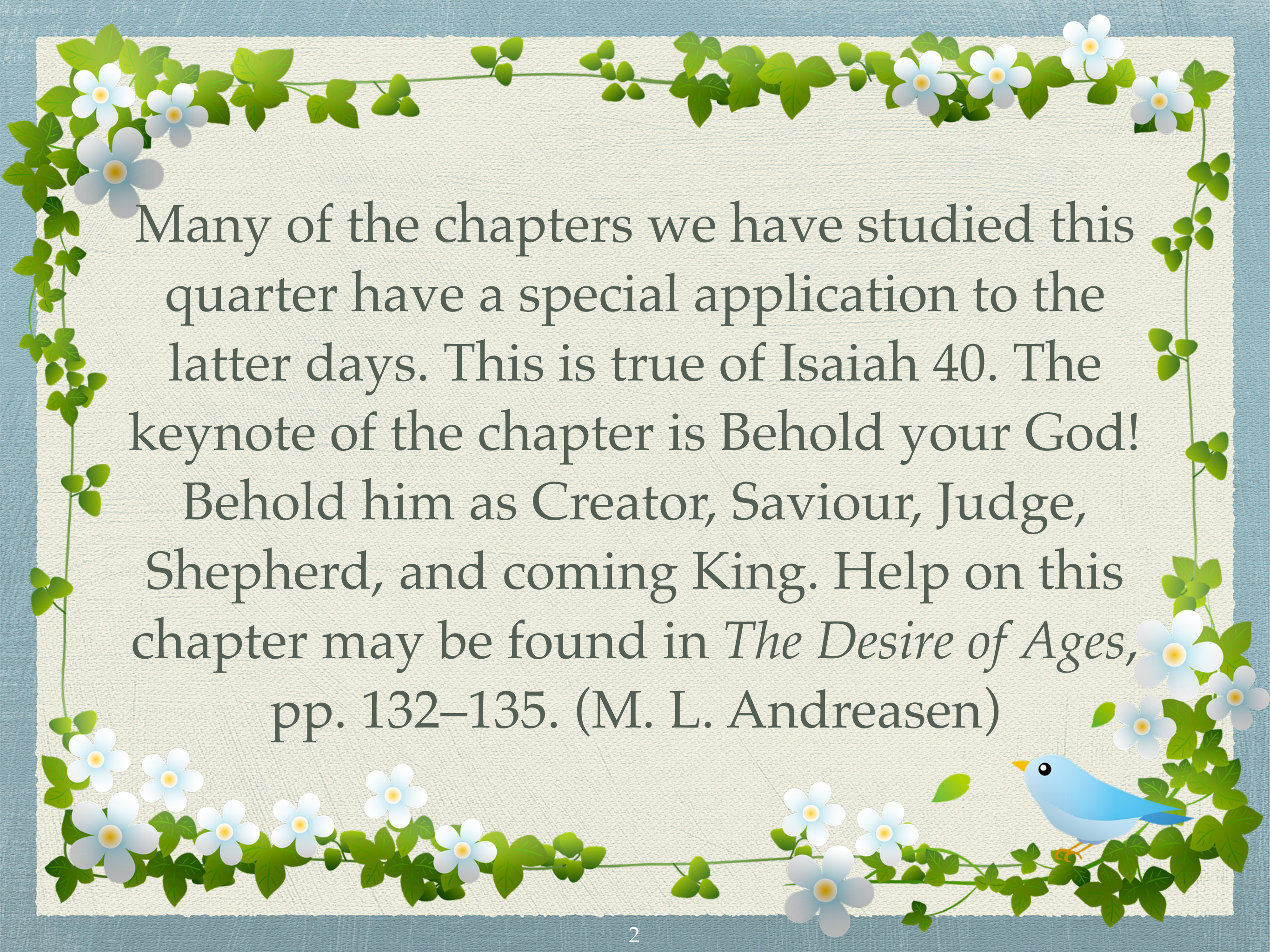


Lessons from the Old Testament

Lesson 13—*The Blessings of the Gospel*—Isaiah 40:1–10



Many of the chapters we have studied this quarter have a special application to the latter days. This is true of Isaiah 40. The keynote of the chapter is Behold your God! Behold him as Creator, Saviour, Judge, Shepherd, and coming King. Help on this chapter may be found in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 132–135. (M. L. Andreasen)

