

## Isaiah Chapter 40- John Karmelich

1. Ask yourself this question: What would bring you comfort in life? I'm not talking about reclining in a big chair. I'm asking what would it require to give us a wonderful sense of comfort about the world's future? That's the main point of Chapter 40 in one thought. God through Isaiah is going to explain to us why we should take comfort about our world's eternal future as we trust in Him.
  - a) To say this another way, God's telling those of us who put our trust in Him, eventually we will win. Let me explain this from the point of view of the nation of Israel and then repeat the idea from the point of view of the Christian: Since Isaiah wrote this book, about 2,700 years ago, the Israelites were conquered by the Assyrian Empire, the Babylonians Empire, the Greeks, the Romans, different Arab groups through the rise of Islam, and after WWII, became a country again. I disagree with Christians who claim God's done with the nation of Israel, simply because after all that time, they have their own nation again.
  - b) All of that leads back to this chapter. Isaiah opens it with the statement effectively saying for God's people to take comfort that despite a lot of bad things and despite a lot of killing of His people, they'll be united as a people when their long promised Messiah will return to rule over the world from the nation of Israel.
  - c) OK good for them, I suppose. What does that have to do with us non-Jewish Christians? That promise of comfort is to you and I who trust in that same God as well. To be honest, we all worry about our future and what'll happen to our descendants in the future. If we see the problems we're facing in the world and we don't see a solution, God still wants us to take comfort in the fact that God will win in the end. He allows all things that happen in our world to somehow work out for His glory. The key point of this chapter is that it's worth all the trouble to trust in God, because He'll win in the end.
  - d) Let's be honest we all have troubles and trials we have to face. We don't know how it will work out. God's saying to us that despite whatever we have to deal with, all of us should take comfort that that He'll win in the end. So how does any of that help with what I have to deal with right now? The answer is no matter what we're dealing with it'll only last at the most for one lifetime. You and I who trust that Jesus is God and He paid for every sin we've ever committed, and also believe Jesus is in charge of our lives, will be the winners in the end based on our trust in those facts.
  - e) John, you're "preaching to the choir" again. Suppose we already believe all of that is true. Why should we study Chapter 40 with you? So that the next time we're worried about all our stuff, we can take comfort that God's in charge, He'll lead us through whatever we are dealing with for His glory. We can take comfort knowing that whatever happens to us in this life is only for one lifetime and how long is that compared to eternity?
2. So is that all there is to this chapter, a message to take comfort? If that were it, we'd be done after the first verse.
  - a) The chapter starts with the reminder that we're to prepare for the Messiah's coming. That does not mean Jesus will definitely come back today but that we should live our lives as if He can return at any moment. It's like the idea that we work harder at our jobs if our boss is looking over our shoulder. A reason we Jesus told us to pray "thy kingdom come" is to remind us to live every day as if effectively all the bad stuff of Revelation begins today, as it marks the start of the time of Jesus' returning. In other words, if we're going to use our lives to make a difference for Jesus we should live as if the "boss is always watching us" as He can return at any time to reward us based on how we've used our lives to glorify Him.
  - b) Want me to make it simple? God wants us to trust that He's guiding our lives as we use it to be a witness for Him. It's about living each day as if it could be the last one we ever get so that we can use every day in some way, shape or form to make a difference for Jesus in the world around us.

- c) So how do we do that? Ideally, it's about using the gifts God's given us and finding a way to combine things we enjoy doing anyway by doing those things for His glory. It can be as simple as helping out around the house or around church. It can be going on some sort of a missionary project. The point is if we believe Jesus is God, He died for our sins and He's in charge of our lives, the proof of that belief is what we do about it. That's why Isaiah is going to explain to us why we should take comfort in God no matter what it is we have to face in this world be it short or long term.
3. From there, this chapter spends sometime reminding us who God is and who we are. It's to say to us effectively that our lives in this world relatively speaking, is as short as grass compared to how long we'll live in heaven and in comparison to how long God lives. If we only live for this life, it's the biggest waste of a life one can have. If we live to make a difference for Jesus in this world, we are making the greatest use of time we can possibly use it for.
