

Isaiah Chapters 54-55 – John Karmelich

1. Where does one go after discussing the most important event in human history? If you weren't around for the last lessons, Isaiah described in 15 verses, Jesus death and resurrection about 700 years before it occurred. My question is "now what"? Just like my theme of all my studies is the idea of "I believe Jesus is God and died for all my sins, now what?" This lesson's a great example of that "now what" as it follows right after describing the most important event in human history.
 - a) OK John, we get your now what concept. The big question is what is Isaiah's "now what" right after He predicts Jesus death and resurrection? The answer is, "How will that event affect the history of the world?" What we're going to read about in these chapters as well as for the rest of the book is the "epilogue" of that event and how we as a collective group of saved people benefit from that event.
 - b) To put this another way, what we read in these two chapters is also a set of predictions on what life will be like with that resurrected Messiah ruling over our lives. It gives all of us a set of guidelines on how to live life realizing there is a resurrected man who is in charge of this world. In other words, Jesus is in charge, deal with it, and live our life accordingly. That's this lesson in one thought. The rest of this lesson is the details.
2. Speaking of details, let me go over these two chapters, to show you why it's worth the trouble for us to learn the details about why Isaiah wrote them.
 - a) The first part of Chapter 54 I believe shows us the great growth of the Christian church as this idea was also predicted long before it occurred. Isaiah uses the concept of a nothing, growing into something really big. I'd argue he's describing the quick and fast growth of the Christian church after the events of the last chapter. Assuming we know that, why is that such a big deal? Because 700 years before Jesus came on the scene, Isaiah tells us that God knows how history unfolds, and those of us who believe that Jesus is God will be far greater in number than those who believe in the same God but not in Jesus.
 - b) Then we get to what I consider the really important part, "Trusting in Jesus despite what we're dealing with at the moment." I consider most of the bible text here as a big delayed gratification speech. One of the important lessons one learns in life is that if we're willing to delay an immediate gratification of what we desire, we usually get far more than if we let go of that desire and settle for something easier. For example if we're willing to spend time learning a particular skill, the payoff will usually far greater than if we only settle for what we can get quickly. As we all know, success rarely occurs in the first five minutes of life. We need to take the time to figure out "the plan" and make the time to execute it, and be willing to be deal with whatever life throws at us as we still work toward our goals. If one does that one usually becomes more successful in life and even enjoys it more.
 - c) OK John, that's good common sense advice, what does it have to do with Isaiah here? It is for us to realize, Jesus is God, He's resurrected, He is in charge of our lives, and we should make the best decisions we can based on that fact. It's to realize those essential facts for us Christians is to accept them and plan our lives around it. Yes we could die today or live a long time longer, and yes we still have to deal with our issues. What God wants is for us to keep in mind is that His plan for the course of humanity is already occurring. That just means we should be using some of our time and the gifts He's given us to be a part of that plan and glorify Him with our lives. To other words, God's in charge, deal with it and the best use of our life is to be a part of that plan.
 - d) OK John Part 2! We get that. Most of us reading this are Christians who in some way use our lives for His glory. Why should we study the details of these two chapters? What can we learn that we don't know already? First and foremost it's the reminder that none of us are wasting our time following Jesus. It's worth the effort and whatever were called to do for Him will give us far more satisfaction in life than any other way we can use it.

- e) Let me explain it this way: All of us want our lives to have meaning. Even if we're living in a situation that seems hopeless, God wants us to use our lives for His glory by doing all we can do for Him. Most of us are not called to lead say millions to Jesus. Most of us are just called to make a difference in the world around us. We don't get rewarded in heaven based on the number of people we saved, but strictly on using our lives in order to make a difference for Jesus based on the gifts we have and the circumstances of our lives. All I'm saying is Isaiah explains to us in these chapters how it is we're to live life based on the fact of Jesus being God and ruling from heaven over our lives at this moment.
3. The rest of this lesson is in effect the details. We'll get hints of changes on how life will exist after His Second Coming in these chapters, but most of the text will deal with how we should be living based on the fact that "Jesus is in charge of our lives, accept it and deal with it". That phrase I just put in quotes is my lesson title for this week. My point is we can live life feeling sorry for how it's turning out or we can realize, Jesus is in charge, I desire to be a part of His plan for the world and I'd like to use my life for His glory. If we learn to think that way daily, the specifics of how we do live out our lives is not as important as the fact we have chosen to live for Him and make the best decisions we can based on that decision. If we do that, "we cannot lose" in life.
 - a) Let me give you a specific example and then we'll start the lesson. There's a fairly famous Christian pastor I quote regularly who's taught bible studies for years, while still having a long career in the business world. He realized late in life that the biggest difference he did made in life wasn't the people he hired over the years, or the successful business he began but seeing the people who he's either taught simple bible lessons to, or taught at length of some facts about the bible and seeing them grow in their relationship with Jesus. All that I'm saying is the greatest difference we make in this life is when we use our lives in some fashion for His glory. That and that alone makes life worth living.
