

1. We're quickly approaching the end of the book. I'm still shocked I made it this far. I'll wait until the final lesson to bid my "fond farewells". In the meantime, Isaiah's got a few things left to teach us. Let's start by remembering where we left off: The last lesson focused on the issue of what will we do for eternity? If you didn't read it, the lesson asked the question, if we're resurrected for all of eternity, what will we do then? The answer is we will keep busy not only to draw close to God but I believe we'll also have joy as we'll continue to use our lives make a difference for Him. If He wants us to use this life is to prepare us for the next one, then realize our life is a one big "training ground" for the next one. I love joy in my life. If we use our time to make a difference for God, we will be full of joy. He desires that joy to increase as we will continue to use the next life to make a difference for Him and continue to be full of joy.
 - a) OK John that's great. However that was the last lesson. What's the purpose of these two chapters? How do they connect to the last few chapters, and since we're near the end of the book, how will all this "endless commentary" wrap up? Thought you'd never ask.
 - b) The question of this lesson is how do we prepare for that eternity? It begins by teaching a few of the things we'll see near the end of Revelation, which is Jesus returning to rule over the world. One of the things to grasp about Jesus Second Coming is just as He did pay the complete price for all sins all by Himself, so He'll conquer the world by Himself. We'll get into that idea as we cover the first set of Verses in Chapter 63. If you get only one thing in that section, it is the idea that just as Jesus First Coming, "did it all" for the payment of our sins, Jesus Second Coming, "does it all" to set up a world with Jesus Himself ruling over it with believers helping Him rule. Just as Jesus calls us now to spread the word about Him of how He alone paid for our sins, so Jesus "will do it all" the Second Time so we will then go and serve Him when all of this eventually begins.
 - c) With all that said, that's just the first part of these two chapters. Most of it can be thought of as a prayer. It's essentially saying, "Jesus we're still suffering in this world now, as You are not ruling over it. How much longer is this going to last? What is it we should do now in preparation for eternity?" Yes of course we should be using our lives to make whatever difference we can for Jesus, but there are times when we feel overwhelmed. Moments are there, where we think, "Dear God, I can't do this anymore. I'm up to my neck in "this" and I need to focus upon You to get my perspective right about eternity and what You desire I do before all that utopia begins."
 - d) Bottom line, these two chapters are thoughts on what will happen when Jesus returns and how we should occasionally focus on that event to help our perspective with what we do now in this lifetime. That leads to my lesson title, "Preparing for Jesus Return". Know that we can't speed up that event by praying that line, or begging Him to come now. God will work on His timing and there's nothing we can do to change that timing. Isaiah's point is we should keep our perspective right through whatever we're dealing with. That's what these two chapters remind us of, how to keep our perspective right about Jesus' return.
2. Oh, and by the way, that'll lead perfectly to my last lesson on Isaiah, which is about how God will answer our prayers about His ultimate return. However, we'll save that for next week. Since next week is the final lesson, I'll have to think of some way to celebrate getting through this large book, and figure some way to summarize a years' work in one lesson. However, that's a problem I will have to deal with in the next lesson. In the meantime, I need to focus on this "second to last one" as we cover two of the last four chapters in the book of Isaiah.
3. As to this lesson, again, think of it as a prayer we're going to lift up to God for Him to execute His plan for eternity. Which reminds me, "If God is God", why does He need us? Why won't He just "snap His fingers" and have everyone killed who won't accept His rule over the earth? To put this another way, why go through all this trouble of this "life" and then all the "Revelation stuff"?

- a) The answer is, as I like to remind us every now and then, is that because the God is a god of love, He desires something to express that love upon. The example I use is, if we enjoy painting or playing a musical instrument, we do that out of joy, and not just for a financial benefit. We may earn a living by using our talents, but first and foremost we do what we love just because we enjoy doing it. God's the same way: Since He doesn't need to earn a living, He needs something to express that love upon. Therefore He created people so He can spend eternity expressing His love upon us. What He desires is we return that favor, as we use our lives to express love back to Him by using our lives to make a difference for Him. That's how we get joy in this life and joy in the next one, while I'm at it.
 - b) Therefore, we're living in an era where God's effectively saying, let's see how many of the people that live in this world are willing to love Me in return and prove it by using a good part of their life to help others to demonstrate that love. I also hold the view that there will many people in heaven who died before an age of accountability, but I'll save that debate for another day.
 - c) The question is how does that understanding of God's game plan apply to these chapters? It's to realize that just as Jesus paid the price for our sins by Himself, so Jesus "By Himself" will one day right the wrongs of this world. That way we can then spend eternity drawing close to Him and continue making a difference for Him. Then we have a prayer to get our focus off our problems and realize He's the one responsible for the eternal joy we'll have.