- a) From there the chapter spends a little time talking about idolatry. It's the idea of cheating on the most important relationship we have. The reason idolatry and adultery are similar terms in the bible is in both cases, we're cheating on the most important relationships that we have in life. While we don't make little statutes representing what we worship, we do make "little gods" out of anything and everything we can care about more than God. This is not saying we can't have any hobbies. It's saying to consider God while we enjoy what it is we enjoy doing.
  - b) Then the chapter gives us a few reminders of "how big God is and how short our life is in comparison to how big God is". The upshot of all of this is to remind us what's important in life and why we don't need to worry about things that don't matter for eternity. No we don't quit our jobs so we can preach the gospel all day. We still have to support ourselves and do what's necessary to survive. What we have to do is realize what's really important in life and live accordingly. That's the idea behind this preaching of "how big God is".
  - c) In summary, this lesson is about having comfort that God's still in charge no matter what it is we're dealing with at any given time. Remember that the Israelites still living in that land are to be taken into captivity within 100 years of the time of Isaiah. He's preaching to them that despite that conquest, God's still in charge and still wants to guide their lives so they (and us) can make a difference for Him in the world around us.
  - d) So, with that positive statement about comfort (yes that word is my lesson title) especially during a time of difficulties, let us take comfort that God's still there guiding our lives as we trust in Him to guide our lives. With that said, time for the details:
4. Chapter 40, Verse 1: Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
- a) Let's think about these opening words in context to what Isaiah was discussing in the last lesson on Chapter 39. Remember there were no chapter breaks in the original text. Isaiah was recalling the time roughly 10 years prior to when he wrote "Chapter 39" how the king had showed the king of Babylon all of his treasure. At that time, Babylon wasn't anything special but just another city in the Assyrian Empire. Effectively what Isaiah was saying in the last chapter was that the Israel king shouldn't have shown off all of his treasures to the Babylonian "rep's", as that city will lead a rebellion against the Assyrians as they form their own empire and will eventually conquer and destroy Jerusalem.
  - b) For most of us, that's old news and ancient history. The point of Verse 1 is Isaiah's saying in despite of all that destruction, God wants them and us to take comfort as it's all part of God's plans for His people. The point of course for you and me is when we are facing our own tragedies, God wants us to take comfort too, (repeated for emphasis) that He still has a great plan not only for our eternal destiny, but for those of us who've been separated so we can make a difference for Him. In other words, stop wasting the time God's given us, so we can use some of it to make that difference for Him.
  - c) It's the reminder that despite all the bad things we can go through in life, God still wants to be our God and be in charge of our lives. Take comfort in the fact we win in the end.

5. Verse 2: Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.
- a) Remember at the time Isaiah wrote this, Israel was split into two kingdoms. The Northern most kingdom had already been conquered by the Assyrian Empire. That empire failed to conquer the Southern Kingdom where Isaiah lived and Jerusalem was the capital. To refer to Jerusalem is a way of saying that this city will still be the center of God's people despite the fact that the city will be destroyed in the future.
  - b) I should pause at this moment to remind you that there are a lot of bad theology out there that a "different" Isaiah wrote from Chapter 40 to the end of the book, as those critics can't stand the fact that Isaiah knew so many details about the rise and fall of Babylon, which is about 100 years after the time when Isaiah lived. There are a number of ways to argue for only one Isaiah, but for the Christian, the best proof is in John's Gospel. To repeat quickly what I said in the last lesson, Jesus quotes from the "second Isaiah" and the "first Isaiah" in the Gospel of John, Chapter 12. In between those two verses Jesus said in effect, "They can not believe that the same Isaiah said again". My point is simply that if you believe Jesus is God and believe the Gospels are the word of God, Jesus Himself effectively says that there was only one Isaiah. (See John 12:38-40.) With that in mind, let's get back to Verse 2:
  - c) Here is Isaiah saying that "Jerusalem's time of punishment" is all done. Let's be honest we know that captivity hasn't begun yet. For those who don't know their history, those living in the Southern Kingdom were relocated in the Babylonian empire. When they conquered the Assyrians, the Babylonians also "inherited" all the groups they conquered. My point is Isaiah is predicting the Israelites will be scattered throughout the Babylonian Empire for a period of time that is roughly 70 years. Even when some of them came back to Israel after that time period, they were still parts of other empires. They were never an independent nation again until 1948. My point is despite all of that very rough history, God's saying to them that "their sin has been paid for in full". I'd say that requires an explanation:
  - d) To begin realize that the Israelites as a nation had a separate beginning and a destiny from the Christian church. To summarize a lot of New Testament theology commonly held by Protestant Christians, once the "church era" is over, God will focus His attention on Israel once again. This is the idea of the 70th week (of years) as taught in Daniel Chapter 9, that has not occurred yet and as also taught in Romans Chapter 11. The short version is God's not done with Israel as a nation neither back then or today. That's why Verse 2 says, "her service has been completed" as God has completely forgiven their sins of rejecting Him all of these millenniums. Jesus stated He'll return one day to rule over the entire world from Jerusalem as He establishes His rule over the world in that future day.