 - b) That's enough guilt for one introduction. Time to cover two chapters verse by verse. Let's get started.
 4. Chapter 54, Verse 1: "Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband," says the LORD.
 - a) To begin, let's remember where we left off. Isaiah just finished 15 verses describing Jesus death and resurrection 700 years before it occurred. The next thing we read here is about a "barren" (childless) woman singing in joy because she's going to have lots more children than a married woman. To explain, let me talk about the culture of Isaiah's day:
 - i) For a grown woman (older teenager in that culture) not to be married and not with children is a great sign of shame. It wasn't a death sentence, but such women were looked down upon in that culture. I still remember vividly when one of my wife's good friends was crying hard that she'd never get married. I remember the day of her letting go of that desire and go do some missionary work. She then met a man who's she's married to this day. I also remember the early days when my wife and I got married and struggled for years to get pregnant. My point is that this image of a desolate woman is something even I as a man had a good glimpse of seeing.
 - ii) OK, if Isaiah jumps from describing the purpose of Jesus in the last lesson to this image of a barren women having lots of children, who is he taking about and why is it we should care? Some commentators think it's describing the nation of Israel in it's "lowly" state of being in captivity and this is God's way of saying, "I've still got a wonderful plan for your future, and despite all the things that you've had to deal with it, and will deal with, I still have plans to make you a great nation."
 - iii) An alternative Christian view is that since Isaiah just described the key event of all of history (Jesus death and resurrection) the desolate is describing those of us who believe in Jesus are far greater in number than those who believe in God but deny that Jesus is God. It's essentially a prediction of the growth of the church.

- b) Whether Isaiah is referring to Israelites or Christians, the key point is whoever believes in the passage of the last 15 verses will benefit far more than those who don't. That's the key point of this verse. Now let me personalize it before moving on.
 - i) First of all to believe in Jesus does not mean every believer will automatically have lots of children, so that interpretation can't be correct. Therefore it must be bigger in scope than that interpretation. I view the opening several verses of this chapter as telling us of how our lives will be enriched by our trust in Jesus.
 - ii) Again I think of that man who had a long business career but realized the greatest difference he made in life was all the people who he helped draw closer to Jesus in some fashion. Also remember we don't get a "notch in our bibles" for everyone we save. Our rewards are not based on the size of our ministry, but on whether or not we're loyal to whatever God called us to do. A person who worked many years to raise up say children to trust in Jesus may have just a great reward in heaven as a person who's led multitudes of people to Jesus. What I like to tell people is what is it one enjoys doing or is "good at" and find a way to combine that skill to make a difference for God with that skill. That's the greatest way to live life out.
 - iii) My point here is that anyone of us can have our "spiritual life enlarged with more children" if we're willing to use our lives for His glory. That's the underlying idea of the first verse as well as the next several. Speaking of which:
- 5. Verse 2: "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. ³ For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities.
 - a) Imagine for a moment living by yourself in a tent. Then you learn another person is going to live there with you. That's the idea of Verse 2. It's a little like a homeowner enlarging a house to make room for more people. OK we get that. What does this have to do with me and why is it described at this point in Isaiah?
 - i) First let's consider the possibilities from the standpoint of the Israelites, who were Isaiah's original target audience of this book. It can be describing how God's going to enlarge their borders and the Israelites will take over desolate cities. No time in history has ever fit that description, so it must be something future to them as well as us. Many see this passage as describing the "end time's" as the bible tells us that Israel will "win" in the great final war as described in much of Revelation.
 - a) That prediction is a worldwide war will occurs before Jesus returns "to rule over this world". Before Jesus returns a lot of bad things occur. Among the bad things is that many will be killed and a lot of cities will be desolated.
 - b) All I'm saying here is that Israel will survive as a nation through all of that and even grow as a nation as they take over desolate cities.
 - ii) Let me explain this concept another way. When God promised Abraham that his descendants would have the land of Israel, that area of land promised to him was much greater than the area that exists today. Much of what we call Syria, Jordan and parts of Iraq will be part of this future Israel, when the Second Coming event occurs. All of this is a way of saying that the Israel's boundaries will be larger one day and additional land for them will be part of that event.
 - iii) Next let's consider this "enlarged tent" from the standpoint of the Christian church. Let's be honest the growth of the church came from a bunch of nobodies to become one of the largest religions in the world. My point is the great growth of the church would fit well into Isaiah's model of "expanded believers".
 - iv) Finally, think about how we use our life for His glory. The difference we make for Him is never a waste of a life. We "enlarge that tent" by new believers becoming a part of that "tent". Again, it's not just about literal children, but about making that difference for Jesus. It's the greatest purpose a life can have.

