c</sup> (1) Most commentators have interpreted the three Heralds of verses 1-11 as an announcement in or by those in the Council of Heaven of the coming end of suffering of God's people, the Jews, and of their release from Exile. **Comfort, comfort** (נַחַם, *nacham*, meaning comfort (Gn 5:29; Jb 2:11; Ps 23:4; Jr 16:7, 31:13; Zec 10:2) but also repent (Ex 13:7; Jb 42:6; Ps 90:13, 110:4; Jr 18:8-10; Jl 2:14)) are thus instructions to the three Heralds (Is 41:27). Thus, if the "voices" of verses 3 (presence), 6 (power) and 9 (proclamation) are members of the heavenly council addressing Zion, then verse 1 should be understood as the Lord addressing the council and instructing them to comfort Jerusalem and tell the people of Jerusalem that He is no longer angry at His people. It is also possible to translate the verse, as in the Vulgate, "Comfort, give comfort, O my people" (i.e., the Exiles are called to comfort Jerusalem). God, through His Prophet, reminds the Exiles that they are still His covenant people (Is 41:10-14, 41:27, 49:13-16; Gn 12:1-3; Ex 6:7, 19:4-6; Lv 26:12; Dt 26:17-19; Jr 11:5; Heb 6:17-18) and while there has been a time of punishment (Ezk 16:42), God will provide comfort (Is 3:10, 12:1, 51:12, 52:7-12, 57:15-19, 61:2, 62:11-12, 66:10-14; Ps 85:8; Zec 1:17) and restoration (Is 35:9-10, 51:3, 57:18; Jr 31:10-14; Zep 3:14-17). By repeating **comfort**, he emphasizes the meaning of the word (Is 6:3). This repetition is a common rhetorical device in Isaiah (Is 51:9, 51:17, 52:1, 57:14). If Isaiah 40-55 was written by Isaiah himself more or less contemporaneously with Chapters 38 and 39 (though perhaps collected and assembled later), the prospect of a future Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem described in Chapter 39 would have caused fear for the future of the Jewish people. Those who would experience this time of calamity would come to have a need for comfort, and an assurance that the distressing circumstances would end. The opening words of this chapter of Isaiah address that need. God, through His Messiah (Zec 9:9), is the ultimate comforter and His comfort allows us to comfort others (Is 51:12-13; Lk 2:25-32; 2Co 1:3-4; 1Th 4:18; 1Jn 4:19). **Says your God** (יֹאמַר אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, *amar elohim*) is a common formulation in all of Isaiah (Is 1:11, 1:18, 33:10, 40:1, 41:21, 66:9) but does not appear in the remainder of the Hebrew Scriptures.

<sup>d</sup> **Lord - Yahweh**, or **Jehovah** (יהוה, YHWH), written without vowel markings, unpronounced by Jews and referred to as the Tetragrammaton. See Note in the Introduction to this Study. **YHWH** appears here and in verses 3, 5 (twice), 7, 27, 28 and 31. It also appears combined with **Adonai** in verse 10 and **Ruach** in verse 13.

<sup>e</sup> (2) God instructs His Heralds to comfort, or speak (דָּבַר, *dabar*) from the heart (לֵב, *leb*, Is 12:1; 2Ch 30:22; Hag 1:13; Hos 2:14; Zec 1:13), to Jerusalem and tell her that her hard service (צָבָה, *tsaba*, meaning army, **warfare, hard service**, forced labor or struggle; Jb 7:1) and Exile are over (Is 14:3, 43:14; 2Ch 36:22-23; Zec 2:5-10) and that her sins (עֲוֹן, *avon*, meaning iniquity, guilt or sin) have been forgiven (רָצַח, *ratsah*, meaning accepted, approved, pleased, take pleasure; Is 6:7, 12:1, 33:24; Jr 29:11, 31:33-34). God had given (Is 35:4) Jerusalem **double** (כִּפְּלָה, *kephe*, meaning double or folded; Ex 22:7-8; Jb 42:10-12; Hag 2:9) for her sins (חַטָּאת, *chattath*, meaning both sin and sin offering; Is 53:5-6, 61:7; Zec 9:9-12). If double indicates that the punishment is double the sin, perhaps that is because the Jews had the Law and the Prophets and still did not understand (Lk 16:19-21; Rm 9:30-10:4, 10:14-21, 11:1-10). The Messiah declared from the Cross that with His death it was paid in full (Τετέλεσται, *tetelestai*; Is 53:11; Jn 19:30; Gal 4:4-6). Double may refer to the full and complete punishment for Jerusalem's sins, or perhaps that it has received a double portion of grace (Is 61:7; Jb 11:6; Jr 16:18; Mt 7:9-11; Lk 11:11-12; Rv 18:6). In order to end the Exile God will have to defeat the Babylonians (Is 13:11, 35:4, 41:11-13, 49:25, 54:15-17; Ps 102:13-28; Jr 17:18; Zec 1:15). Exile is pictured as a sort of penal servitude long enough to atone for Israel's sins (Lv 26:41-43; Jr 25:12; Lm 4:22; Dn 9:2, 9:12, 9:24-27, 11:35, 12:4-9; Ac 1:7; Rv 6:10-11) and to finally cure the Jews of idolatry (Is 27:9). Though they have rebelled against God, God speaks to them as to a lover (Is 51:19; Gn 34:3; Jdg 19:3; Song 2:11-13). Jerusalem had done nothing to deserve this mercy, which is a matter of God's grace (Is 43:25, 44:22; Ps 32:1; Zep 3:9; 1Co 6:9-11). Martin Luther commented, "God's people are those who need comfort because they have been wounded and terrified by the Law and they are an empty vessel capable of receiving comfort. Only those who are afflicted have comfort and are capable of it, because comfort means nothing unless there is a malady." The LXX reads, "Speak, you priests, to the heart of Jerusalem; comfort her, for her humiliation is accomplished, her sin is put away; for she has received of the Lord's hand double for her sins." The LXX focuses on the priests as those directed to provide comfort though no word for priest appears in the Hebrew. This would not preclude understanding the ones designated to give comfort to be the prophets, for there were times when priests functioned in that capacity (Jr 1:1; 2Ch 24:19-20). The question remains, however, whether those who will speak to Jerusalem are human beings (priests or prophets) or members of the Council of Heaven (Rv 11:15-18).

