

Great is our God!

Isaiah 40

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**BIG BEND
BIBLE
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Isaiah 40:15-26 – Greatness Compared (NIV)

¹⁵ Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. ¹⁶ Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.

¹⁷ Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing.

¹⁸ With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken him? ¹⁹ As for an idol, a metalworker casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. ²⁰ A person too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot;

they look for a skilled worker to set up an idol that will not topple. ²¹ Do you not know? Have you not heard?

Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? ²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

²³ He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. ²⁴ No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. ²⁵ “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.

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

v15 – How great are the nations in comparison to God?

Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket: The glory of a powerful nation might be displayed in a huge military parade. But compared to God, it is nothing. The greatest glory of the greatest nation is as a drop in a bucket compared to the greatness and glory of the Lord GOD.

v16 – How does man’s efforts to satisfy God compare to His glory?

Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering: If man were to take all the wood in the mighty forests of Lebanon and use it to make a burnt

offering of all the animals of the land, it would not be enough to satisfy God. Man’s best efforts cannot satisfy the honor and glory of God.

v17 – What does God count as less than nothing and worthless?

In this chapter, God declares His greatness over all creation, but He never says of creation that it is less than nothing and worthless. But the nations have an arrogance, a pride against God that puts them lower than creation itself — He accounts them less than nothing and worthless.

v18 – What do people compare to God?

What likeness will you compare to Him? There are many likenesses that represent the gods of the nations. How do they compare to God? They don’t compare at all, because they are only the work of men’s hands (*the workman molds an image*, v19).

Today, people have many idols they make greater than God: the government, science, collective human effort, etc.

v19 – Why did ancient people worship little man-made statues that represented their gods?

God made us with a need to worship Him so people are compelled to worship something. The statues gave people who don’t know the Creator-God an object to worship.

Why have unbelievers mostly abandoned statues as objects of worship during modern times?

The idol statues are obviously worthless. And people today consider themselves too sophisticated and advanced to need objects to worship. The growth of secular humanism has given rise to the idea that people need not worship anyone other than themselves. Yet people still replace God with something that they worship whether they admit it or not.

v20 – What must the creators of objects of worship do?

To prepare a carved image that will not totter: The empty images that are the idols of the nations are so insignificant that they must be made so that they will not totter. They can’t even stand up on their own! God has no rivals.

Do idols require a lot of our attention?

Yes, they do so by nature... Look at the care you have to give to your idols:

- First, you have to choose good wood, because who wants to worship a rotting god?
- Then you must choose a skilled workman because who wants to worship a poorly made god?
- Then it has to be well designed because who wants to worship a god that keeps falling over?

Whenever Isaiah speaks about idolatry, he cannot keep from using the most cutting mockery.

v21 – Why would anyone doubt the greatness of God?

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Isaiah can't believe that anyone could doubt the greatness of God when they see the glory of God's creation. First, He sits above all creation (*It is He who sits above the circle of the earth*). Second, He created it all (*Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain*).

How does creation reveal God's greatness?

Psalm 19:1 – *The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.*

The fact that the heavens have order despite the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics (entropy naturally increases; the natural trend is toward an increase in randomness – unordered).

- Anthropic Principle: the universe is designed for life.
- Living things have irreducible complexity which is powerful evidence of design.

v22 – What is the circle of the earth?

The earth seen from space looks like a circle... a sphere in two dimensions. How could Isaiah possibly know that the earth's shape was a circle? It was God who revealed this to him.

- Columbus proposed a western course to India because he believed the earth was a sphere based on the Bible.
- Augustine, who lived about a thousand years before Columbus, professed that the earth was round, not flat.
- In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas, the most profound and prolific of medieval theologians, observed that the spherical shape of the earth could be empirically demonstrated.

Why do people think the Bible teaches that the earth is flat?

They cite references such as Revelation 7:1 which speaks of *"four angels standing at the four corners of the earth."* Or references to the "ends" of the earth (Deuteronomy 13:7; Job 28:24; Psalm 48:10; and Proverbs 30:4).

- But these are all idiomatic language—the "four corners of the earth" refer to "every distant location." The "four corners" encompass the cardinal directions—north, south, east, and west.

- The "ends of the earth" is also idiomatic simply referring to "the farthest reaches of the inhabited world." Also, the phrase the ends of the earth at times refers to people, not to land.

What does it mean that God stretches out the heavens?

This would suggest that the universe has actually increased in size since its creation. God has stretched it out. He has expanded it (and it is still expanding). In the 1920s, astronomers discovered that virtually all clusters of galaxies appear to be moving away from all other clusters; this indicates that the entire universe is expanding.

- And the expansion is away from our galaxy... the earth is at the center of the universe.
- Atheistic astronomers like Hubble who don't like the implications of the earth being at the center of the universe resort to philosophy saying their observations are due to the "curvature of space." This "cosmological principle" (or theory) is described as all galaxies being on an expanding balloon.

v23-24 – What does it tell us that God brings the princes to nothing and makes the judges of the earth useless?

God's power and glory are not only exalted above the creation, but also over men of power on the earth. When people have political power (*princes*) or legal power (*judges*) it is easy for them to think of themselves as gods!

- All God needs to do is to *blow on them, and they will wither* (v24).

v25- Who is equal to our Creator-God?

There is none despite the claims of those who do not know Him. There are many human and demon-inspired religions that would have us think that the God of the Bible is not unique.

v26 – What host is it that God brings out by number?

This is either the stars of heaven or the angels of heaven. If stars, that is impressive...

- Using our Milky Way as a typical galaxy with 100 billion stars multiplied by the number of galaxies in the universe (2 trillion): There are ~200 billion-trillion stars in the universe. Or, to put it another way, 200 sextillions.
- It is staggering to know that God can number and name them all.