6. Verse 4: "Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. ⁵ For your Maker is your husband-- the LORD Almighty is his name-- the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth.
- a) I stated about two pages back that for a woman to not have children was considered to be a sign of great shame in that culture. Keep in mind that about two centuries after this was written is when the Israelites were first driven out of their land. It must have felt like God had abandoned them. Most of us have gone through times even as believers when we feel abandoned by God. Here is where these verses are a great reminder to us that God's still there, He's still guiding us and despite all we're going through, He's still calling the shots and desires to guide our live for His glory.
 - b) There are lots of tragedies I can't explain. I know of parents who've lost young children. I have seen believers die in ways I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. All I know is God is still there guiding us and allows those things to occur somehow, ultimately for His glory. It may be to strengthen the faith of others around that event, and it can even used to lead other people to draw closer to Him. Always remember that God's into relationships, and He allows things to occur often to encourage people to draw close to Him to help us deal with the circumstance of the moment.
 - c) That tough thought leads me back to these verses. It's a reminder of who we're married to in the first place! It's like realizing "we're one of His, and there's nothing we can do to lose that relationship!" We can't sin enough to lose it. We can't ever be abandoned by Him no matter what situation we're in. We can't lose no matter what! That's the underlying point of these verses.
 - d) That leads me to the last sentence of Verse 5. Notice the verse states bluntly that the God of the Israelites is also called the "God of the all the earth". All I'm saying is the one we do worship is not just a local "deity" or something people made up, but is the God who rules over the entire world. We may have accepted that as fact years ago, but consider it from the perspective of the Israelites. It's one thing to say, "Our god is powerful and is capable of doing great things". It's another to say He is the only God who rules over the universe as we know it. The "proof is in the pudding", which just means the historical evidence of what has been accomplished through the Israelites existing to this day and the growth of the Christian church despite all the persecution is a great proof that God is the God of all the world and not just of the Israelites!
 - e) All of that leads back to you and me. The verses remind us to not feel humiliated due to our circumstances. We may think we're not good enough for God, or think we won't be rewarded as well as others in this life or the next one. The point to remember is that God has never abandoned those of us who trust in Him and never will. There is no reason to ever feel humiliated or ashamed because no matter what happens to us in this life we win just because we trust in the God of the Universe and trust that since He's already paid the complete price for our sins, we're now free to use our lives to make a difference for Him. If you get that you've jus gotten the purpose of living and the Gospel message. OK then, time to move on:
7. Verse 6: The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit-- a wife who married young, only to be rejected," says your God.
- a) We've only got a few more verses left of this "don't feel rejected" speech before Isaiah goes on to the next topic. With all of this tragedy talk and "God's still there", it's easy to forget that Isaiah started this section with "sing out in praise". My point is this section is not any sort of "Sit there and fell sorry for ourselves" dirge, but a reminder that God's still there in spite of whatever we're dealing with so we should choose to be joyful. As the old saying goes, we only get one shot at this life. We can choose to be miserable or choose to be full of joy. Being full of joy is a much better way to go through life than being miserable!

- b) Ask yourself this question: Would you rather be around someone who's joyful most of the time or someone who's complaining most of the time? That's why Isaiah's working on our attitude here in these verses. He's effectively saying, "Yes I know things look pretty bad at this moment, but God's still there and has great eternal plans for your life, so be full of joy despite whatever we're dealing with as God wants to use our lives for His glory as well as be full of joy as we go through our life!"
 - c) That leads me back to Verse 6. It's a perfect example of "have faith despite whatever we're dealing with at the moment." Isaiah uses the illustration of a deserted wife and a woman who is "down in spirit" (depressed). We're getting the big reminder that no matter what is the problem of the moment, how does that compare to the fact we're eternally forgiven of all our sins and God's still there to guide us despite those issues and He still wants to use our lives for His glory? Realizing those facts should give us a great sense of joy no matter the circumstances we're dealing with and that's the point of this little lecture.
 - d) Meanwhile, Isaiah's almost done making his point about the same issue:
8. Verse 7: "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. ⁸ In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the LORD your Redeemer.
- a) Hey John, you just lectured us for a few pages that God never abandons us. Yet we read here in Verse 7 it states that God has abandoned you (The Israelites I assume) for a brief moment. What does that mean and why should I care? So glad you asked.
 - i) First abandonment is a reference here to "feeling". It's the idea that we feel like He has abandoned us. Let's face it, from Israel's standpoint when they were taken out of that land into captivity, it must have felt like God abandoned them. Even many centuries later when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, it must have felt like He'd abandoned them permanently. Just as God allowed the Israelites to return to that land in the last century, so I'm positive He's got a plan for them that's a "separate deal" than God has for us Christians. We need to remember the Jewish nation has a separate beginning and a separate destiny than the Christian church. That's what the bible teaches. Their destiny is God will rule over the earth from that land. The Christian destiny is we rule and reign with Jesus over the world. What that means is we help enforce His rule over the world! (That's what I suspect.)
