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He Sits Enthroned Above the Circle of the Earth

40: 18-26

He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth DIG: Does the Bible teach that the world is flat? Is any image or standard of comparison adequate to measure God's worth? Why or why not? How does Isaiah approach the topic of idols? What is the point He is making?

REFLECT: What grass and flowers 40:6, or idols in 40:19 of this world seem awfully powerful to you today? How much do you depend on them? By comparison, do the promises of God just seem like words right now, or do they provide you with hope? Why? What sort of complaints do you hear today from non-believers? From believers? How might you answer them from the truths of this chapter? When have you most recently felt like God must have lost your address or phone number? What fears and thoughts arose in your mind? How might the truths of this chapter help restore strength to you?

This section introduces the conclusion to the previous arguments that **the LORD** was both interested and capable of saving **Isra'el** despite the fact that they continued to wallow in **their sin (to see link click Hf - Surely the Nations Are Like a Drop in the Bucket)**. **Isaiah** knew **he** was called to minister to a **stubborn** and stiff-necked people (**48:4**). From the very beginning **ADONAI** told **him** that **the Israelites** would be **ever hearing but never understanding, ever seeing but never perceiving (6:9)**. But I'm sure that didn't make it any easier for **the prophet** to see **his** beloved people turn **their** backs on **God** at every opportunity.

This section, then, introduces the conclusion to the previous arguments as indicated in the opening word *waw*, meaning **so** or **then**. If it is true that **ADONAI** is absolutely alone in **His** creation and maintenance of the world, and if it is true that **the Gentile nations** are nothing when compared to **Him, what image** can **He** be compared to? What one thing from all of creation could be used for that purpose?

Isaiah then asked the question: **So, to whom then, will you compare God?** The word for *God* here is translated *El*, not the more common *ELOHIM*. The difference between the two is



that while *ELOHIM* speaks of **His** general qualities, *El* would remind **the Jews** of the pagan high god of the Canaanite pantheon with the same name. By using this name **Isaiah** would leave no doubt of the absolute superiority of **ADONAI** over any such imposter (**43:12; 45:14, 46:9** and **31:3**). Since **He** alone is *El*, then there is nothing or no one like **Him** in all the universe.

What image will you compare Him to (40:18)? It has been said that this verse is the culminating experience of Hebrew monotheism found in the Scriptures. The context of this verse is idolatry. In other words, **God** is saying, "How can **you compare Me** with **idols**?" The point here is not how **God** or **idols** look, but what is the character of each.

But incredibly, Muslims teach that **40:18** and **25** (and also **Psalm 89:6** and **Jeremiah 10:6-7**) contradict **Genesis 1:26** where **God said: Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.** Is this a contradiction? Certainly not. Because we are not made with the same character as **God**. If that were true then we would indeed be **God**. But we are not **God** and **God** does not dwell in **idols**. That is the point made here in **Isaiah**, the *incomparableness* of **the LORD** to anyone or anything. This has nothing to do with us being made in the **image** of **ADONAI**. **God's** Word is true when it says that **the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor 4:4).**

Of all the comparisons to **ADONAI** that one might choose, the most ridiculous to **Isaiah** was an **idol**. **The prophet** ridiculed that thought several times in **his** book (**41:6-7, 44:9-20, 46:5-7**). **He** reserved **his** deepest sarcasm to show how foolish it was to try to make a god out of worldly material. **As for an idol a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it (40:19).** Humor and irony are used here. Some people were able to buy expensive **gods**, wood overlaid with gold and silver. Others had to buy cheap ones. But some were so poor they had to actually make their own idol from scratch.

A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple (40:20). There was a three-stage process. First, **they** went out in the forest and looked for **wood** that would **not rot**. For it is not nice for **gods** to rot. Secondly, **he** would choose a **skillful** carver to make the **god** look nice. For it is not nice for **gods** to look ugly. Thirdly, **he** made sure he built a strong base for the **god** to stand on because it is not nice for **gods** to **topple** over. . . irony and humor are heavy. It is not nice for **gods** to rot, it's not nice for **gods** to look ugly, and it's not nice for **gods** to **topple** over. So therefore, you, skillful worker, make sure you do a



good job with this piece of wood and make me a really nice-looking **god**. Will **the Creator**, who made the heaven and the earth without any help, be represented by **an idol** made by a **skilled craftsman** from the stuff of creation and then cannot be trusted to stand up without toppling **over**?