<sup>f</sup> (3) Verses 3-5, the **Herald of Presence** (Is 63:9; Mi 1:3), provide a description of the return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem (Zion). The language used here figuratively describes the road the exiles will take. The Lord Himself will come and lead them (Is 45:2-3, 46:3-4, 52:7-12; Dt 33:2; Pr 3:5-6; Ps 68:4-8), so their way lies straight across the wilderness or desert (עֲרָבָה, *arabah*, referring both to the name given to the sterile Jordan Valley where John the Baptist baptized the Messiah, and to deserts generally) rather than along the fertile crescent, well-watered routes usually followed from Mesopotamia to Israel. The

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Hebrew for the beginning of verse three allows for alternate understandings depending on whether the phrase “in the desert” describes the place from which the voice cries (e.g. KJV) or the place where the way of the Lord will be prepared (e.g. RSV, NIV). The LXX follows the former understanding reading, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight the paths of our God.” While most modern translations follow the latter examples, the influence of the KJV on classical music, such as Handel’s *Messiah*, make the former sound more familiar to us. There was a contemporaneous Babylonian hymn which speaks of making straight paths for the Babylonian god Nabu. Nabu was the patron deity of Borsippa, and the god of wisdom and writing. During the time of Isaiah and into the time of the Exile, Nabu is one of the most important Mesopotamian gods. Initially a minister of Marduk, he later becomes co-regent. Nabu sometimes appears in the Bible as Nebo (Is 46:1). In this time period, new or improved roads were often constructed for important events such as the arrival of a foreign dignitary, the return of a King in triumph or entry of a new idol being placed in a temple. Although the return of the Jews from Exile did not involve the building of any new roads through the desert, yet God prevailed upon the heart of the Persian King (Ezr 1:1) and led the way back to the Land (Is 11:15-16, 35:8; Ps 68:4). Metaphorically the “**Way of the Lord**” can refer to the process by which an individual follows the Lord’s plan for our lives, to the way in which we should approach unbelievers to make their coming to faith easier, or to the process by which the Lord will go about saving His people. The voice may be a Herald from the Council of Heaven (in light of verse 1), or Moses leading the people during the Exodus (in light of the Exodus imagery; Is 35:8; Jdg 5:4; Ps 68:7), or to the Prophet announcing the return of the Exiles from Babylon (given the context), or to all three. The Gospel writers apply the verse to **John the Baptist** preparing the Way of the Lord by preparing God’s people for the coming of the Messiah (Mal 3:1, 4:5-6), though no physical journey was involved (Mt 3:1-12; Mk 1:3; Lk 1:16-17, 1:76-79, 3:2-6; Jn 1:23). The Gospel writers followed the LXX in their quotations. The Prophet here clearly says, however, that the Lord is coming, and that we should all prepare (Mt 24:42-51, 25:1-13; Mk 13:32-37; Lk 12:35-36, 12:41-46, 12:39-40). The **Way of the Lord** (Is 42:16, 43:16-19, 48:17, 51:10) is a common reference in Isaiah. Just as God brought the Jews out of the desert in the Exodus, He will bring them out of the wilderness of Exile in Babylon (Is 11:15-16, 48:21; Jr 16:14-15, 31:2; Ezk 20:34-36; Mi 7:14-15), and ultimately He will bring His people to salvation through the Messiah (Sir 48:10), all by the grace of God. These images of God’s faithfulness during the Exodus, here and in other prophets (Is 4:5-6), teach the Jews to remain faithful and wait for the Lord during their Exile in Babylon.