 - d) Bottom line, think of these chapters as us putting our life in perspective of God's plans for our eternity. It's about how to be in a good mood despite whatever is our circumstance of the moment. On that positive thought, it's time to begin the verse-by-verse commentary.
4. Chapter 63, Verse 1: Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? "It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save."
- a) The natural question to ask about this verse is "Who is the "who" to start this verse?" Then we can ask, why should we care that the "who" is coming from Edom and Bozrah? Why's his garment stained crimson (red)? To answer that, one always needs to read any verse in context of the previous set of verses and ignore the "modern" chapter breaks.
 - i) The previous set of verses all focus on "God's people" and the reward they'll get as followers of God. Therefore, Isaiah's moving into a new subject here as if he put in his own chapter breaks. All I'm saying is the last few verses don't really help us to understand who the "who" is.
 - ii) Another clue would be "what's the overriding topic of the last few chapters? It'd be about what will life be like when the Messiah "sets up shop". It's as if Isaiah pauses from his discussion of what will we do for all of eternity as if he is startled by what he just saw. It'd be like saying, forget all of the what will do for eternity stuff for a moment, let me tell you something shocking I'm seeing now.
 - b) Since this is a bible study let's assume it's Jesus in His Second Coming. There's an old joke about a children's Sunday school class where a teacher asked, what's small, furry, lives by flowing water, and likes to dam up that water to build a home? A child answers: it seems like a beaver, but I'll play it safe and say it's Jesus. The point of that joke is no matter how logical a correct answer may be, even children realize the point of Sunday school classes is to learn about Jesus, so they will often say "Jesus" assuming that's the correct answer.
 - i) My point is if the "who" of Verse 1 is really Jesus, let's see if it ties to what the New Testament says about Him. When the resurrected Jesus left the disciples in Acts 1, the disciples were told by angels right after He was taken up into heaven that he'd return the same way He was taken up. The last part of Luke 24 (same writer) said that the disciples were near Bethany, (near Jerusalem) when this occurred. All I'm saying is if the New Testament says that Jesus "returns" to the land of Israel when He comes back, why does the "who" say He comes from Bozrah and where is that?

- c) To explain, I need to give a little background on Edom and Bozrah.
 - i) To understand, first realize that both religious Jews and Christians believe when the Messiah comes, He comes to Israel. To state the obvious, religious Jews argue that the Messiah is just a man who will rule over the world from Israel. Christians argue that it is Jesus at His Second Coming. If we accept that is true, why is there a "pit stop" in Bozrah and what's that all about?
 - ii) To explain, first I need to give a little Middle East geography lesson. Edom was a country just to the southeast of Israel. It's part of Jordan today. If you are in Israel by the Jordan River and look across the river to the country of Jordan, the hills are called the "Hills of Edom" to this day. Bozrah was a main city within Edom at the time Isaiah wrote it. Anyway, that's the physical location Verse 1 is describing.
 - iii) Next, we need to realize that Edom was a traditional enemy of Israel. They've had a history of predominately fighting against each other for millenniums. What I'm suspecting that Isaiah is stating is that part of the eternal rule of the Messiah is He will wipe out all the Israelite enemies all by Himself. As I said in the introduction, if Jesus paid the price for our sins all by Himself, I also believe He deals with those who oppose the Gospel message all by Himself. That's why we get a verse here of the Messiah wiping out a traditional enemy of the Israelites.
 - iv) OK, what about Iran and other enemies of Israel today? Either they get wiped out before the Messiah's return or they are part of this "wipe out" when He returns. No matter how it happens, the point is Jesus will rule the world from the land of Israel after making a "pit stop" to wipe out those who want to harm His people.
 - v) What about the fact that most Israelites don't believe Jesus is the Messiah? How is that going to play out in this scenario? The short version is the Holy Spirit is going to do a lot of "convicting" before this occurs. That's coming up later in this lesson.
 - vi) All I want you to know about Verse 1 is that part of the role of the Messiah will be to wipe out Israel's enemies before ruling over the world from Israel. Speaking of that topic, it's time for Verse 2.
- 5. Verse 2: Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? ³ "I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing.
 - a) OK, if Verse 1 wasn't strange enough, Verse 2 and 3 go "right over the edge" unless we get what Isaiah is talking about. First understand that in the original Hebrew, Isaiah is using a "pun". There are references to the color red and the color of crushed red grapes. It does come across a little in the English and this translation is "not bad". The idea is just as one's clothes would get all red if one was stomping grapes for a long time, so one's clothes will also be red if one was killing a lot of people with a sword. The text is essentially telling us that Jesus alone will wipe out the enemies of the Israelites when He returns.
 - b) I always hold the idea that if "God is God" He can "snap His fingers" and someone will be dead if He wills it. Just as God created life, He has every right to end it as well. All that I am saying is I never worry about the "how issue" with God, because I figure if He is God, then the "how" won't be an issue. I just want to bet on the "winning horse" so I can watch this show safely from the balcony.