Then **Isaiah** brings out **God's** sovereign control over the world. From **His** sovereign position in heaven **God** watches over **His** created universe. **He** is the **God** of eternity and speaks to Gentile idolaters about **His** eternity. Again, **Isaiah** asks a series of rhetorical questions: **Do you all not know? Have you all not heard? Do you all not know? Has it not been told you from the beginning?** The issue is intensified with the use of the imperfect with the verbs *knowing* and *hearing*. The Septuagint translates it: *Will you not know? Can you not hear?* It was not only a question of being aware that **the LORD** transcends the world, but whether those hearing believed **Isaiah's** message. It was, and is, possible to hear the message but to refuse to act on it.

From the questions of intent and response **Isaiah** moves to questions of fact. **Have you not understood since the earth was founded (40:21)?** From the beginning (**Genesis 1:1**), from the very foundations of **the earth**, **God** was there. **Isaiah** questions how people could even imagine building their own little god out of wood that would eventually rot and then believe it created the heavens and the earth? The creation of the earth begs for a **Creator**. If the cosmos had an origin it could not itself be responsible for that event. The current "big bang" theory for the beginning of the earth still does not address the origin of *the stuff* of the "bang." **Isaiah** contends that **God** is behind it all, and nothing that is part of creation, whether **gods** or humans, can thwart **His** plans.



It is **He** that **sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers (40:22a)**. One of the statements of liberal critics is that the Bible says that the world is flat. That is utterly ridiculous. In fact, the Bible says the opposite, but scientists during the days of Christopher Columbus taught that theory. Those so-called scientists did not pay attention to the Word of **God** and missed something. And I think they are missing something today. It is clearly stated that **ADONAI** sits **above the circle of the earth** and looks down at the inhabitants **of the earth**, who appear to be little tiny **grasshoppers**. **He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in (40:22b)**. **The heavens** are pictured as spread **out like a tent** for **Him** to live in (**Psalms 104:2**). **Isaiah** was not offering a detailed picture of **God's** dwelling place. **He** was merely using imagery that his readers would easily understand.



He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing (40:23). Even the destinies of the greatest are in the hands of God, and their very existence, without His protection, is like stubble in the whirlwind. In controlling history **God** establishes **rulers** and removes them (**Dani'el 2:21**). They are *easily* removed. **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 (40:24).** When **God** removes them, it is as if they had never been. All it takes is the breath of **the LORD**. With one breath **He** can remove the most powerful of men because **God** is sovereign over **the rulers of this world**.

Finally, **God** asks: **To whom will you compare Me? Or who is My equal?** says **the Holy One (40:25)**. **God** is speaking of the incomparableness of **Himself** to **idols** or anyone else. **The LORD** cannot be compared to anyone or anything. **He** knows everything about **His** creation and sustains it. **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 (40:26a).** In **His strength He** created, controls, and also sustains millions upon millions of stars; **each one is individually known to Him** (see the commentary on **Genesis Lw - The Witness of the Stars**). **Because of His great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing (40:26b).** The stars have not existed forever. Someone brought them into existence, who was that? It was **ADONAI**, who is seated on **His** throne in heaven, who else (see my commentary on **Revelation Cd - And There Before Me was a Throne in Heaven**)? When we see the power of **God's** creation, we feel the power of **His** love.

In **Chapters 40-66 God** is frequently referred to as **Creator** and **Maker**, and there could not be a more dramatic contrast to the lifeless **idols** of Babylon. **He** created the heavens, the earth, **the Gentile nations**, and **Isra'el**, and **He** will create a new heaven and a new earth (see my commentary on **Revelation Fr - Then I Saw a New Heaven and a New Earth**).

Some nights when you're away from the city lights **lift your eyes and look to the heavens**. There in the heavens you'll see a luminous band of stars stretching from horizon to horizon - our galaxy. If you have good eyes, you can see about 5,000 stars, according to astronomer Simon Driver. There are, however, far more that you cannot see with the naked eye. In 1995, the Hubble Deep Field Study space probe concluded that there are billions of galaxies, each containing billions of stars. By one estimate, there are more than ten stars in the universe for every grain of sand on the earth. Yet, each night, without fail, **God brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name . . . not one of them is missing.**



Why then do people say: **My way is hidden from the LORD (40:27a)?** Yes, billions of individuals live on the earth, but **ADONAI** has forgotten no one. **He** knows **those who are His (Second Timothy 2:19)**. If **He** can bring out the incalculable **starry host** each night one by one, **He** can bring you into **His** light. **He** does so by **His great power and mighty strength** - the power **He** displayed when **Jesus** was raised from the dead. Are **the stars** out tonight? Rejoice! **God** cares for you.