<sup>g</sup> (4) This is a physical, or metaphorical, description of how the Way of the Lord will be made straight, as straight as the Roman roads that still remain in some parts of its old Empire. Valleys or ravines are raised by filling them (Is 57:14, 62:10-11; Zec 4:7). Mountains and hills would be lowered (Is 2:14, 49:11), uneven places would be made level (Ps 26:12), and rough places smoothed out to be like a plain (Is 45:2). Everything would be done to remove every obstacle that would hinder God from leading His repentant people to the Land (Is 2:12-15, 26:7, 42:15-16, 45:2, 43:19; Jr 31:9; Bar 5:7-9; Lk 2:27-32, 3:5-6), including raising up the lowly and bringing down the arrogant (1Sm 2:8; Jb 40:11-13; Ps 113:7-8; Ezk 17:24, 21:26; Lk 1:52-53, 18:14). Is likens this process to the process by which the Persian King Cyrus the Great is moved to conquer Babylon and release the Exiles (Is 45:13).

<sup>h</sup> The **Glory of the Lord** refers to the Lord’s presence. The Hebrew for **Glory** (כְּבוֹד, *kabod*, see also, אִי־כְבוֹד, *Ichabod*, meaning literally “no glory” referring to the capture of the Ark by the Philistines, 1Sm 4:21) is not the Hebrew *Shekinah* which does not itself appear in the Hebrew Scriptures but which derives from Hebrew for dwell or rest (שָׁכַן, *shakan*) which is used in the Scriptures in passages that speak of where the Lord would rest or abide. *Shekinah* first appears in reference to the Glory of God in the *Targumim*, Rabbinic paraphrases or amplifications of the Hebrew Scriptures which were initially oral during the 1<sup>st</sup> Century B.C. and then written down beginning in the late 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D. The LXX uses a word associated with God’s intrinsic worth (δόξα, *doxa*). This Greek word is frequently used in the Messianic Writings in contexts indicating that it referred to the Shekinah Glory (e.g. Mt 4:8, 6:29, 16:27, 24:30, 25:31; Mk 8:38, 13:26; Lk 2:9, 9:26, 24:26; Jn 1:14, 17:24; Ac 7:55; Rm 1:23, 6:4, 9:4, 9:23; 1Co 10:31; Phil 2:11; Rv 1:6, 5:12-13, 15:8, 18:1, 21:11, 21:23-24). The Glory of the Lord had a real presence among Israel and Judah (Ex 40:34-38; 1Ki 8:10-12; 2Ch 5:14, 7:1-3; Ezk 8:4, 10:18-19, 43:1-5).

<sup>i</sup> (5) The **Glory of the Lord** was present in the cloudy and fiery pillars of the Exodus (Ex 13:21, 16:7-10), the Tent of the Tabernacle (Ex 40:34-38), and in the Temple (Is 4:5, 6:3; 2Ch 5:14; 1Ki 8:10-11; 2Ch 7:3; Ezk 43:1-5). Moses saw the reflection of the Glory of the Lord while hiding in a cleft in the rock (Ex 24:16, 33:17-23). Isaiah saw the Glory of the Lord in a vision (Is 6:1-5; Jn 12:41) at the beginning of his ministry. God’s purpose is revealed to be make Himself known to “all flesh”, that is, all people (Is 11:9, 35:2, 49:6, 49:26, 52:10, 60:1-3, 66:16, 66:23-24; Nu 14:21; Ps 72:19, 97:6; Jr 32:27; Hab 2:14; Jl 2:28; Lk 2:30-32, 3:4-6; Jn 17:2; Ac 2:17; 2Co 3:18; Heb 1:3). While in early times the Glory of the Lord was thought to be His visible presence among us (Is 58:8; Ps 96:6, 102:16; Rv 21:23), it should really be interpreted to include the visible presence of the Messiah (Is 60:1; Lk 2:10-14; Jn 1:14, 14:9; 2Co 4:6) who was in all respects fully man, and fully God (Heb 2:16-18). And through the Son, God’s true Glory (Mt 25:31-32), that He will Himself provide salvation, by Grace, to all Nations through His Messiah (Zec 2:13), will be revealed to all men at the same time. The true Glory of the Lord is not in His Creation, or the visible manifestations of God, but in His Character and His Grace to have sent His son for our salvation. God will reveal His glory by the **Mouth of the Lord** (Is 1:20, 34:16, 58:14, 62:2; Jr 9:12; Mi 4:4). The LXX reads, “And the glory of the Lord shall appear, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God; for the Lord has spoken it.”