 - c) Let me explain these verses another way that most of us Christians understand. The book of Revelation describes a great battle where Jesus wipes out Israel's enemies. We call this place "Armageddon". While these verses may or may not be talking about that final war against God, the point is the same, "Don't mess with God, as our arms aren't big enough to box against Him." (Yes I'm laughing at that one.) I've never thought of Armageddon as a battle, but more of a "wipe out". The literal place is a large valley in Israel where Jesus is going to wipe out a final attempt to prevent Him from ruling over the world. All that I'm saying is Jesus will wipe out enemies of God's desire before we rule and reign with Him.

- d) Think of these verses this way. The last lesson focused on living an eternal life full of joy as we live as priests making a difference for Jesus for eternity. Before that eternity begins, there has to be a destruction of all people who don't want a "Jewish God" to rule over this world. Therefore, a great war and great "wipe out" has to occur. That's why we're reading of Jesus making a "pit stop" to wipe out Israel's enemies before He can rule. I suspect that Edom is the staging ground for all of this. I'd argue the important thing for us to realize is just as Jesus paid for our sins all by Himself, so He'll wipe out those who want to oppose Him ruling over the world by Himself. Like I said, "If God is God", how it will be done, is not an issue to me, because if God wants, it can be an instant wipeout. I want to be on the winning team and again, watch this from a safe distance away.
 - e) Speaking of God acting alone, I present the next few verses:
6. Verse 4: For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come. ⁵ I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm worked salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me. ⁶ I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground."
- a) Here is Isaiah around the year 700BC describing the end of the world, as we know it with the Messiah wiping out Israel's enemies all by Himself. To quote many Jewish rabbi's on when the Messiah comes, "What took you so long?" Why did He wait until after all of the horrid tragedies of Rome destroying Jerusalem or the Holocaust? Why didn't this occur a long time ago? Let me try to explain. The only good news of the Holocaust is that event did allow Israel to form it's own country again. The Roman Empire was at it's peak when word of Christianity spread. All I'm saying is God has His reasons why tragedies occur as it is part of His bigger plan for all of humanity. If this life is all that there is, I'd argue that this life is very unfair and is a tragedy. If our lives continue in the next one, and we'll use them to spread joy to others and have joy ourselves, then this world makes more sense as to why God allows horrid tragedies to occur in the first place.
 - b) That little lecture leads us back to these verses. Notice Isaiah's appalled that no one helped the Messiah wipe out Israel's enemies. It's not like Israel was crazy about their neighbors. Again, the issue to learn here is just as God paid the price for our sins alone, so He will be responsible by Himself for taking care of our enemies.
 - c) OK John, this is all interesting philosophy and I'm glad the good guys will win in the end. How does any of this theology help me here and now? It's a reminder that just as He will win in the end, so He'll lead us to victory in our own battles in life. I've always argued for a God that guides us through life, kind of like someone throwing us a "line" to pull us out of whatever danger we're in at the moment. I'm not saying to trust in God means we will never suffer in this lifetime. Many Christians have had to be martyrs for the cause. All I am saying is that just as God will guide us down a path He desires we go if we're willing to commit our lives to serving Him, so He will give us the victory we desire over what we face such as resistance to the Gospel message and even death itself.
 - d) Let me try this one more way and then I'll come back to the verse. A survey was done of what people fear the most: Death was second. Public speaking was first. As to number 1, practice helps. It'll also help us to realize that God wants to lead us through our fears and that includes #1 and #2 on that list. The idea is that worrying about what we can't control is a waste of time. We can't control the fear of humiliation if we don't speak well publicly and we can't control the fear of what happens to us after we die. All we can do is trust in God to guide us through our fears of what could happen to us and trust that He is going to guide us through whatever we face.
 - e) Gee John, that's all well and good and maybe my trust in God's existence will help when I have to speak in public sometime. What does it have to do with these verses? The point's to realize that God's in charge, He's working life out on His timing and He'll wipe out our problems and fears on His timing, so we don't have to worry about what we can't control!

7. Verse 7: I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us-- yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses.
- a) The good news is we're done with the "death and destruction" part of this lesson. I know I "glazed over" a lot of horror that will occur in the future. Again, the point is to bet on the "winning horse" so that when this occurs we can watch from the sideline or just realize the fact that Jesus by Himself takes care of any and all that oppose His rule over this world.
 - b) Notice that Isaiah "stops on a dime" to change topics from the Messiah wiping out all His enemies to a praise fest. If there is one thing I've learned about Isaiah after going through this book is that he's always in his best mood when he focuses on the good that God does and will do for His people. We too should have a great sense of joy when we focus upon Him and trust that He will work His timing deal with those who do want to harm us and oppose our efforts to make a difference for Him.