 - ii) Next, coming back to us, it's normal to feel that God's abandoned us especially at a time of tragedy. Again, these verses are here to remind us that He never leaves us even though we may feel that way at times. I have to admit, these verses are great ones to memorize and recall at times when such tragedies strike.
 - iii) OK, enough "feeling sorry for ourselves", let's see what Isaiah says next.
9. Verse 9: "To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again.
- a) Let's start with the phrase translated "To me". I want to remind you that Isaiah sometimes writes as if he's taken dictation from God and this is one of those times.
 - b) With that said God's saying through Isaiah, that the times when the Israelites felt like God had abandoned them, He wants them and us to recall God's promise to Noah. That is the idea that the whole world will never be covered with a flood again.
 - c) Let me pause for a moment to consider a few things. First notice that Isaiah doesn't think of Noah as a mythical legend but a real person and a real event that occurred. Now notice that the verse is saying the flood was not a local event but covered the whole earth. Think about it this way: Since Noah, there has been many a local flood around the world. There has never been another worldwide flood. Archeological evidence exists around the world that supports the idea of a worldwide flood. At the same time, if you've with me through Isaiah to date, he's made lots of predictions that are easy to prove including the details of Jesus death and resurrection in the last chapter. If we trust that, we can trust the "flood".

- d) The point here is not just to state that Noah's flood was a fact. The point is God stated to Noah that there will never be a worldwide flood and the rainbow is the symbol associated with that promise. The idea is "God hasn't abandoned His people way back then and He's not about to abandon them now."
 - e) Let me explain this idea one more way: In the last year, I've personally known of a handful of people who were so depressed about their lives they committed suicide. These weren't close friends, but acquaintances of mine. In those cases, they were going through a rough time in their lives. They didn't see a solution and ended their life. As sad as all that is, my point is when one is feeling really down, one has to remember that God is still there, He's still got a plan for our lives and still wants to guide us despite whatever it is we are facing. Just as God didn't abandon Noah, just as God has never abandon the Israelites as a group in their hour of need, so God's still guiding our lives and wants to guide it for His glory in spite of whatever it is we're facing at this time.
 - f) Consider the second line of this verse: "Now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again." While it can apply to many times in Israel's history where they must have felt like God abandoned them during horrid times of suffering, what I suspect it also means is just as the complete price for our sins was paid for as stated in the last chapter of Isaiah, so the logical conclusion is God's "not angry at us" in the sense that by our trust in Him, we don't have to worry about sin in the sense that price has already been paid. Yes of course I believe sin is to be avoided, but not to earn His love, but just to be grateful for what He's done for us. With that said, let's move on to Verse 10.
10. Verse 10: Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you.
- a) I admit this is a tough verse to accept if one is Jewish. Consider how they've been treated over the millenniums with the holocaust as only a fairly recent example. Yet here we read of God saying through Isaiah that mountains and hills will be removed, yet My unfailing love for all of you won't change". Some commentators think that when Jesus returns there will be geographical changes based on this verse. That's possible, but I believe the point is simply that God can't stop loving what He loves despite the tragedies of our existence.
 - b) In effect this verse ties well to the last lesson. That lesson focused on Isaiah's prediction of Jesus dying for our sins. The tie-in is since God Himself paid that price, we never have to worry about God's love for us "growing cold". Let me put it this way, we can sin so badly we mess up our rewards in heaven or mess up our life so bad that we may lose all we got or say go to jail. However, God can't "un-love" what He loves in the first place. All that I am saying is this verse is a great one to take comfort in when one feels abandoned by God or by anyone else. It's the reminder that no matter how bad things get in life, we're loved by God and He still wants to guide the rest of our lives for His glory. No matter what the situation is we're in at the moment, God can and does want to use it for His glory.
11. Verse 11: "O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. ¹² I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones. ¹³ All your sons will be taught by the LORD, and great will be your children's peace.
- a) First logical question for these verses: They start by saying, "O(h) afflicted city". What is Isaiah talking about? In one sense I'm sure it refers to Jerusalem. If you've been with me through the book to date, I said many lessons back that a scholar's nickname for the bible is "A tale of two cities". As much of the bible focuses on the history and destiny of the city of Jerusalem and the city of Babylon of all places. My point is those two cities represent a life choice of either drawing close to God or drawing away from Him. All I'm saying here is that the afflicted city can literally represent Jerusalem, but I think in context it's focusing on those of us who trust in God to guide our lives. Let me explain that better:

- i) Whatever this city is, Isaiah's describing it as being built with precious stones. It's describing the city as being full of valuable stones as described in these verses.