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<sup>j</sup> 1QIsaa and LXX read “I”; MT reads “he.” **Cry out** may be a command to proclaim a message or, following the *Targum of Isaiah*, to prophesy. The verb is second person singular, thus grammatically directed to Isaiah. In the LXX and 1QIsaa, Isaiah is the one who responds “I said” and corresponding to the question, “What shall I cry out?”

<sup>k</sup> (6) Quoted in 1Pt 1:24. The **Second Herald**, of **Power** (Is 29:5-6), now cries out (Is 12:6, 58:1; Jr 2:2, 31:6; Hos 5:8; Zec 1:14) to the Prophet who asks for and receives clear directions for the mission entrusted to him (Is 6:8-13, Jr 1:4-10; Ezk 1-2). This Herald declares that while men, and indeed all creation, will come and go (Gn 6:3; Ps 90:5-6, 92:7, 102:11), God’s Word remains forever (1Pt 1:24-25). Some have suggested that the withering grass may refer particularly to the demise of the Babylonian Empire at the hands of the Persians, but it would seem to apply to all of mankind, unable to save itself and like grass (Is 51:12; Jb 14:2; Sir 14:18; Jas 1:10) that grows and then dies and blows away. We cannot even control what happens in our own lives. **Beauty**, (תְּהִלָּה, *chesed*) or sometimes glory as in the LXX (δόξα, *doxa*), could also be translated favor (Est 2:17; Jb 10:12; Dn 1:9), goodness (2Ch 32:32, 35:26; Neh 13:14), kindness (Gn 20:13, 40:14; Jos 2:12; Jdg 1:24, 8:35; Ruth 2:20, 3:10; 1Sm 15:6; 2Sm 9:1-7; 2Ch 24:22; Ps 141:5; Pr 31:26), loyalty (Gn 21:23; 1Sm 20:14-15; 2Sm 2:5-6, 3:8, 10:2, 16:17; 1Ki 2:7; 1Ch 19:2; Pr 19:22; Jr 2:2), and mercy (Ps 23:6; Mi 6:8; Zec 7:9), most often in connection with **God’s lovingkindness, steadfast love and mercy** (Is 54:8-10, 63:7; Gn 24:12-14, 24:27; Ex 34:6; Nu 14:18-19; 1Ki 3:6; Neh 9:17; Ps 25:6, 31:21, 33:5, 89:49, 107:8, 107:15, 107:21, 107:31, 117:2, 119:76; Jl 2:13; Jnh 4:2). Comparing men to blades of grass is a common image in Scripture (Is 27:37; Jb 8:12; Ps 37:2; Ps 103:15-16; Jas 1:10-11; 1Pt 1:24-25). The *Targum of Isaiah* interprets the crying out to be prophesying, with the one responding to the imperative asking, “What shall I prophesy?” This is followed by a message concerning the wicked. They are like grass and their strength is like the blossom of the field. The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Article III, Section 39, states in part, “AND IN THE LORD’S PRAYER THE SAINTS ASK FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. THEREFORE EVEN THE SAINTS HAVE GUILT AND SINS. AGAIN, IN NUM. 14:18: THE INNOCENT WILL NOT BE INNOCENT. AND ZECHARIAH 2:13, SAYS: BE SILENT O ALL FLESH, BEFORE THE LORD. AND ISAIAH 40:6-7: ALL FLESH IS GRASS, I.E., FLESH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE FLESH CANNOT ENDURE THE JUDGMENT OF GOD.”

<sup>l</sup> **When**, or because (כִּי, *ki*).

<sup>m</sup> (7) The **breath**, or Spirit (רוּחַ, *ruach*) of the Lord is active in mortality (Gn 3:19). It is usually a life-giving force (Gn 2:7; Ps 104:30; Ezk 37:1-6; Jn 20:22), but here is a destructive one (Is 11:4, 40:24; Ex 15:10; Jb 4:9, 41:21; Ezk 22:21). Even today there is in Israel a hot, dry wind, called *Hamsin*, that comes in May and can turn green pasture into desert. Since all men die and fade away (Jb 8:12, 14:2; Ps 90:5-6, 103:16; Jas 1:10-11), only God is trustworthy. We can never make a promise that we know we can keep because circumstances may intervene to prevent us from doing so. Only God will always keep His promises. This verse appears to be absent in the LXX. The *Lutheran Large Catechism*, Sec. 100 reads, “WE HAVE NOW HEARD ENOUGH WHAT TOIL AND LABOR IS REQUIRED TO RETAIN ALL THAT FOR WHICH WE PRAY, AND TO PERSEVERE THEREIN, WHICH, HOWEVER, IS NOT ACHIEVED WITHOUT INFIRMITIES AND STUMBLING. BESIDES, ALTHOUGH WE HAVE RECEIVED FORGIVENESS AND A GOOD CONSCIENCE AND ARE ENTIRELY ACQUITTED, YET IS OUR LIFE OF SUCH A NATURE THAT ONE STANDS TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW FALLS. THEREFORE, EVEN THOUGH WE BE GODLY NOW AND STAND BEFORE GOD WITH A GOOD CONSCIENCE, WE MUST PRAY AGAIN THAT HE WOULD NOT SUFFER US TO RELAPSE AND YIELD TO TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS.”