Chapters 1–35 consist largely of a series of denunciations against transgression and pronouncements of judgments to follow. In chs. 36–39 there are incidents connected with Sennacherib’s invasion, Hezekiah’s illness and recovery, and the visit of the Babylonian envoys. In the chapters that follow, the message of the prophet is entirely different in tone and theme.

Pronouncements of judgment and doom are largely in the past, and the remainder of the book deals with promises of the outpouring of God’s grace upon the righteous. It is largely chs. 40–66 that have earned for Isaiah the name of “gospel prophet.” Here, in the most sublime language ever to grace the lips of an inspired orator, Isaiah sets forth the glorious future of Israel as God’s faithful “servant,” her deliverance from every foe, the coming of Messiah, and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. (*SDA BC*)

In the earlier part of the book, Isaiah proclaims a message of rebuke; now he sets before them one of comfort and hope. The previous section deals largely with the unrighteousness of the people; this part with the righteousness of God. Chapters 1–39 are concerned largely with the success of the enemy in drawing God’s people away from their high ideals; chs. 40–66, with the Lord’s success in drawing Israel back to its ideal position as the light and hope of the world. Here is a striking picture of Messiah as God’s Servant, and of men walking in His footsteps and being His witnesses. Here are sublime pictures of God as the hope of His people, and of His people returning to Him and occupying their appointed position as His representatives on earth. Here, they are delivered from the power of Babylon, they reoccupy the Land of Promise, and the waste places of earth become “like the garden of the Lord” (ch. 51:3). (*SDA BC*)

Isaiah 40

- ◆ Handel's *Messiah* starts with Isaiah 40—first words are *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people*—then 1–3, v. 4, then v. 5, then v. 9, and later v. 11.
- ◆ The author of the lesson today chose Isaiah 40:3 as the memory verse; Andreason in 1928 chose v. 9; and Roy Gane, author of 2021 SS quarterly on Isaiah, chose verse 9 also when studying chapter 40.

Isaiah 40

- ◆ Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God—be consoled or console yourselves
- ◆ Speak comfortably—different word—speak to the heart to Jerusalem and proclaim—
- ◆ Her warfare is over; her iniquity is pardoned!

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

(Matthew 3:1–6)

Wilderness

- ◆ Mark 1:13—isolated, desolate, uninhabited place
- ◆ Revelation 12:6, 14
- ◆ Revelation 17:3—A “wilderness” was an uninhabited region where life could be sustained only amid difficulty and danger. Food, shelter, and possibly even water would be difficult to obtain, and there would be danger from wild animals and perhaps from brigands. Accordingly, some consider that when used figuratively, as here, a “wilderness” would be a situation fraught with difficulty and danger . . . (*SDA BC*)

So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead *was* a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. (Revelation 17:3–5)

Revelation 9:4

And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

Verse 11

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found *it*, he layeth *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together *his* friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. (Luke 15:4–6)

In the company about Jesus there were shepherds, and also men who had money invested in flocks and herds, and all could appreciate His illustration: “What man of *you*, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?” (COL 186.4)

These souls whom you despise, said Jesus, are the property of God. By creation and by redemption they are His, and they are of value in His sight. As the shepherd loves his sheep, and cannot rest if even one be missing, so, in an infinitely higher degree, does God love every outcast soul. Men may deny the claim of His love, they may wander from Him, they may choose another master; yet they are God's, and He longs to recover His own. He says, "As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out My sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day."