 - c) Pause and think what Isaiah talked about so far: When he wrote this book, the Assyrian Empire had already wiped out the Northern Israel kingdom. God then sent a single angel to wipe out their army as they surrounded Jerusalem, but after they already killed or took captive a lot of other people living in Israel. Isaiah described in great detail, the rise and fall of the Babylonian Empire long before it occurs. Despite all those horrible things that'll occur in Israel's history around Isaiah's time, he pauses here to thank God for all the good that He's done for the Israelites over the millenniums.
 - d) My point is the reason we praise God in church or even at home is it gets our perspective on the eternal things and off our issues of the moment. When we realize it is God who is the one that gives us life in the first place, we can always think of reasons why we can be grateful for what we do have. It can be as simple as being thankful for a place to live, for the food we have or the fact we get the opportunity to be a witness for Him. My point is if we think hard enough, we can always find something to be grateful for. Isaiah realizes his homeland is about to go through really hard times and despite all of that, He wants to pause to show gratitude to God for the good that He's done. If Isaiah can show gratitude for the good God's done for him, why can't we have that same attitude?
 - e) OK, what's the specific things that Isaiah's grateful for? For starters, he just spent the last bunch of verses describing how God alone will wipe out Israel's enemies in the final days before He begins to rule over this world. We're back to the idea that since God will win in the end, there's no need to worry about life as God has it under His control. Yes of course we still have to deal with problems of the moment, but the issue of what will happen to us in the eternal future is not an issue as we win in the end.
 - f) Let me explain this one more way and then I'll move on. I'm not Jewish. The main reason I am "Pro-Israel" is the God I worship is Pro-Israel. To quote a Christian proverb, the great mistake most Jewish people make is they fail to see Jesus as their promised Messiah. The great mistake most Christians make is we fail to see God as a God of the Jews!" My point is when God says He's going to bless that land and Israelite nation in the end, that means we Christians can be a part of that blessing when Jesus returns to rule the world when all of this begins. If that isn't a reason to praise God I don't know what is!
 - g) On that happy note, we can move on.
8. Verse 8: He said, "Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me"; and so he became their Savior.
- a) You might recall a few pages back I told the children's joke about "It sounds like a beaver, but I will play it safe and say the answer is Jesus". I come back to that as this verse tells us for sure that Isaiah's describing the "Savior" as the one who will do all the damage that we read in the first part of this chapter. This Savior is also the reason Isaiah broke out into his "praise fest" in these verses. OK John we believe Jesus is the Savior (Messiah). What about the rest of the verse where it says "my people...will not be false to me?" Who are they?

- i) Let's start with what this verse is not saying: We have to be perfect in our life to be part of Jesus' eternal kingdom.
 - ii) The issue isn't our perspective it's God's perspective. It represents the concept that if we're trusting in Jesus as one who paid for all our sins, we can have assurance of our eternal salvation because of our trust in that fact.
 - iii) The way I look at this issue is if we're trusting that Jesus is God and did pay for all my sins, no matter how bad I may mess up my life, I can have assurance that I'm a part of that eternal kingdom. Do I want to mess up? Of course not. I desire to use my life to make a difference for Him. However, I know I'll never be perfect. All I can do is trust Him daily and ask for His guidance to make a difference for Him.
 - iv) Bottom line: don't panic about trying to be good enough to please God. Have faith it's up to Him and not up to us to be perfect and we can trust in a perfect God.
- b) So how do religious Jewish people see this verse? As describing God the Father as being a faithful God to them. My disagreement is how does that deal with the eternal sin issue. I don't believe it does, so the debate continues. Meanwhile, Verse 9.
9. Verse 9: In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.
- a) My loose translation: God hates to see us suffer. Just as He rescued those Israelites out of Egypt on His timing, He works to help us through our own suffering. Just as He sent "a" Messiah to relieve them of the Babylonian captivity, God is there with us when we do go through tough trials. So what about the World War II Holocaust? Where was God then? He was using the millions of people to end that war and rescue as many of the survivors. Yes it was horrible, but I trust in a God that judges people fairly. I can't explain all of the horrors of the world. I just accept the idea that God exists, He rules over this world and He allows horrible things to occur somehow and ultimately for His glory.
 - b) Bottom line time again: If we accept that Jesus paid for our sins and wants to guide us for His glory, He promises to be there with us whatever we go through in life. If we're willing to use our lives for His glory, He promises to guide us if we make ourselves available.
 - c) That's why this verse is a praise! It's not saying tragedies don't occur. It's saying that He's redeemed us by His blood and guides us into eternal life despite whatever we're facing.
10. Verse 10: Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them.
- a) OK, now for the bad news. Let's start with the Israelites before the days of Jesus. How do the Israelites "grieve" the Holy Spirit? First, realize the Holy Spirit is mentioned by name here in the Old Testament. It's not a "New Testament thing". If we believe the Holy Spirit is God how can He (or it) be grieved? It would help to define the Spirit first. His role is to draw people close to God. We are all built with a need to worship something. Therefore, the job of the Holy Spirit is to take that need and draw us closer to Him. It's God's Spirit that helps us to pray His will. It's the Spirit that guides us to what God wants for our life. It's the Spirit that tells us, make yourself available for God and He'll find a way to use our lives for His glory.
