

ECC Growth Groups – Term 4, 2014
Behold our God – Study 8: God is Beyond Compare (Isaiah 40)¹

Big Idea: God is incomparable and this is particularly seen in terms of creation and his relationship to creation.

Study Aim: That group members will: (i) have their personal understanding of God enlarged to be more in line with how the Scriptures present God; and (ii) be appropriately overwhelmed at who God really is and respond in humble adoration, trust and love.

Discussion Starter

1. In verse 27 of our passage, Isaiah writes, “*Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God?’*” What causes us to have the same kinds of thoughts?
2. How do you usually respond in those times?

Prayer

Spend some time praying together before you look at God’s Word.

Bible Reading²

The book of Isaiah is set in the time after the kingdom of Israel was split into two – the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah). Isaiah was one of the prophets to the southern kingdom, Judah. His ministry occurred during the lead-up to the Babylonian invasion and the exile of God’s people. Hence, there is much talk of God’s judgement on his people for the sin that has brought this about – particularly in the first half of the book. We saw some of this when we looked at Isaiah Chapter 6 in Study 4. Chapter 40 represents a significant shift in the flow of the book. From this point on Isaiah moves away from speaking of judgement to emphasising the future hope and comfort that God will eventually bring his people.

Read Isaiah 40:12-31.

¹ This series of studies is loosely based on the booklet ‘Meeting God’ by J. I. Packer in the *Lifeguide Bible Study* series (1986, IVP).

² As mentioned in Study 3, in a topical/doctrinal series of studies such as this, where we are regularly moving from one part of the Bible to another, it is imperative that we provide people with the biblical-theological framework of the Bible. Omitting the context in which particular biblical texts are located can easily lead to erroneous interpretation and application. Setting the context can be done by way of question and answer. Another way, such as has been adopted here, is simply for the leader to briefly provide an outline of the context. Either way, context is crucial.

Activity 1

3. Using a whiteboard or butcher's paper, have the group identify the various ways in which God is described in these verses³.

He measures the waters in the hollow of his hand (v 12). He marks off the heavens with the breadth of his hand (v 12). He holds the dust of the earth in a basket (v 12). He weighs the mountains on scales and the hills in a balance (v 12). No one has understood the LORD's mind or instructed him as his counselor (v 13). The LORD did not consult anyone to enlighten him or teach him the right way (v 14). No one taught God knowledge or showed him the path of understanding (v 14). The nations are as nothing before him and in comparison to him (vv 15-17). No one and nothing can be compared to God – an idol is a laughable comparison (vv 18-20). God sits enthroned above the earth (v 22). People are like grasshoppers in comparison to him (v 22). God stretches out the heavens like a canopy, like a tent to live in (v 22). He brings princes and rulers to nothing (vv 23-24). No one is the Holy One's equal (v 25). He created the heavens (v 26). God brings out the stars one by one and by name (v 26). By his great power and mighty strength not one is missing (v 26). The LORD is the everlasting God (v 28). He is the Creator of the ends of the earth (v 28). He will not grow tired or weary (v 28). No one can fathom his understanding (v 28). God gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak (v 29).

Activity 2

4. Split the group into smaller groups of at least three or four members. Give people a few minutes to spend on their own, reflecting on what was written on the whiteboard/butcher's paper. After this time of reflection, have each member share with their small group what particularly impacted them in terms of who God is⁴.

5. Bring the groups back together and have a few members share their thoughts with the larger group.

Questions

6. What kind of emotional response does this chapter produce in you?

Awe. Wonder. Amazement etc.

³ Don't be afraid to take a significant proportion of time on this part of the study. There is a lot to notice here! It is important that the group be given the space to allow their picture of God to build from the passage. Allowing sufficient time here ought to have the desired effect of members being overwhelmed at who God really is. As you will notice, there are not as many questions in the study to compensate for the time spent on this Activity. Also, try not to get caught up in discussing the various aspects mentioned here in too much detail. This would run counter to the activity's purpose and desired effect mentioned above.

⁴ Of course, this activity could be done by keeping the larger group together. However, breaking into smaller groups does seem to prompt quieter/more reserved members to be more willing to share their thoughts. Providing some space for members to reflect before sharing should also increase the likelihood of everyone having something to say – a key goal for leaders to have in any Bible study discussion.

7. Have a look again at the complaint of God's people in verse 27. How do verses 12-26 answer this charge?

God's 'bigness' (his sovereignty, his rule over creation etc) ensures that nothing in his creation is hidden or disregarded by him, even though that may be how his people feel at times. He does not need informing or teaching as to events and circumstances (vv 13-14). He even knows each of the starry hosts by name (v 26).

8. How do verses 28-31 also answer this complaint from God's people?

God could be all that he is described as being in verses 12-26 and yet not necessarily be personal, relational, gracious etc. The closing verses of the chapter remind us that the God who will never tire or grow weary himself is also able and willing to provide "strength to the weary" and power to the weak (v 29). Our way is not hidden from him nor our cause disregarded by him. In fact he longs that we would only put our hope in him that he might renew our strength (v 31).

Read Colossians 1:15-23.

9. In verses 15-19, Paul focuses on who Jesus is. Given what we read in Isaiah, what stands out to you in what Paul says about Jesus?

All things were created by Jesus and for Jesus (v 16). He holds all things together (v 17). All of God's fullness (all that we saw in Isaiah 40, for example, and more) dwells in Jesus (v 19).

10. In verses 20-23, Paul speaks about what Jesus has done. Why is this so amazing?

That the God we saw in Isaiah 40, Jesus who we see described in Colossians 1:15-19, should reconcile enemies through the shedding of his blood is truly remarkable. Words cannot really express the wonder of this. Verse 3 of 'Behold our God' (see Appendix 1 – 'Theology to Doxology') brings this out well.

Close + Prayer

See Appendix 1 – 'Theology to Doxology' – and then close the study with a time of prayer.

Appendix 1 – Theology to Doxology⁵

Given that (apart from the Review Study) this is the last in our series of studies, it is fitting that our final *'Theology to Doxology'* should be *'Behold our God'*. It is also appropriate given that so many of the thoughts expressed in the song, and even the very way in which the lyrics are formed, matches with what we have seen from Isaiah 40.

If you would like to listen to a version online, you can use the URL below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gqrl3Lkf58>

If you would like to sing together or simply read out the lyrics, they are included below:

Verse 1

Who has held the oceans in His hands
Who has numbered every grain of sand
Kings and nations tremble at His voice
All creation rises to rejoice

Chorus

Behold our God seated on His throne
Come let us adore Him
Behold our King nothing can compare
Come let us adore Him

Verse 2

Who has given counsel to the Lord
Who can question any of His words
Who can teach the One who knows all things
Who can fathom all His wondrous deeds

Chorus

Verse 3

Who has felt the nails upon His hand
Bearing all the guilt of sinful man
God eternal humbled to the grave
Jesus Savior risen now to reign

Chorus

Bridge

You will reign forever (Let Your glory fill the earth) (REPEAT 4X)

Chorus

CCLI Song # 5937510

Jonathan Baird | Meghan Baird | Ryan Baird | Stephen Altrogge

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⁵ Theology – literally 'a word of/about God' is to lead to Doxology – literally 'a word of praise/glory'. Please see the introductory notes to this section in Study 1 – Appendix 1 if you need to recall the rationale behind its inclusion.