 - ii) Think about this in context of what we've read so far in this lesson. Isaiah has been pounding the point that God still loves us no matter what because what He loves, He loves and nothing can change it. If we've committed our lives to serving Him, we can be confident that we are among that chosen no matter how we may feel at any given moment in time.
- b) I'd like you to consider the term "precious jewels" as it's used in the bible. One of the items that the High Priest wore was a breastplate. On that breastplate were twelve jewels which represented the 12 tribes of Israel. At the "other end of the bible", Revelation 18 describes a "New Jerusalem" coming down from heaven among other things being adored with items we associate with the "rich and famous" being fine clothing, gold and precious jewels. All I'm saying is while God desired the current city of Jerusalem to be the center of worship of Him, there will also be a "New Jerusalem" when Jesus returns that I believe represents the church as it returns with Jesus. Confused? Just realize that "betting on Jesus" means we'll be a part of a wonderful eternal future as we return with Jesus to rule and reign with Him over the earth.
- c) If all of that isn't strange enough, Verse 13 isn't any easier to grasp. That verse essentially is saying when Jesus returns all our "children" will be taught by Him. So does that mean Jesus will lead a really big Sunday school class when He returns? I don't know. I suspect it means is first of all, when Jesus returns, the nation of Israel will exist as a place for Jesus to rule from. It also means that life will go on in the sense that children will still come into this world at that time. With that said, I don't know if Jesus Himself will be leading a big bible study or that many will draw close to Him to learn of Him.
- d) This gets back to my weird theory that when we're resurrected we will exist in more than three dimensions so that many can draw close to Him. It also supports my theory that we won't be bored in the next life as we can still draw close to Jesus to learn more about what it is He desires to tell us about life and how He desires we live. An old Jewish expression is that when the Messiah comes He will not only explain what the "Torah" (bible) says, but He will also explain the spaces between the letters. That just means one of the jobs that the Messiah will have is to explain to us the proper understanding of His word. Does all that mean we are among the children who learn from Jesus when He returns? I don't know. I just know I'd personally like to be there to draw close to Him and learn what He wants to teach children and all people about what He desires of us as we live forever.
- e) Enough of the "strange stuff". Let's move on.
12. Verse 14: In righteousness you will be established: Tyranny will be far from you; you will have nothing to fear. Terror will be far removed; it will not come near you. ¹⁵ If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing; whoever attacks you will surrender to you.
- a) Let's back up to see the big picture here. The last "chapter" spoke of Jesus death and His resurrection. This chapter is focusing on how the nation of Israel should benefit from that event. The early verses of this chapter talked about how Israel will be "enlarged" one day as the number of believers in Jesus grew around the world. It benefited Israel as a nation even though they corporately didn't believe in Jesus, Christianity created a world of those who trust in the God of the Israelites. Those of us who study the entire bible have come to realize that the Israelites are still God's chosen people, and that the church and the nation of Israel have separate beginnings and separate destinies in the bible. This chapter gives us clues about the destinies of both groups. The last few verses have given us some hints as what will life be like when Jesus returns to set up His eternal kingdom.
 - b) With that summary completed, these verses are essentially saying to those Israelites, that when all of this takes place one day, all the things one normally has to worry about in this life, will no longer be an issue. Jesus is also our protector in this biblical "utopia".

- c) Pause and think about this future world another way. Apparently when Jesus returns, a world will still exist for Him to rule over. There will still be "sinful" people who desire to have power and won't want Jesus to rule over them. It be logical to speculate that threats will exist to want to take over the Messiah's power and rule over this world. All that these verses are saying is when this day occurs we'll no longer have to fear any threat to change the Messiah's rule over this world. Coming back to my speculation about what it is that we Christians do during this time is I suspect we help "enforce" Jesus rule over the world. All that means is I think we not only get to enjoy life with Jesus ruling over it, but we will also help enforce His rule, so that when He rules from Jerusalem, people are free to draw close to Him and not have to worry about external threats.
 - d) Want a shorter version? In the next life, we won't have to worry about external threats to Jesus rule as none of those threats will ever win.
 - e) If all of this is so wonderful, why hasn't it begun yet? The answer is that God wants many to join in this "utopia" and is waiting a long time, not forever but just a long time from our perspective so that many can enjoy drawing close to Him. I'm not suggesting that we go kill ourselves so we experience this sooner. God wants us to use the time we have in this life for His glory, and not waste it by feeling sorry for ourselves. Consider how short our live is in comparison to an eternity with God being the center of world where He literally rules from it and over it.
13. Verse 16: "See, it is I who created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame and forges a weapon fit for its work. And it is I who have created the destroyer to work havoc; ¹⁷ no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me," declares the LORD.
- a) Isaiah finishes this "chapter" (no chapter breaks in the original text), by reminding us that God created all things and allows all things to exist for His greater purpose. The point is He knows all things, even all the horrible tragedies that have existed throughout human history.