 - i) As to being grieved, when we choose to walk away from God's will, the Spirit gets "grieved". That doesn't mean God isn't perfect. It means that He won't violate our free will. We're free to ignore God and sin all we want. Yes consequences happen. My point is God doesn't make us into a bunch of robots being forced to do His will for our lives. All the Holy Spirit can do is "grieve" when we refuse to commit our lives to Him or turn from God at any moment in time.
 - ii) With that lecture out of my system, let me turn back to the Israelites back then. At the time of Isaiah's writing the Northern Kingdom had already been destroyed as they spent centuries ignoring God and turning to idolatry. The Southern Kingdom was about to be destroyed for the same reason.

- iii) Remember how I asked earlier, why did God allow all that horrible history to be part of the history of Israel? Part of it, was to show the consequences of ignoring Him individually and collectively. So was the Holocaust their fault? No! I don't know why God allowed that other than to make it possible for Israel to once again have their own homeland or to have millions fight to free them of that misery. All I'm saying is God's plans are God's plans and we must accept them. All we can do is be a good witness for Him and use our lives as a witness for Him.
 - iv) OK enough bad news for one verse. Let's move on to something positive.
11. Verse 11: Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people-- where is he who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who set his Holy Spirit among them, ¹² who sent his glorious arm of power to be at Moses' right hand, who divided the waters before them, to gain for himself everlasting renown, ¹³ who led them through the depths? Like a horse in open country, they did not stumble; ¹⁴ like cattle that go down to the plain, they were given rest by the Spirit of the LORD. This is how you guided your people to make for yourself a glorious name.
- a) Whenever I see a "Then" to start a sentence, I like to back up and see what connects to the then if I don't already know. The answer is the same as it was the last few verses, that is, we're still describing the Israelites generally around the time of Isaiah, or he could just be looking forward the Babylonian captivity.
 - b) Let me throw one of my loose translations at you: Hey God, we're in big trouble here. We read (or heard in synagogue) how You've worked miracles in the past. Yet, here we are in big trouble and we can really use your help right now, so why aren't you helping us? That is what I suspect the Israelites debated during the Holocaust to use a recent example.
 - i) Let me discuss God "working" in our lives for a moment. One of the first things to learn is God won't do for us what we can do for ourselves. For example, God may have his hand "behind the scenes" of World War II, but millions still had to fight in that war to obtain a victory. The next thing to realize is He rarely works when we want Him to. (The joke is if He does work on our timing, it's a coincidence.) God works His way and on His timing. He loves to hear from us and we should share with Him where we are struggling at any given moment. I've seen way too many "cute coincides" to doubt that God works in my life.
 - ii) Does that mean if a tree fell on my home was it God ordained? The answer is God knows all things but some things are His "permissive" will versus His desired will. He often allows us to go through things to test us and see if we'll still trust Him in spite of the issue of the moment. Most of us who've lived a while have seen things too horrible to think about. My point is God knows all things but often He allows us to experience things in some way to glorify Him with our life.
 - iii) The way I find God works best is in "hindsight". It's not like a visible "thing" comes to guide us. It's more like as we go through life and we realize how we've made it this far, the hand of God was there to guide us the whole time.
 - c) Believe it or not, that last thought leads right back to these verses. It describes in hindsight how God has worked in the past for the Israelites. Here's the important thing: If God has gotten us this far in life, what makes us think He's forgotten about us or stopped caring at this point? It's so easy to get our focus on our issues of the moment, that we forget that He can and will be there to guide us through the rest of our lives here.
 - i) I tend to be a worrier about finances at times. I worry how I'll pay for things in the future. Maybe that's a natural worry for us men who are trying to provide for our families. What these verses are reminding me is that if God's gotten me this far in life, why do I worry about how I'm going to make through the rest of my life.
 - ii) That doesn't mean I sit still and quit trying. It means I go forward, make what I'd consider the best decisions I can and trust God with what I worry over.

12. Verse 15: Look down from heaven and see from your lofty throne, holy and glorious. Where are your zeal and your might? Your tenderness and compassion are withheld from us. ¹⁶ But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.
- a) Meanwhile, while I was stating my own fears, Isaiah was doing the same. I'd say Isaiah is not worried about God, as Isaiah knows God's sovereign and cares for His own. The issue is not them, but us, as the classic expression goes. The verses here remind us that God did reach out to the common ancestor Abraham, so God's able to reach out and help us in our hour of need. However, there are times where God "hold's back". Let me explain:
 - b) The point Isaiah's trying to make here is times come where God may be withhold blessing due to His people collectively ignoring Him. How do we know that? We don't. So let me put it this way: Suppose life isn't going well. Suppose the work we depend upon is not an option. Does that mean God is holding back blessing us?