  - e) Let me discuss the phrase "double for all her sins". It doesn't mean Israel, as a nation has to pay twice for her sins. It's an expression that means paid in full. Think of it as getting a notice on our door saying, "the rent or mortgage is past due and you now have 30 days to move out". If someone paid that bill for us, in that culture, they would fold that notice in half, as they'd write paid in full on it and "double the paper" by folding in half. Now you know what the "double" reference means in this verse, as if you cared.
  - f) The point of all this theology is to realize that the Israelites are still God's "chosen people" as from our perspective He'll still forgive them collectively for rejecting Him as God, and He'll draw the remnant of them close to Him as He rules from Jerusalem one day. That's why nonbelievers are so obsessed with the destruction of Israel as a nation, as the fact of their existence means we're close to "the end" when all of this stuff will occur.
6. Verse 3: A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.
- a) If this verse is familiar, it's because Matthew quotes Verses 3 in Chapter 3, Verse 3. For us to understand why Isaiah and John the Baptist speak this line, let me explain further:

- b) In the Middle East during ancient times, when a king was going to visit an area, a notice was made that the road must be made "worthy" of a king traveling on that road. Yes it's to be taken literal as in fixing a road for travel. More importantly, it's about getting right with the king coming, and preparing our hearts (attitudes) about that fact.
  - c) For Isaiah, he's essentially saying that despite all of the destruction coming, despite all of the bad things that will happen in the future, prepare one's hearts as the Messiah will still come to rule the world from Jerusalem one day.
  - d) In effect, John the Baptist was called to a similar ministry as Isaiah. John's message was to prepare because the Messiah is coming. Of course John was sent to prepare people's heart for the appearing of Jesus First coming. What we Christians tend to forget is we are called to preach the same message as Isaiah and John: Prepare for the return of the Messiah. We are called as Christians to go into the world and tell others about Jesus. That's the essence of the "Great Commission" which is Matthew 28:19.
  - e) Every so often in these lessons I like to remind you that prophesy is in "patterns". All that means is prophecy often has more than one fulfillment. Isaiah was called to preach all of this as Isaiah was concerned that his fellow Israelites "get their hearts right" about all they are about to experience: Captivity and life outside of the land of Israel. Despite that fact, they are to take comfort in the fact that God still has a plan for that nation. That's why we get the references to their sins "paid in full" and to plan for the Messiah's coming.
  - f) OK John, we get the idea that Jesus will return one day. None of us know when that day's going to occur, so why should we think about that stuff? After all, we all have enough to deal with in life without thinking about Jesus' return. The point is to realize what's really important in life. Just as both Isaiah and John the Baptist were called to tell many people that the Messiah is coming, so that's what God's called you and I to do as believers. No, it doesn't mean we quit our lives to pass out bible tracts to every stranger. It means our life should always be a witness to God, to those around us as well as those we may come into contact with. All I'm saying is we're saved "for a purpose": That purpose is to use our life as a living witness for Jesus. The best way to do that is to do what we enjoy doing in the first place and find a way to combine what we enjoy doing to make a difference for Him.
  - g) While I was getting on a role, so was Isaiah, so let's get back to what he was saying:
7. Verse 4: Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.
- a) Let's get back to the literal interpretation of this verse for a moment. When a dignitary of a foreign place would visit, you'd know when that event was going to occur, as the roads would look their best prior to that event. I recall the university I attended many years ago would always look its best when "big shots" were there for major events. All I'm saying is we can sometimes tell when a big event is going to occur, because before we realize it, the place where we live looks better than it normally does. That's sort of the idea of preparing the road for a "big shot" to come by here.