 - b) Let me use the Holocaust of WWII as an example. At that time, some Jewish people held a "mock trial" as if to ask does God still exist and still care about His people. It's asking if God still exists and why would He allow that tragedy to go on. One positive aspect that came out of that tragedy is it allowed the Israelites to have a homeland again. Having all those Jewish people killed reminds us that evil exists and it still desires to prevent God's plan for the world to occur. Yes it was horrible. Yes it's a reminder that God's still there and still working out "the world" for His glory. Hell is a literal place for those who refuse to turn their lives over to the God of the Jewish world that we Christians worship. Just as I'm convinced some will be rewarded more in heaven than others, I also suspect many are going to suffer worse than others in hell.
 - c) All of that should remind us that when we read these two verses, we should realize that it is referring to a future day when Jesus rules over the world when we'll no longer have to fear any weapon against us. So does that mean for example, the Jewish nation should not have a legitimate fear of enemies wanting to destroy them? Since no one knows when all of this "utopia" will begin, we still have to make the best decisions we can based on what's in front of us and do our best to be a witness for God knowing that "bad weapons" exist to stop God's plans from occurring and it's our duty to prevent evil from occurring as much as we can until this utopia begins.
 - d) In the meantime, I've got one more shorter-chapter to cover which continues this theme of trusting God because He's paid the price for our sins and what we should be doing before He returns to rule over world.
 - e) In effect, "Chapter 55" expands the theme of the benefit of living under God's rule to show us non-Israelites what is that benefit. All I'm saying is while "Chapter 54" focused on the benefits for the Israelites, realize "Chapter 55" focuses on the benefits for all people!

14. Chapter 55, Verse 1: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.
- a) The "all you" phrase in this verse is the first indicator that the scope has expanded past the Israelites to include all people. If you have any doubts the scope changing here, Verse 4 is going to make that very clear coming up.
 - b) Notice that whatever "Isaiah's selling" doesn't cost anything. What about the travel cost to get there? There is none. The point is we don't have to travel to Jerusalem in order for us to get this water, wine and milk. It's back to the basic concept that since God Himself did pay the complete price for our sins, He alone provides for our spiritual needs if we'll seek Him for our spiritual needs.
 - c) OK, what does the water, wine and milk represent? Thought you'd never ask.
 - i) Water is a basic staple of life. It represents cleaning as well as a basic substance to sustain life. Most of our bodies are water and we need it to survive. The text isn't saying a day will occur when we have to travel to Jesus somewhere in order to get free water. It's the idea that He provides life for us. One of the classic bible stories in the Gospels is about a Samaritan (foreign) woman who wants to draw water out of a well. In that story Jesus tells her that He can provide water that will be enough for a lifetime. That's the same principal as being taught in this verse. (That story is told in John Chapter 4.)
 - ii) Milk is associated with growth in early life. Babies live off mother's breast milk. In the early years of development, animal's milk is used to help children grow. All I am saying is that just as milk helps us physically grow, so Jesus provides what we need in order to grow spiritually.
 - iii) Finally we have wine. Throughout the bible, the word "wine" is associated with a time of joy. I'm not going to get into a debate about whether or not it's appropriate for Christians to drink alcohol. It's been debated for 2,000 years and I'm not going to solve it here and now. All I wanted to say here is that just as wine is associated with joy in the bible, so God wants us to have joy in life as we use our lives for His glory. Let me define joy as I use it. I think of "happiness" as based on occurrences in our life at any moment. If we just get some great news, we may be happy for a given amount of time. Joy is "internal". It's about choosing to be joyful no matter the circumstances at any given moment. As I asked earlier, would you rather be around a joyful person or a depressed person all day? That's why I'd argue that it is the Christian duty to be joyful as that is how God expects us to be a witness for Him. Just as the bible associates wine with joy, so He wants us to be joyful people as we share His love with the world around us.
 - d) The final point here is in effect that all three of these are free for the asking. If we choose to accept Jesus as paying the complete price for our sins and choosing to accept that He is in charge of our lives, we'll have all we need to sustain our lives physically as well as have a life full of joy despite whatever the circumstances of the moment.
 - e) Meanwhile, Isaiah's getting on a role himself, and I of course, interrupted that role:
15. Verse 2: Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.
- a) Translation: Why do we waste our money and our time doing things that don't give us a sense of satisfaction? I'm not saying for example, we can't go see a movie or go travel on a vacation. All I'm saying is after one does those things eventually we'll crave another thing to want to do and they don't give us a full sense of satisfaction. Again the main point is to understand that Jesus fulfills all our spiritual needs. Yes we still have to do what's needed in order to financially survive and thrive and deal with tough situations as they arrive. All I'm saying is that "through life", Jesus promises to satisfy the spiritual need we all have to worship "something" as God will fully satisfy that need.