How many angels are there?

The book of Hebrews describes a multitude of angels in heaven that are too great to count:

Hebrews 12:22 – *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels*

We know there are at least 100,000,000 (100 million); just the ones gathered around God's throne at the time of John's observation...

Revelation 5:11 – *Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands*

While the Bible leaves the precise number of angels unspecified, some believe there could be as many angels as the number of humans alive at any one time or at least those prior to the age of accountability...

Matthew 18:10 – *Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.*

Scripture is clear that angels do guard and protect human beings (Psalm 34:7; 91:11–12; Matthew 18:10; Acts 12:9–15).

Is the concept of an age of accountability biblical?

Frequently lost in the discussion regarding the age of accountability is the fact that children, no matter how young, are not “innocent” in the sense of being sinless.

Psalm 51:5 – *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

The Bible does not directly address an age of accountability. The age of 13 is the most commonly suggested for the age of accountability, based on the Jewish custom. Christ's death is presented as sufficient for all of mankind...

1 John 2:2 – *the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world*

There are other reasons to believe this as well:

- King David had peace that he would see his dead infant son in heaven (2 Samuel 12:21–23)
- God extending grace to those who cannot believe would seem consistent with His character. Whatever God does is always right and good, and He loves children (Matthew 19:14).

There is certainly support for expecting the children of believers who die before the age of accountability will be in heaven:

1 Corinthians 7:14 – *the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy*

Isaiah 40:27-31 – God's Greatness Applied (NIV)

²⁷ *Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God”?* ²⁸ *Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.* ²⁹ *He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.* ³⁰ *Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;* ³¹ *but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*

v27 – How could God's people say, my way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God?

Understanding the greatness and glory of God persuades us that there is nothing in our life hidden from God, and there is nothing neglected by God.

How should understanding the greatness of God make a difference in our lives?

Knowing Him should cause us to make changes so that we may better please Him.

v28 – To whom were the questions, have you not known and have you not heard directed?

The people asked this question in Isaiah 40:21 doubted there was a Creator-God. The ones asked the same questions in this verse seem to know there is a creator, but live as practical atheists (aka deists)... they don't seem to understand that God makes a difference in everyday life.

- It is easy to believe in the infinite power of God and at the same time to feel that He is unable or unwilling to meet our personal needs!

How should people live who know God as Creator, that He doesn't get weary and His understanding is beyond us?

Those who really believe these truths about God should live as if God is really there and that He intervenes in human affairs.

v29 – What does God do with His Almighty power?

He gives power to the weak: After explaining all the greatness and glory of God, now Isaiah explains another benefit we can receive from our God — He gives us His great power.

Why is it that God gives power to the weak?

Those who are proud and confident in their own wisdom and strength will receive no strength from God.

- Those who thought themselves strong find themselves weak. God's strength is reserved for those who know they are weak, and know they have no might.

v30 – Why is it the young men who will *stumble and fall*?

They are the ones most likely to be puffed up with pride in their own abilities. Experience with God builds wisdom (and humility before Him).

- *Weak* in Isaiah 40:29 and *faint* in Isaiah 40:30 are the same Hebrew word, which means “*failure through loss of inherent strength.*”
- *Weary* in Isaiah 40:30 is a different word, which means “*exhaustion because of the hardness of life.*”

If we are worn out for either reason, God is here to give us strength — if we will wait on Him.

v31 – How may we have our strength renewed?

those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength:

We receive strength as we wait on the LORD. The idea behind wait on the LORD is not a passive sitting around until the LORD does something. Yes, God gives us strength; but we don't expect it to come as if He were pouring it into us as we sit passively. He brings it to us as we seek Him, and rely on Him, instead of our own strength. If we are weak, it is because we do not wait on the LORD.

How is the strength the Lord gives us described?

They shall mount up with wings like eagles: This is the measure of strength the LORD gives us — strength to soar above everything else.

Why does God give us strength?

They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint: The purpose of the strength the LORD gives us is to move forward and progress for Him. It isn't strength to show off, but strength in which to go forward.

Isn't this out of order: first we mount up with wings like eagles, then we run and finally we walk?

First, we recognize that we soar up into heavenly places in Christ Jesus...

Ephesians 2:6 – *made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus* (our justification)

Then we set ourselves on the course to run the race...

Hebrews 12:1 – *let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us* (sanctification, purge sin)

Then we are in a good place to walk the walk...

Colossians 2:6 – *As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him* (sanctification, be like Jesus)

How can we walk in God's ways?

Psalm 128:1 – *Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, Who walks in His ways.*

In the original Hebrew, the word translated as “*walk*” in Psalm 128:1 means “*to live or behave in a specific manner.*” Those who genuinely worship and serve the Lord God Almighty will devote their lives to Him not only with words but also by obeying His commands.

Psalm 119:105 – *Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path*

The Bible is the definitive roadmap for walking in God's ways. To walk in God's ways describes a lifestyle of daily seeking to know God and living in obedience to His will.

- Walking in God's ways is a metaphor for following God and living for Him. Jesus told His disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23, NLT).
- There is a cost to walking in God's ways—that cost is giving up our own way. It involves death to self.
- It meant relinquishing self-will and selfish ambition. Jesus explained, “If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it” (Luke 9:24, NLT).

What applications come to mind from our discussion?

- God is greater than we can imagine, we'll spend eternity learning His greatness so we should start now.
- Evidence of the Creator is obvious in the heavens, all who reject it do so willfully.
- There is an age of accountability but this is probably different for everyone and only God knows it.
- God gives strength to the weak; the more we can recognize our weaknesses, the more of His power we can have.
- We are called to walk in God's ways; so we should get to know Him and apply His wisdom all day every day.