<sup>n</sup> (8) Quoted in 1Pt 1:25. Unlike everything else which will pass away (Is 51:12; Jb 14:1-2; Ps 37:2, 90:5, 103:15; Jas 10:10-11), **God’s Word**, Incarnate and Written (Mt 5:18; Mk 13:31; Lk 21:33), will remain forever (Is 55:10-11, 59:21; Pr 19:21; Ps 103:15-17, 119:89; Jr 39:16; 2Tm 3:16; 1Pt 1:24-25). In contrast to men who will be destroyed by God’s destructive breath, every word of Scripture is inspired (literally, God-breathed, θεόπνευστος, *theopneustos*) and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2Tm 3:16).

<sup>o</sup> (9) The **Third Herald** comes **Proclaiming Good tidings**, that is, good news (the Gospel, εὐαγγέλιον, *euaggelion*; Mt 4:23, 26:13; Mk 1:1, 1:15, 8:35, 13:10, 14:9, 16:15; Ac 20:24; Rm 1:1, 1:16, 10:16, 11:28; 1Co 9:12) in the immediate future of restoration to the Land, and ultimately to the coming of Messiah. Verses 9-11 are an announcement to Zion that God will again rule over Israel as a Good Shepherd. Alternatively, “Zion, bringer of good tidings/Go up on a high Mountain/Jerusalem, bringer of good tidings . . .” Thus, in this alternative reading, Zion becomes the bringer of the Good News, the Third Herald, rather than its recipient, bringing the news to the nations. This reading would not fit as well with vs. 1-2 in which Zion is the hearer, not the speaker of the comforting words. It would, however, fit with the idea of good news coming from the Jews to the Nations (Gn 12:1-3; Lk 24:37; Ac 1:8, 13:46). The focus of the verse is upon the coming of God in visible form, that is, the coming of the Messiah. We are the voice that should proclaim that the King is coming, and that sin is forgiven. We should do it boldly from the mountaintop. This theme of the proclamation of the good news occurs elsewhere in Second Isaiah; cf. also 41:27; 52:7. Is 1:1, 7:7-9, 25:9, 35:2, 41:27, 44:26-28, 52:7-10, 61:1; Ps 102:14, 119:89; Ezk 34; Na 1:15; Hos 2:16; Mt 24:35; Jn 1:1; Ac 13:32; Rm 10:15; 1Co 15:1-4; Jas 2:13.

<sup>p</sup> **Lord God** - *Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי) *Yahweh*, or *Jehovah*, (יהוה, YHWH) combines the plural form of lord or master with the Tetragrammaton. See note on the Names of God in the introduction to this Study.

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<sup>q</sup> (10) The **Arm of the Lord**, that is the Lord acting with power, makes its first appearance in Egypt, delivering the people from bondage (). **Recompense** refers to the wages of retribution to the Godless and blessing to the faithful. Is 9:6-7, 28:2, 30:30, 33:2, 35:4, 48:14, 51:5-9, 52:10, 53:1, 59:16-20, 62:8, 62:11, 63:5, 63:12; Ps 44:3; Mt 21:5; Lk 11:22; Rm 2:6; Rv 22:7, 22:12.

<sup>r</sup> (11) God, and His Messiah, are often pictured as a shepherd caring for His people and guiding His flock (Ps 23; Lk 1:52; Jn 10:3-4, 10:11; Heb 13:20; 1Pt 5:4). Here, in verses 10 and 11, He is pictured as both shepherd and warrior, lion and lamb (Rv 5:1-12). Both aspects of God, his justice and his mercy (Mi 6:8), are essential. Is 49:9-10, 53:6-7, 63:11; Gn 22:2-8, 33:13, 48:15, 49:9-10; Nu 11:12; Dt 26:19, 30:4, 32:11; 2Sm 5:2, 7:7; Ps 28:9; Jr 23:1-6, 31:10; Ezk 24:23, 34:1, 34:12-14, 34:23, 34:31, 37:24; Zec 11:7; Mi 5:4; Mt 18:12-14; Lk 15:5; Jn 1:29, 10:10-18, 21:15; Ac 20:28; 1Co 5:7; 1Pt 1:19; Rv 14:1-3, 17:14, 19:7, 19:15, 21:22-27.