 - i) What I've learned to do in tough situations is first of all, take inventory: Are there any unconfessed sins I need to think about? Have I been ignoring what He's called me to do? There is no set answer for everyone. I'm not even trying to lay any guilt trip on anyone. I'm just saying when things aren't going well, it never hurts to take a quick spiritual inventory and fire up a prayer for guidance on what He desires of us at any given moment.
 - ii) The next step is to make the best decisions we can given what's in front of us. If we don't violate any biblical principals, I'd argue we're free to make the best decisions we can in any given situation. For example if we lost a job, that may be God's way of getting us to move where He wants us to be. I'm not saying that's the issue, but I wouldn't put it past God to go to extreme's to get us to do His will. As I said, we don't usually know what's His will until we think about it in hindsight. All we can do is make good decisions and hope that things work out for the best.
 - iii) If you think I've wandered away from the verses, what I've been lecturing over in the last few paragraphs are essentially Isaiah's point as well. What he's saying is if there is a problem in our life, God wants to help us but we can't force Him to help, we have to ask and He's more than willing to guide us if we are willing to commit our lives to make a difference for Him. That's what Christianity is all about! What we have in these verses is the reminder that God is there and He wants to guide us if we're wiling to come to Him on His terms.
 - iv) OK, we'll bite, what are His terms? It's simple the idea that He's God and He is in charge of our lives. That's what Jesus being "Lord" is all about. I'm reminded of a famous quote by a Jewish rabbi who was asked to summarize what the bible tells us while standing on one foot. He responded in effect, "Love God as much as we can, love your neighbor as yourself and the rest is commentary. Now go and study the bible!" It's that realizing that we're to love God and treat others the same way we want God to treat others, and study His word to learn the details!
13. Verse 17: Why, O LORD, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes that are your inheritance. ¹⁸ For a little while your people possessed your holy place, but now our enemies have trampled down your sanctuary. ¹⁹ We are yours from of old; but you have not ruled over them, they have not been called by your name.
- a) We're now at the end of Chapter 63 and this "dirge" of why isn't God helping us now will continue into the next (short) chapter, so bear with it.
 - b) Ask yourself, why is Isaiah going "on and on" about why God isn't helping at the moment through Isaiah's description of suffering? Think about the last time you had to deal with a major crisis. Did it go away in five minutes? Of course not. Things like that take time. So Isaiah is giving us things to think about during times when life gets hard.

- c) Think about these verses this way: Here we are near the end of the book. Why is Isaiah at this point reminding us about suffering in this life before he wraps up the book? As we all know life can get hard at times. Yes we're to have joy through all we deal with, but at the same time, reality is still there. Just as this life can be difficult at times to journey through, so Isaiah's reminding us that God's still there to guide us through whatever it is we'll deal with in this life. Just as our problems don't magically go away in five minutes, so we need to pour out our hearts to Him about our issues as to remember He's still there to guide us through whatever we're dealing with.
 - d) My point is while Isaiah's focusing on the example of Israel as a nation suffering through a time of captivity, we can apply this "God's still there" lecture to any and all times of our lives to realize He still wants to guide us through this life in order to prepare us for what He has in store for us for all of eternity. Of course not all aspects of this life are pleasant. If we're willing to consider what we're dealing with from His perspective, that can give us the strength to face whatever we have to deal with.
 - e) Speaking of dealing with things, what do you say I get back to Isaiah.
 - f) The specifics of these verses is they're describing a future time when Israel's enemies have destroyed God's temple. Yes it's a prediction from Isaiah's time perspective of the coming Babylonian invasion. Isaiah's essentially saying, God's still there and we still need to seek Him as God despite the tragedy of the moment. We're still "His people" despite all of the horrid things the Israelites had to suffer during that time period.
 - g) Again, Isaiah's getting into all this near the end of the book to remind us that this life will be hard at times but not to worry as "God's got a plan", even though we may not see what is the big picture and we may have to suffer in this lifetime, it's all "worth it". The idea of this life as a "training ground" for the next one is the underlying theme of this lesson. As I've now beaten that point to death, we're ready for Chapter 64, which is only 12 verses.
14. Chapter 64, Verse 1: Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! ² As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you!
- a) My translation: Come on God, do something! Can't you see how your people are hurting at this moment? Do something dramatic and make your enemies know who you are!
 - b) In other words, let's get this show on the road! Let's begin life with Jesus ruling over this world! Let "Thy kingdom come" now!