  - b) Speaking of "big shot's", the biggest of them all is being described here:
8. Verse 5: And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."
- a) I have to admit I'm fascinated by the phrase "all mankind together will see it". I don't see how Isaiah could visualize the whole world witnessing an event with the technology that existed 2,700 years ago. Yet he predicted the whole world would see it. Today of course, we see events all over the world right as they happen. How Isaiah knew this would occur one day, I can't explain: I suspect that Isaiah just figured God told me to preach this, even though he didn't understand the "how", but if God is God, He'll work it out one day.
  - b) The other possibility to consider is that whenever this event occurs in the future, all of us will be resurrected to see this event. It's a way for nonbelievers to say, "boy did we bet on the wrong horse and we're in trouble now!"

- c) Let me explain this verse another way. If we accept the idea that God is God, that means He created all things including time itself. I hold the view that when we're resurrected we enter a world where time as we know it doesn't exist. God's not an entity with lots of time on His hand. He's someone who's outside of time completely. Many scholars believe that all people get resurrected "at the same time" from God's "outside of time" perspective. All I'm saying is in a world where time doesn't exist, I can visualize a world where all people are resurrected "at the same time" where we get to witness Jesus ruling over the world.
  - d) As I like to put it, the reason we should care about all this "future" stuff, is we'll be there to see it ourselves. Isaiah wrote this to prepare us for the reality we all must face one day. If you say I'll worry about that when I get there, the reason God wants us to know all of this in advance is so we can worship Jesus as it occurs and thank Him that He's providing the ultimate solution to the problems the world faces when He rules over this world forever.
  - e) To keep it simple, realize we'll be part of this world forever so we might as well learn of it now so we know what to expect when we experience it.
  - f) In the meantime, we left Isaiah puzzled about what to say next.
9. Verse 6: A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?"
- a) Remember in Verse 5, Isaiah saw God (think Jesus) being revealed to the whole world all at one time. While Isaiah was probably standing there with his mouth open gazing at this vision, he hears a voice saying, "cry out" (as in speak out). I see Isaiah as dumbfounded at this moment as he ponders, what shall I say that would make people believe what it is I'm seeing at this moment?
  - b) That leads God through Isaiah to give us a little lecture to remind us how short this life is in comparison to eternity. With that thought in mind, consider the next few verses:
10. Verse 6 (cont.): "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. <sup>7</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. <sup>8</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."
- a) Isaiah loves to use word pictures that people of his day and our time can relate to. If you have ever studied grass, you would know it turns brown real easy. There could be a great rainstorm for weeks, but if you fail to water that grass after that rainstorm it can fade in a short time span. I live in a climate similar to Israel and when it gets hot, realize that grass can fade fast due to the heat.
  - b) Isaiah's point here isn't about grass itself. It's about how short our lifespan is compared to eternity. Isaiah wants to use a word picture of something that's short lived and uses grass as a thing that doesn't live long as most of us can relate to that picture.
  - c) To paraphrase Isaiah, "I just saw God rule over this world and that'll last forever. The life we each live now will come and go quickly, yet God's word stands forever."
  - d) Remember that the Israelites Isaiah was preaching to will go into captivity about 100 years after he wrote this. For those Israelites to keep their culture alive in a foreign land, Isaiah needed to remind the Israelites that God's word stands forever despite all they were about to suffer or that their descendants would suffer.
  - e) The point is life, as we know it is in effect a tragedy. We're all going to die one day. When we read verses like this, it reminds us that despite the relatively short time we'll each live, remember that we'll live forever and we'll each will see the God's glory as it'll be revealed to this world when He will literally rule over it one day.