<sup>s</sup> DSS reads waters of the sea

<sup>t</sup> Span is the distance between the tip of the thumb and the tip of the pinky finger (?) or a half-cubit, being about 9 inches.

<sup>u</sup> Enclosed, or contained or comprehended () the dust of the earth.

<sup>v</sup> (12) Verses 12-31 emphasize the otherness, the power, of God over Creation. If God can do all, and be all, this, then he can certainly bring about the salvation of mere humans. So trust in the Lord, essentially a reiteration of the lesson of Chapters 1-39. Verse 12 is a series of merisms (water/land, heaven/earth) asking the question, who is like God? The implicit answer is “the hand of the Lord” (v. 2). Waters...heavens...earth: together form the universe; cf. Gn 1:1-2. Span: the distance between the extended little finger and the thumb. Fingers: lit., “three fingers” (i.e., thumb, index, and middle). In verses 12-31 Isaiah describes many of the attributes of God including His creative power, His Providence, and His Presence to help in times of trouble. The contrast between God’s greatness and human weakness is a frequent theme in the Wisdom literature (Jb 28, 38-39; Pr 8:22-30) though it is usually ascribed to the Wisdom of God specifically (Jb 28:23-27; Pr 8:22-31; Sir 1:1-3). Metaphorically, the Universe itself is small when compared with God. Even though omnipotent, God also cares for each of us individually. Even inspired by the Holy Spirit, Isaiah’s description of God is limited by our language and limited understanding. The Westminster Confession (1647) Sec. 6.012 states, “God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them: he is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom, are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest; his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature; so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them.” Is 48:3, 48:12-13; Jb 12:15, 28:23-27, 38:4-11, 38:18; Pr 16:11, 30:4; Ps 19:1, 102:25-26; Wis 11:20; Heb 1:10-12.

<sup>w</sup> Directed, literally measured or marked off () the Spirit of the Lord.

<sup>x</sup> **Spirit - Ruach** (רוּחַ) usually translated as **Spirit**, can mean spirit, wind or breath. It is here combined with the Tetragrammaton for the equivalent of “Holy Spirit”. See Note on the Names of God in the Introduction to this Study.

<sup>y</sup> (13) Verses 13 and 14 ask who did God need to help him create the heavens and the earth (Gn 1) and are an implied comparison to the Babylonian God Marduk who required help and advice from Nabu when he supposedly created the earth (see note on verse 3 above). Is 41:28; Jb 15:8, 38:1-11; Jr 23:18; Wis 9:13; Rm 11:34; 1Co 2:16.

<sup>z</sup> (14) Is 55:9; Jb 12:13, 21:22, 34:13, 36:22-26, 38:4; Pr 8:22-31; Jr 23:18; Col 2:3.

<sup>aa</sup> Isles, or coastlands ().

<sup>bb</sup> (15) Verses 15-17 say that, compared with God, the nations are nothing. This does not say people are not valuable, but God is the source of life for all people who would not exist apart from God. This is the God who will get the Jews out of Exile. Drop...wisp of cloud...a speck: the smallest constituent parts of the cosmic waters, heavens, and earth mentioned in v. 12. God is sovereign over all the Nations (Heb), including Babylon, who are like the proverbial drop in the bucket. Islands are frequently equated with the nations here and elsewhere in Isaiah (Heb & cites)). Is 2:6-22, 17:13, 29:5, 41:1; Dt 9:21; Ps 62:9; Jr 10:10; Sir 10:16-17; Wis 11:22.

<sup>cc</sup> (16) Lebanon...fuel: the famed cedars would not be enough to keep the fires of sacrifice burning. Is 33:9, 37:24; Ps 50:9-11; Mi 6:6-7; Heb 10:5-9.

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<sup>dd</sup> Less than is omitted in some manuscripts.

<sup>ee</sup> Emptiness, meaningless or void (). Greek for void?

<sup>ff</sup> (17) Less than nothing (tohu). This verse expresses the incomparability of the true God (Is 25:1) which forms the basis for the prohibition of images of the Divine in the Decalogue and later. Verses 19-20 may have been inserted later and are continued at 41:6-7 concerning the making of idols (c.f. the long addition at 44:9-20). Nonetheless, polemics against non-Yahwist gods for a common theme in the second part of Isaiah (Is 41:21, 42:8, 42:17, 45:16-20, 46:5-7). Is 29:7, 30:28, 34:11, 37:19, 41:12; Gn 1:2; Jb 12:19; Ps 29:5-11, 62:9, 115:3-8; Jr 10:1-6, 51:15-19; Dn 4:32-35; Bar 6; Wis 13:11-15.

<sup>gg</sup> **God - El (אל)**, the singular form of **Elohim (אלהים)** most often used of gods other than the One True God but here referring to the latter. See Note on the Names of God in the Introduction to this Study.