Ezekiel 34:12. (COL 187.1)

In the parable the shepherd goes out to search for one sheep—the very least that can be numbered. So if there had been but one lost soul, Christ would have died for that one.

The sheep that has strayed from the fold is the most helpless of all creatures. It must be sought for by the shepherd, for it cannot find its way back. So with the soul that has wandered away from God; he is as helpless as the lost sheep, and unless divine love had come to his rescue he could never find his way to God. (*COL* 187.2–.3)

With what relief he hears in the distance its first faint cry. Following the sound, he climbs the steepest heights, he goes to the very edge of the precipice, at the risk of his own life. Thus he searches, while the cry, growing fainter, tells him that his sheep is ready to die. At last his effort is rewarded; the lost is found. Then he does not scold it because it has caused him so much trouble. He does not drive it with a whip. He does not even try to lead it home. In his joy he takes the trembling creature upon his shoulders; if it is bruised and wounded, he gathers it in his arms, pressing it close to his bosom, that the warmth of his own heart may give it life. With gratitude that his search has not been in vain, he bears it back to the fold.

(COL 188.1)

Desponding soul, take courage, even though you have done wickedly. Do not think that *perhaps* God will pardon your transgressions and permit you to come into His presence. God has made the first advance. While you were in rebellion against Him, He went forth to seek you. With the tender heart of the shepherd He left the ninety and nine and went out into the wilderness to find that which was lost. The soul, bruised and wounded and ready to perish, He encircles in His arms of love and joyfully bears it to the fold of safety. (COL 188.3)

By the lost sheep Christ represents not only the individual sinner but the one world that has apostatized and has been ruined by sin. This world is but an **atom** in the vast dominions over which God presides, yet this little fallen world—the one lost sheep—is more precious in His sight than are the ninety and nine that went not astray from the fold. Christ, the loved Commander in the heavenly courts, stooped from His high estate, laid aside the glory that He had with the Father, in order to save the one lost world. For this He left the sinless worlds on high, the ninety and nine that loved Him, and came to this earth, to be “wounded for our transgressions” and “bruised for our iniquities.” (Isaiah 53:5.) God gave Himself in His Son that He might have the joy of receiving back the sheep that was lost. (*COL* 190.3)

- ◆ Trillions of atoms can fit inside a single period at the end of a sentence.
- ◆ Approximately 100,000 atoms can fit across the width of a human hair.

When you turn from those who seem unpromising and unattractive, do you realize that you are neglecting the souls for whom Christ is seeking? At the very time when you turn from them, they may be in the greatest need of your compassion. In **every** assembly for worship, there are souls longing for rest and peace. (COL 191.2)

- ◆ We are scattered like atoms.
- ◆ It may be in your residence you are the only one.
- ◆ It may be easy to think that no one cares.
- ◆ It may be we are suffering.
- ◆ We know that God cares, but that is not all.

We are a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. The whole universe is looking with inexpressible interest to see the closing work of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. (5T 526)

. . . for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. (1 Corinthians 4:9)

Joseph, when honored by the Egyptians, did not conceal his loyalty to God.

Elijah, amid the general apostasy, did not seek to hide the fact that he served the God of heaven. Baal's prophets numbered four hundred and fifty, his priests, four hundred, and his worshipers were thousands; yet Elijah did not try to make it appear that he was on the popular side. He grandly stood alone. The mountain was covered with people full of eager expectation. The king came in great pomp, and the idolaters, confident of triumph, shouted his welcome. But God had been greatly dishonored. One man, and only one man, appeared to vindicate the honor of God. With clear, trumpetlike tones Elijah addressed the vast multitude: "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him." The result was that the Lord God, who ruleth in the heavens, was vindicated, and the Baal worshipers were slain. Where are the Elijahs of today? (5T 526–527)