- b) So what about other religions? I'd argue that other religions do satisfy a need within us to worship something. The problem with other religions is that one must always do more in order to get closer to God. The "top of that ladder" is never satisfying. While God desires we grow in faith in Him, we never have to worry about being good enough for God since He already paid the complete price for our sins and we never have to prove our worth to Him by our efforts if we believe Jesus is God and paid that price for our sins. That's what Isaiah's trying to get across in these verses, the idea that since God paid the price for sins, we are free to seek Him, to grow spiritual in Him and have a joyful life in our relationship with Him as well as with other believers. That's the key point of the last two verses.
16. Verse 3: Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. ⁴ See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples.
- a) Some scholars read these verses and think that David himself will be resurrected to rule over Jerusalem under Jesus rule. My response is "could be", but I don't think that's what Isaiah's trying to communicate to us in these verses. The point is just as God promised to David that God loved him despite all his faults and mistakes, so God cares for us if we've committed our lives to serving Him and we can't "blow it if we tried". As long as we don't deny Jesus as God for the rest of our lives, we too are part of that eternal covenant.
- b) Remember how I said that "Chapter 55" expands on God's blessings from Israel to include all of us who are trusting in Jesus as God? These verses tell us (that's all people) that our souls will live forever based on that trust. Just as God took David from a "nobody" to be a king, so we should trust in God despite our faults and sins, so we too will be raised up to rule with Him forever. I don't know what we do forever, but I'm pretty positive it'll never be boring and our joy will never run out. Speaking of joy, we only have nine more verses to go that include one of my favorites in the whole bible.
17. Verse 5: Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor." ⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. ⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.
- a) Try to visualize from the perspective of 2,700 years ago that God is telling the Israelites of how other nations will seek you. That had to be tough to understand. Reading this from a perspective of 2,700 years later, it's easy to see how people from all over the world have been drawn to worship the God that the Israelites worship and believe that one who came from that small nation is also the God who rules over the world. These verses are a call to all people to seek that God while we can. Let me explain that better:
- b) Verse 6 here is the key: It says that we're to seek Him while we can. I'm positive there is a point a person can reach in this life where it's too late to turn to God. I don't know when a person reaches that point and I pray for lots of hearts to be open to His truth. The point is if a person doesn't want God to rule over their lives, He will give them what they want: A life in eternity without Him ruling over it. All that I'm saying is the desire to accept God or reject Him will continue for eternity to either be with Him or separated from Him.
- c) Then notice that God does not desire any to choose to turn from Him. That's why Verse 7 is literally begging people to turn to God and He'll forgive us of all our sins, no matter the level of depth of that sin. My point is there is a "too late", but we never know when it's too late to turn to Him before we die. If that's true, why don't we wait until the last minute to accept Jesus? First we don't know when that last minute occurs. We could be hit by a car and not get such a chance. Why waste one's life without Him when we could grow in His love and have joy by serving Him? Yes I know these verses are stating the basics, but we can't grow in Him unless we have a good understanding of the basics before we begin to use our lives to make that difference for Him.

18. Verse 8: "For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, Nor *are* your ways My ways," says the LORD.
⁹"For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.
- a) Verse 8 is a verse quoted often by pastors and teachers. It's the reminder to us that we do not get the privilege of knowing all that God knows. This reminds me of a great quote on this topic: "Every time I try to think about how big God is, all I do is get a headache." (David Hocking). To state the obvious a God that's big enough to fully understand is not a god big enough to worship. (Another quote, don't know the source). All we have to do is think about this verse logically and it makes sense. Can we understand how God made the world? Can we understand how we are resurrected and live forever? Is it possible to even understand how God can manifest Himself in a way where multitudes can get close to Him? The logical answer is no, which is why these verses are stating the obvious.
 - b) Now the more important question: Why are these verses right here? The previous bunch of verses we're telling us to call out to God while we can. It expressed the idea that we're able to speak to Him whenever and wherever we want. Remember that this section was written to everyone. For a lot of people in those days, a "god" was only to be reached in a temple. Even the Jewish people argued that God is "met" in the temple, even though they understood the concept that God is everywhere. That's why it was necessary for Isaiah to remind us that God's bigger than we can comprehend and He's able to read our thoughts as well as watch our actions.
 - c) Speaking of things that are beyond our ability to comprehend, I present the next 2 verses:
19. Verse 10: As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.
- a) Verse 10 is another pretty straightforward verse that's pretty easy to understand. Just as it is hard to fully understand the "water cycle" of the earth, we know that in the long run we don't run out of it and the rain provides water for the crops that we can eat.
 - b) However, that fact is not Isaiah's main point. It is that just as the earth's water cycle does it's thing, so God's word will accomplish what God wants it to accomplish.
 - c) By the way, for those of you who've read this far, Verse 11 is one of my favorites in all of the bible as I literally see it coming true in my ministry. More on that in a moment.