<sup>hh</sup> (18) To whom can you liken God (verses 18-20), certainly not an idol. There is irony in this question. Pieces of wood, no matter how well crafted, cannot do anything by themselves. Look on the Jewish translation again here. Isaiah is goofing on the pagans. Idolatry creates, at best, art. At worst it is foolishness, and ultimately sin. It is a rejection of the truth of God (Rm 1). God is not jealous because of His ego, or because He needs our worship. Rather, He knows that worshipping idols will lead us down dark and dangerous paths which will not be for our good. Isaiah speaks against idolatry which will continue to be a problem for the Jews until the Exile. The Babylonians, however, among whom the Jews would dwell, did practice forms of idolatry. The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) contains the following question and answer: “Q. What is God’s will for us in the second commandment? A. That we in no way make any image of God [Is 40:18] nor worship him in any other way than has been commanded in God’s Word.” Is 40:18, 40:25, 41:6-7, 41:29, 42:17, 43:10, 44:9-20, 45:16, 45:20, 46:1-7; Ex 8:10, 15:11; Dt 4:15; 1Sm 2:2; Jr 10:1-10; Hos 13:2; Mi 7:18; Ac 17:29.

<sup>ii</sup> Idol, or literally graven image (), here and in verse 20.

<sup>jj</sup> (19) The jealousy of God for us to worship and trust only Him does not come from God’s ego, and need for our worship, but from His concern for us, because the worship of idols can lead us down wrong paths and to destruction. Chains: needed to hold the idol steady when carried in processions; cf. v. 20; Jer 10:4. Is 2:20, 30:22, 31:7, 37:19, 41:6-7, 42:17, 44:9-20, 46:1-2, 46:6; Ex 20:4; Ps 115:3-8; Jr 2:8, 2:28, 10:1-19, 51:15-19; Hos 13:2; Hab 2:18-19; Zec 10:2; Wis 13:11-19; Bar 6.

<sup>kk</sup> Set up, or prepare ().

<sup>ll</sup> (20) The Prophets treated idolatry as sin (), but also as foolishness (Is 41:6-7, 44:9-20, 46:5-7; Hos 13:2). The Westminster Larger Catechism (1647) contains the following question and answer, “Q. 7. What is God? A. God is a Spirit, in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty; knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.” 1Sm 5:3-4, 12:21; 1Ki 18:27-29; Jr 10:3-5; Ac 17:19-31.

<sup>mmm</sup> (21) Don’t you know this people? Go out and look at the sky, at Creation, and see God’s handiwork. We can’t do that. Only God (Rm 1). Isaiah is asking rhetorical questions and recapitulates the sense of verses 12-20. His description of the Heavens can be contrasted with that in Gn 1:1-31. Is 37:26, 41:22, 42:9, 44:8, 48:3-5, 48:13, 51:13, 55:13; Gn 1:1; 2Ki 19:25; Ps 19:1, 37:26, 48:13, 50:6, 51:13; Lk 1:70; Ac 14:17; Rm 1:19-20.

<sup>nn</sup> Sits, or is enthroned () above the heavens.

<sup>oo</sup> (22) God is not only the God of geography, but also the God of politics and monarchy. He rules the nations along with the natural world. At this time most did not consider that the Earth was round, but thought it flat. The Lord is also the Ruler of the Universe, controlling the princes of this world from above the “**Circle of the Earth**” (, also translated as “vault”). The Hebrew allows the concept that the World is a sphere. Grasshoppers, see Nu 13:33. The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) contains the following question and answer, “Q. 4. What is God? A. God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” Is 37:16, 42:5, 44:24, 48:13; Gn 1:1, 1:8; Nu 13:33; 2Ch 6:18; Jb 9:8, 12:21, 22:14, 26:7, 36:29; Pr 8:27; Ps 2:4, 18:11, 19:4, 104:2; Dn 4:32; Heb 8:1-2.

<sup>pp</sup> Rulers, or judges () become nothing, or meaningless or void (). Is 24:10, 45:18; Jb 26:7.

<sup>qq</sup> (23) Is 5:21, 34:12; Jb 12:18-21, 34:18-19; Ps 107:40; Jr 25:18-27; Am 2:3.

<sup>rr</sup> (24) Scarcely is literally “not even” (). Is 11:4, 17:13-14, 41:2, 41:16, 64:6; 2Sm 22:16; Jb 5:3, 8:12, 18:16, 24:24; Ps 1:4, 2:2-5, 83:13; Ezk 17:10, 17:24; Nah 1:4.