 - c) This leads to the classic question, why is God so waiting so long to act? Again we can use many examples from history to ponder this question as I've done in this lesson. If Isaiah's pondering why God's waited so long to act and it's been 2,700 years, how can any of us be certain this will happen? For starters, Isaiah's been accurate in all he's predicted about the world so far. He described the Babylonian rise and fall before it occurred. He gave a good detailed description of Jesus first coming in Chapters 52 and 53. Now here near the end of the book he's pondering, "OK, God we get the game plan, when's it all going to happen?"
 - i) The classic answer of course is on His timing. If Jesus did return say 100 years ago, none of us would have appreciated it. God's waiting as long as He does so as to be able to draw more people close to Him before this event occurs. If that's true, why won't He wait "forever" with some people accepting Jesus and some not? Because there has to be an end to this world just as there was a beginning. There has to be a final person to get saved so this plan can be executed. That's what Isaiah's going to get to as we wrap up this book. In the meantime, back to these verses.
 - d) Again, I can summarize the verses as saying, "Come on God, do something obvious so we can bring this suffering to an end!" The reason He doesn't respond on our timing is so we can continue to trust Him through whatever we're dealing with. The idea is to have joy as we realize what the ultimate "end" will be for those of us trusting in Him. We have joy as we realize "we can't lose, we can't get out of the game and Jesus is God, deal with it!"

15. Verse 3: For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you. ⁴ Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.
- a) Verse 3 is one more reminder that God has acted in the past, which implies He's in charge, so again, "Deal with it".
 - b) Verse 4 starts with the reminder that no other so-called god has acted to interfere with the affairs of man like God has in the past. There is no other case in history, where one nation walked out of a more powerful nation to start it's own. The closest comparison I can think of to the Israelites leaving Egypt might be how the United States formed with a big group of people leaving Europe to live freely without persecution from those who hold a view of God, that is not their own. Without getting into a big history lesson, the point here is that there are times where we can see in hindsight, that God's worked miracles in order for the world to go down the path He desires. That "path" is to create a "nation" of people who do choose to be a part of a "nation" that realizes Jesus is God, paid for all our sins, which frees us up so now we can use our lives to make a difference for Him.
 - c) Bottom line, "God is working, He continues to work in this world, so deal with it and trust He'll wrap this up on His timing!" In the meantime He desires we use the time He's given us to make a difference for Him. Therefore, stop worrying about when all this utopia will begin and focus on what He does desire, which is to use our lives for His glory.
 - d) Meanwhile, Isaiah's got a few more points to make on this "rant" before we wrap this up.
16. Verse 5: You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry. How then can we be saved? ⁶ All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.
- a) Even after 64 chapters of Isaiah, people can think, "Hey, I'm not perfect. I realize God is a perfect entity, how can I please Him by my efforts?" Even those living in and around the era when Isaiah lived must have thought, "OK, the Northern Kingdom was destroyed by the Assyrians and now Isaiah's telling us the Southern Kingdom and God's temple will be destroyed by the Babylonians. What can we do to be saved as we're imperfect sinners?"
 - b) That's the neat part of this lesson. These verses remind us that we'll never be perfect. It is to realize that as we approach God. Verse 6's line about our "good works being like filthy rags" is a famous line used by evangelists. The actual translation is "bloody rages" as if it was used during a woman's menstrual cycle. The point of course, is we can never please God based on our works. So if that's true, why try? Why try to make a difference for Him if our works don't impress Him? The answer is to realize that we're not trying to impress Him by our works. It's not like, I shared the Gospel with three people today, therefore, I'll get three more points in heaven! We're called to live differently and use our time to make a difference for Him, not to "earn points", but just out of gratitude for what He has already done for us by saving us.
 - c) But what about all those lectures you gave us about rewards in heaven? Yes we'll receive rewards in heaven, but they're based on how we live, not what specific actions we take. I heard it explained this way, "When we get to heaven, the things we thought would make a difference in that judgment may not be a big deal to Him. There may be other things we didn't think much about where God says, "that's why I'm proud of how you used the time I gave you." The point is we're to use the time He's given us to make a difference for Him and let Him focus on what He has planned for us in the next life. All we can do until that day arrives where Jesus returns is continue to use our lives for His glory!
 - d) In the meantime. Isaiah's reminding us that we can't earn God's love based on our efforts. That's the great mistake too many people make. The most common reason people believe they are saved is they believe their good works outweigh their bad works". Isaiah tells us that idea is a waste of time as we serve a perfect God. That's the point of these verses.

17. Verse 7: No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins.
- Here we get one more verse to remind us that we can't please God based on our works. It is the tough reminder that trying to earn His love is a waste of our lives. Because we can't earn it, God at times has to "hide His face" from us, especially during any time that we do try to please Him based on our efforts.
 - Let me explain this idea another way: Suppose things are going bad at the moment. You plead with God to help. As simple examples, we can name some of the times in history of the Jewish people pleading for God's help say during one of those invasions or during the time of the Holocaust? Why isn't God working on our timing to help us? The answer as I have been stating through this lesson is He works on His timing. Of course we should be taking inventory to see if there is anything we're doing that is not pleasing to Him. At the same time, we need to realize He's still there, He's still working and He still wants to help us on His timing to deal with whatever we're dealing with.