 - d) First, have you ever thought about how did the bible writers know God was speaking to them? Was there a glow about their writing? Did they just think it and write it down? Of course we don't know. We do know that all the writings of the bible were tested and they were compared to other writings that were rejected, even writings that may be legitimate. For example, the difference between a preacher given a God-inspired sermon and a bible book is that a consequences of conservative bible scholars accept it as God's word.
 - e) If you have doubts about the bible being the word of God, remember the acronym MAPS. That stands for Manuscripts, Archeology, Prophecy and Statistics or MAPS for short. Let me just say the study of any of those fields applied to the evidence that the bible is God's word, does a great job of supporting it's accuracy. I've discussed a lot in previous lessons about the fact that Isaiah wrote details about Jesus First Coming long before it did occur. That's "prophecy" and just one way of believing the bible's God's word.
 - f) Of all things that leads me to discussing my ministry. I don't try to advertise my studies. I just write them, as that's what I believe God called me to do. I'm sure God's word "does not return empty" (a paraphrase of Verse 11) because every month I check my statistics on who reads this and there are people all over the world who are reading my studies as laid out on my web site. I'm not saying this to brag, but just to show how these studies are one of many proof's that teaching and preaching God's word is never a waste of a life. It will always accomplish what God desires it accomplishes when preached.

- g) I also can't leave this section without quoting Charles Spurgeon. When asked about how the word of God affects people, (I'm paraphrasing), "How do you control a lion? You just let it loose and it goes where it wants." That's the point about God's word. A way we can be sure it is His word is simply by the way it convicts people of God's truth. Preaching it just helps to put it out to places and hearts that have never considered specific points that affect our lives and hopefully draw us closer to Him. OK, enough about my ministry. We have two more verses to go:
20. Verse 12: You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.
- a) I just reread the verses all by themselves and realized that this whole section is a plea for us to be joyful. One thing I've grown to accept about Isaiah is that whenever he focuses on God, the text is generally happy as Isaiah expresses his joy over what God will do for those of us who trust in Him. It's usually when Isaiah gets focuses on the sinfulness of a nation or group that Isaiah tends to focus on the problems we can face in life. In short, we should know after 55 chapters that Isaiah's happiest when he's focused on the joy of being a part of God's family.
- b) Which leads me to this second to last verse here. Who's the "you" to stat this verse? One should always look at the surrounding verses to figure it out. The previous set of verses focus on God and what His word will accomplish in this world. My simple point is that the "you" refers to God. In this case, I believe the "You" is focusing on God the Son as He will lead the world to peace by His rule over it. Will mountains and hills literally start to sing and tree's clap their hands? No. I suspect it simply means that the world we live in will be happy when the God who created it begins to rule over it. It's like nature singing out "Hey, these people are going to stop messing with us as God Himself will come down from heaven to start ruling over us Himself."
- c) Because Verse 12 starts with a "You" and the previous verse is about God Himself telling us that His word accomplishes what it does, I'm positive the "You" is God and it occurred to me that the "You" is Jesus as God as He will rule over this world. Jesus is the one who's responsible for giving us our bible and He intends for us to understand it as He is the one who will literally rule over our world. That's what makes Isaiah joyful to write about and hopefully fills us with joy to realize what God will do in this world. As I said to start this lesson, the idea is about shooting for delayed gratification in heaven as that life will be far greater than settling for whatever this world has to offer. That's the point here.
21. Verse 13: Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the LORD's renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed."
- a) My loose translation, instead of settling for the types of things in nature that are more of a pain to deal with, only the good things will grow. Isaiah lists two types of plants that are not desirable to put it mildly. The two "bad trees" are essentially a bunch of thorns. The two good types of trees are not fruit bearing one's but just ones we associate with height and good growth. Again the point for us is about not settling for something "easy" that is earned only in this life, but our willingness not only to trust that Jesus paid the complete price for our sins and He's coming back to rule over this world. That's the "ground rules" that we need to live by as we use our lives to make a difference for Him.
- b) If you get nothing else out of this lesson, it is simply that our willingness to be gratified in the next world, that lasts for eternity is much greater than whatever we would settle for if we only lived for this life. Don't get me wrong we Christians still need to make the best of the time we have to live here. The key is to find a way to do what we enjoy doing or have a gift to do so that God may be glorified by that process. If we do that we'll be a winner in both this life and the one to come.
- c) So what do we do now? Ask God to help us to use our time to be willing servant of Him so we can lead others closer to Him for all this to occur. With that said I'll close in prayer.

22. Heavenly Father, Thank You for teaching us the "ground rules" of how the world works: That is, You've sent your Son to pay the complete price for our sins and He'll return one day to rule over this world. Until that day, guide us as we use the time You have given us so that we do make a difference for You in this world. Help us to remember that a life focused on You will bring us far more joy than any and all things we do just for ourselves in this world. Guide us as we go make that difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.