Daniel's history is a remarkable one. He carried out his faith and principles against great opposition. He was condemned to death because he would not abate one jot of his allegiance to God even in the face of the king's decree. It might, at this day, be called overrighteousness to go, as was his wont, three times a day and kneel before the open window for prayer while he knew that prying eyes were observing him and that his enemies were ready to accuse him of disloyalty to the king; but Daniel would allow no earthly power to come in between him and his God, even with the prospect of death in the den of lions. Although God did not prevent Daniel from being cast into a den of lions, an angel went in with him and closed their mouths, so that no harm befell him; and in the morning, when the king called him, he responded: "My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before Him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt." He was a noble, steadfast servant of God. (5T 527)

But there is presented another class, who can and will enter the kingdom of God, who will have a right to enter there; and they are those who are working to attain such a position that they will have a moral fitness to stand around the great white throne in their white robes of character. In the day of their probation they realized the importance of the work to be done, and took hold of it understandingly and intelligently. They saw that there was a great work to be done in order to obtain a fitness of character for the kingdom of God. They knew that no one could do their work for them; that no one could believe for them; that no one could form a character for them. It was an individual work, a personal effort. (*RH* January 4, 1887, par. 2)

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed *thee*? or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee*? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me. (Matthew 25:34–40)

The guarding care that the under-shepherd will give the lambs of his flock is well illustrated by a picture I have seen representing the Good Shepherd. The shepherd is leading the way, while the flock follow close behind. Carried in his arms is a helpless lamb, while the mother walks trustingly by his side. Of the work of Christ, Isaiah says, "He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom." [Isaiah 40:11.] The lambs need more than daily food. They need protection, and must constantly be guarded with tender care. If one goes astray, it must be searched for. The figure is a beautiful one, and well represents the loving service that the under-shepherd of the flock of Christ is to give to those under his protection and care. (GW 211.3)

If the lost sheep is not brought back to the fold, it wanders until it perishes. And many souls go down to ruin for want of a hand stretched out to save. These erring ones may appear hard and reckless; but if they had received the same advantages that others have had, they might have revealed far more nobility of soul, and greater talent for usefulness. Angels pity these wandering ones. Angels weep, while human eyes are dry and hearts are closed to pity. (*COL* 191.3)

1. What message does God send to His people? Isa. 40:1, 2—Sin, wherever found, is abhorrent to God, but doubly so in the case of those who know the truth. Light brings responsibility. Those who know the truth and still persist in sin are more guilty than those who do not have a knowledge of God's message for this time. For this reason God's people have received double punishment. But God does not hate His people any more than the gardener hates the vine which he prunes. God loves His people, and sends them a message of comfort and love.

2. What message is proclaimed by "the voice"? Who is spoken of as having fulfilled this scripture? Verses 3–5; Matt. 3:1–3.

“In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, such a work as that of John is to be done. God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord. The message preceding the public ministry of Christ was, ‘Repent; publicans and sinners; repent, Pharisees and Sadducees; “repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”’ . . .

“In order to give such a message as John gave, we must have a spiritual experience like his. The same work must be wrought in us. We must behold God, and in beholding Him lose sight of self.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 332, 333.

3. What further does “the voice” say? What is all flesh said to be? In contrast with this, what is said of the word of our God? Isa. 40:6–8.

Man and his wisdom shall perish; but “the word of our God” shall stand forever. Men’s theories will go down. Their ideas of future peace and of a millennium will not bear the test of “the word.” It is well to build on something that will “stand” when everything else is shaken.

4. Where are those who bring good tidings instructed to go? What is Jerusalem to do? What are the people of God to say to the cities? Verse 9.

The message is not to be given in a corner. The messenger is to get up into a high mountain where all can see and hear, and lift up the voice with strength. This is nothing but “the loud cry.” And the first part of the message is, “Behold your God!”