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<sup>ss</sup> (25) The preceding verses bring the poem to this point in verses 25-26. No one can count the stars, but God made them, and makes them appear every day at their appointed place, calling each by name. They are not deities, but creations. God's infinite creative ability is equaled by His ability to watch over each person individually. One of the great problems of modern Judaism is that God is seen as transcendent and unable to get into our individual problems. But the Messiah demonstrates that He is not only transcendent, but also incarnate and down to Earth. No person or thing can be compared to God. The Holy One is one of Isaiah's most common references to God (Is 1:4, 5:19, 10:17, 29:19, 43:5, 55:5) Is 6:3, 37:23, 45:5, 46:5; 1Sm 2:2; 1Ch 16:25; Ac 17:29.

<sup>tt</sup> (26) Created: see note on Gn 1:1-2:3. By name: for he is their Creator. In addition to being sovereign of the nations, and ruler of the princes of this world, God also controls the stars in the sky. Many ancient peoples viewed the stars as visible representations of gods and other supernatural beings (2Ki 17:16, 21:3; Am 5:26) but Isaiah suggests that they are better viewed as part of God's creation. The stars, forming the hosts of heaven (Is 34:4; Dt 17:3; 2Ki 17:16; Jr 8:2) were regarded in Babylon as divinities. The Hebrew here for create ( ) is used almost exclusively in Gn 1 and in these chapters of Isaiah (Is 40:28, 41:20, 42:5, 43:7, 43:15, 45:7-8, 45:18, 54:16). Is 6:3, 34:16, 42:5, 45:24, 48:12-13, 51:6, 66:2; Gn 15:5; 1Sm 1:3; 2Ki 17:16; Neh 9:6; Jb 9:4, 38:32; Ps 89:11-13, 147:4-5; Bar 3:34-35; Eph 1:19.

<sup>uu</sup> Disregarded, literally passes by ( ).

<sup>vv</sup> (27) The question is why are you complaining when this great God has not answered your prayers when and how you want them answered. He is ready to fix your problem at the right time in His plan. You need to go back to what you know already about God, and all your objections will be refuted. God's ways are inscrutable (Romans on election). We just need to trust. God puts us in our place for complaining about our "light and momentary sufferings" which only bring us eternal Glory in His benevolence. In verses 27-31 Isaiah puts the troubles of Israel in perspective by showing God as the God of all nations rather than just a national God of Israel. Notwithstanding God's great power and glory, and Judah's complaints, He is not too great to care about each of us individually. God's promises may have seemed meaningless to the Jews during this period because of the difficult conditions under which they were required to live in Exile. But the complaints show a lack of faith. 40:27-28 The exiles, here called Jacob-Israel (Gn 32:29), must not give way to discouragement: their Lord is the eternal God. Is 7:13, 25:1, 49:4, 49:14-16, 54:8; Jb 6:29, 27:2, 34:5; Ezk 37:11; Lk 18:7-8; Rm 11:34.

<sup>ww</sup> **Everlasting** [God] - *Olam* (עוֹלָם) YHWH or *El Olam*, from a root indicating both ancient and perpetual and used to emphasize the eternal, unchanging nature of God.

<sup>xx</sup> (28) God's plans for His people do not unfold as we necessarily would think or desire. Is 37:16, 40:21, 42:5, 44:12; Gn 21:33; Dt 33:27; Ps 90:2, 121:4, 147:5; Rm 11:33.

<sup>yy</sup> (29) Wait/Trust in the Lord. (same Hebrew word) God's glory will come if you trust in Him. God Himself is coming to save you from Exile (both real and metaphorical as we are in exile on the Earth waiting to be brought home). God gives power to those who wait on or hope in Him. In times of trouble we all grow weary and sometimes believe that we cannot go on. Yet if we trust in God, our strength can be restored. Is 41:10, 50:4, 57:19; Gn 18:14; Ps 68:35, 119:28; Jr 31:25.

<sup>zz</sup> (30) Is 5:27, 9:17; Ps 20:8; Jr 6:11, 9:21.

<sup>aaa</sup> Wait for, literally hope in ( ).

<sup>bbb</sup> Mount up with wings, literally sprout wings ( ).

<sup>ccc</sup> (31) Wait and hope come from the same Hebrew root. Those who wait for the Lord will exchange their own weakness for the strength of God. The Lutheran Large Confession, Sec. 105 states, "Great and grievous, indeed, are these dangers and temptations which every Christian must bear, even though each one were alone by himself, so that every hour that we are in this vile life where we are attacked on all sides, chased and hunted down, we are moved to cry out and to pray that God would not suffer us to become weary and faint and to relapse into sin, shame, and unbelief. For otherwise it is impossible to overcome even the least temptation." Is 8:17, 30:18, 49:23, 64:4; Ex 19:4; Dt 32:11; 1Sm 2:4; 2Ki 6:33; Jb 17:9; Ps 37:9, 40:1, 103:5; Lk 18:1; 2Co 4:1, 4:8-10, 4:16, 12:9; Gal 6:9; Heb 12:1-3.