 - Let me think of a tough example. Suppose you have to live the rest of your life crippled based on something that wasn't your fault. Even if we do bear responsibility, we can ask God, "why did You allow this to occur?" The answer is so we can glorify Him through it and not because of it. Our ability to be a good witness for Him through whatever it is we have to face is a great example of living as God desires we live.
 - Believe it or not, that last thought leads perfectly into the next verse:
18. Verse 8: Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.
- If Verse 8 seems familiar, it's because Paul uses this verse as part of his argument why it is God's in charge and how we should deal with that fact. Verse 8 is essentially saying, "You are God, we're not, but if we're willing, we can be used by You to make a difference in the world for You. That's why it describes people as "clay in the hands of a potter". (Romans 9:21 is the cross-reference for this verse, if interested.)
 - OK, so if God wants to "mold me", how do I do that? Do I just sit here and say, let's begin the molding process? Of course not. We make the best decisions we can as we go through our lives and live as a witness for Him. That's how God molds us. As I love to state, what is it one enjoys doing? How can we use that love as witness for Him? Combining a thing we enjoy doing for His glory is a great way to be "molded" by God.
 - Meanwhile, Isaiah's got his focus back on God Himself:
19. Verse 9: Do not be angry beyond measure, O LORD; do not remember our sins forever. Oh, look upon us, we pray, for we are all your people.
- Translation; "Come on God, let's get this show on the road! It seems like You're still mad at us for our sins, forgive us and let's get rolling! Of course He paid the price for our sins. It is a future act from Isaiah's perspective, but Isaiah's asking, how long will all of this be? As to the answer, we'll get into that in my next and final lesson on this book.
 - So why go on and on about this? The same way our own issues feel like they go on and on forever. It's Isaiah's way of pouring out his heart to God to do something. The answer of course, is that He has worked to forgive us of our sins, and He continues to work in many lives to glorify Him. The question for us of course, is whether or not we're using our lives to make that difference? If this is His world and we are a "bunch of clay", then we should choose to use our time to make a difference for Him. That's why Isaiah's praying for us to realize we are forgiven and remember we are one of His, whether we accept it or not.
20. Verse 10: Your sacred cities have become a desert; even Zion is a desert, Jerusalem a desolation.
¹¹ Our holy and glorious temple, where our fathers praised you, has been burned with fire, and all that we treasured lies in ruins.
- Realize when Isaiah wrote this, the temple stood. All I'm saying is Isaiah is writing about the future as if it's a "done deal". That's what we have to realize about our life as well.

- b) The reason Isaiah's going "on and on" about this, is because it pains him to see his people suffer even though it hasn't occurred yet. Just as we're called to put the needs of others as a priority over our own needs, so Isaiah grieves for others who are and will be hurting as they collectively failed to seek God. Just as God called us to have a heart for others as we help them in their lives, so Isaiah has a heart for his people. Notice Isaiah never says, "I'm saved, too bad for all of you that you'll burn in hell!" Instead he spends much of this book trying to convince his fellow Israelites to turn their hearts back to God and use their lives to make a difference for Him.
 - c) As to verse specific's Isaiah's describing the temple as if it's already been burned down to the ground. Again, that event didn't happen until at least a century after he wrote this. I have already beaten to death my point how I'm convinced that there was only one Isaiah and he wrote this book long before that event occurred. (For my newcomers, if you read my opening lesson on Isaiah, I explain all of this.)
 - d) For the rest of us, Isaiah's saying, bad times are going to come. Still God wants us to trust in Him through those times and still use our lives to make a difference for Him in spite of whatever it is we have to deal with or will deal with in the time we have to live now!
21. Verse 12: After all this, O LORD, will you hold yourself back? Will you keep silent and punish us beyond measure?
- a) I have to admit, if the book ended on this chapter, it'd be a terrible way to end. Describing all this suffering with no end in site. The good news is it is not the end. The next lesson is going to be God's answer to all this suffering. It's good news. Not just that we've reached the finish line of Isaiah, but also for God to tell us of the wonderful future we'll experience as one of God's "own" and why it's worth the trouble to deal with all of this suffering until the return of Jesus.
 - b) Therefore, hang in there with me as we go through one more Isaiah lesson coming up. In the meantime, time to close in prayer.
22. Heavenly Father, we thank You that You've forgiven us of our sins and have given us the chance to use our lives for Your glory. Help us to not waste the most valuable thing You've given us, our time, so we can use it for Your glory. Help us to remember that this life is not all that there is. We are called by Your grace and are to rely upon Your power to make a difference for You. May we be filled with Your Spirit so that we can and do use our lives for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.