“The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them. The light of the Sun of Righteousness is to shine forth in good works,—in words of truth and deeds of holiness.” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 415, 416)

5. What is a vital part of the message to be given? Verse 10.

NOTE.—“The Lord God will come.” This is the advent proclamation, and should be the keynote of every message. The Lord will come “with strong hand.” He will “rule.” Ps. 2:8, 9. He will also bring the “reward” with Him. Rev. 22:12.

The Lord will come to punish and to reward.

6. Under what symbol is Christ presented? How are his love and care revealed? Verse 11; see also John 10:1–16.

7. How does the prophet illustrate the mighty power of God? Isa. 40:12.

8. What further questions are asked? Verses 13, 14.

These questions are so put as to require the negative answer. “No one,”—the strongest way in which such statements can be placed. The positive would be, God has not been taught by anyone; no one has shown Him “the way of understanding.” That is, God is the Original One, the Ultimate One, the Source of all things. There was no one before Him. No one “instructed” or “taught” him.

9. To what is the importance of the nations compared? Verses 15–17.

The dripping of a bucket or a little dust blown from the scales are not regarded as great or important. Yet if whole nations are so counted, how much smaller must the individual be? And yet small man sets himself up against God, and attempts to teach him! Such indeed must be counted by Heaven “less than nothing, and vanity.”

10. What shows that it is impossible to make any comparison to the great God of heaven? How are idols made? Verses 18–20.

The inference is plain. God is the Creator. He has made all things. Idols can not create. They themselves must be made.

11. In what four ways is the question asked concerning our knowledge of God? Where is God represented as sitting? What is said of the inhabitants of earth? of princes and judges? Verses 21–23.

12. How is the shortness of human life spoken of? Verse 24.

The American Revised Version, margin, renders verse 24: “Scarce are they planted, scarce are they sown, scarce hath their stock taken root in the earth, when He bloweth upon them.” That is, men hardly begin to live ere they are taken away.

13. In what words are the questions of verse 18 repeated? What are we counseled to do? How are God's wisdom and power shown? Verses 25, 26.

NOTE.—“God calls upon His creatures to turn their attention from the confusion and perplexity around them, and admire His handiwork. As we study His works, angels from heaven will be by our side, to enlighten our minds, and guard them from Satan's deceptions. As you look at the wonderful things that God's hand has made, let your proud, foolish heart feel its dependence and inferiority. How terrible it is when the acknowledgment of God is not made when it should be made! How sad to humble one's self when it is too late!” —*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 457

14. What do Jacob and Israel say? Verse 27.

NOTE.—The complaint of Jacob and Israel seems to be that “my way,” that is, their course and condition of life, is hidden from the Lord, and that “my judgment” or, rather, “my right,” escapes his notice. It is really a complaint from the people that God does not pay enough attention to them, that he “passes them by.”

15. How does God meet the complaint of the people, and assure them of his knowledge and of his care? Verses 28, 29.

NOTE.—“There is no searching of His understanding.” That is, God knows. You may think he does not know your perplexities, or, even worse, that he does not care. Be assured, dear soul, God knows and he cares. Your God not only understands, but he will give you the needed power and increase your strength.

“God’s workers will meet with turmoil, discomfort, and weariness. At times, uncertain and distracted, they are almost in despair. When this restless nervousness comes, let them remember Christ’s invitation, Come apart, and rest awhile. The Saviour ‘giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.’” (*Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 244)

16. What may be the experience of the youth? What is noted of them “that wait upon the Lord?” Verses 30, 31.

NOTE.—“Remember that prayer is the source of your strength. A worker can not gain success while he hurries through his prayers, and rushes away to look after something that he fears may be neglected or forgotten. He gives only a few hurried thoughts to God; he does not take time to think, to pray, to wait upon the Lord for a renewal of physical and spiritual strength. He soon becomes weary. He does not feel the uplifting, inspiring influence of God’s Spirit. He is not quickened by fresh life. His jaded frame and tired brain are not soothed by personal contact with Christ.”

(Testimonies, vol. 7, p. 243; read Ps. 27:14)