  - f) The point is this future event is as certain as grass fading over time. This event is as real as the fact that all of us have to face death one day. Therefore we can use our time to just feel sorry for ourselves or complain about our situation, or we can use some of it to make a difference for Jesus by telling them about what all of our futures hold. That's why I am always preaching that the greatest use of our time is to use to make a difference for Jesus in the world around us. With that thought in mind, let's get back to Isaiah:

11. Verse 9: You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"
- The last few verses focused on us believers to remind us how short our life span is, and to realize the greatest use of our time is for God's glory. While Isaiah was in this good mood of reminding us of the best use of our time, it gets his focus back on God Himself.
  - Think of Verse 9 as a praise to Him for what He'll do in the future. For those Israelites, it's a praise for saying, despite the fact the Assyrians wiped out a good portion of our country and despite the fact that we'll be taken into captivity in the future, we still will praise Him as we know He'll win in the end.
  - Now consider whatever problems and issues we face. How bad are they in comparison to the fact that Jesus will return and rule over the world one day and we'll be a part of it. Yes we still have to deal with our issues, but we can take comfort in the fact that at the most, it will only last "one relatively short lifetime. How "bad is that" compared to eternity?
  - For those who don't know "Zion" is a nickname for Israel in general and Jerusalem as that location represents where God will rule the world from. This verse is reminding us to go praise Him now not only for the blessings we already have in this life, but for the greater blessings we'll have in the future as we continue to trust Him to guide us through our life.
  - Also notice that Isaiah tells us to "spread the praise" around Judah. That's the reminder to us to tell others about Jesus and spread the word about Him so together we can all praise Him for what He's done and what He will do in the future.
12. Verse 10: See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.
- Let me explain some of the terms used here. The idea of God being sovereign just means He's in charge and we have to accept it? Does God choose to love some people more than others? Yes He does and we have to accept He's in charge. To paraphrase a famous quote stated over 100 years ago, "I wish God would put a big visible mark on the "saved" so it'd save us a lot of time who to preach to." However, since God doesn't do that, we reach out to all people realizing that only some choose to accept it." (I think Moody first said that.)
  - The idea of "his arm rules" is a metaphor for strength. I do believe Jesus returns in human form. He'll have arms and legs and look like a human. Our eternal bodies won't wear out over time so it won't be exactly like our existing bodies, but it'll still be bodies. We use the term "arm" to represent strength. I don't see Jesus' return as this "100 foot monster" that'll scare us in to believing Him. I see it as a man enforcing all people to live by God's laws in all parts of the world. I think our role is to help Him enforce that judgment. How we'll do that is part of the mystery of how we'll live out the next life. I'm convinced our eternal life will not be boring as we'll work with Jesus to enforce His rule over this world, period.
  - That leads me to what I think is the most interesting part of this verse: The statement that "His reward is with Him". Scattered all over the bible are hints that when Jesus returns to rule over this world, He'll reward believers. Since Isaiah brought it up, let me talk about it for a moment. The New Testament makes it clear that those of us who are trusting that is both God and in charge of our lives, and died for every sin we'll ever commit, will not be condemned for our sins because we're eternally forgiven. The rewards I'm convinced are based on our faithfulness to what opportunities God gives us to be a witness for Him. No we don't get a "notch on our belt" for every person we save. God doesn't call us to save all people, just to lead others to Him. He and He alone determines who's saved. Our job is to be a good witness for Him and use the opportunities in front of us to be a witness for Him in all aspects of our life.
  - Revelation tells us that when we're saved God will "wipe away every tear from our eyes". (That's from Revelation 21:4). If we're not condemned for our sins, why the tears? What I believe is the tears are from missed opportunities we had to lead others closer to Him.

13. Verse 11: He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.
- a) If you've been through most of Isaiah with me, you'd notice that Isaiah seems to be in his best moods when he's focused on describing who God is. To paraphrase Isaiah's attitude through most of the book, "We people mess up and don't live as He desires. Still God is in charge and He wants the best for our lives as He cares about us greatly." That is Isaiah's attitude through the book in a nutshell.
  - b) The point here is that if we live in a world God created, He's responsible for it and He can do whatever He wants with it, because it's His in the first place. It's to realize that despite whatever we have to deal with in this life, God cares about us and wants to protect us like an innocent lamb who can't survive without guidance.
  - c) Does that mean I shouldn't make a move without praying about it first? If that were true, it would take us forever to get anything done. My view is we dedicate some time daily to seek Him, study His word for guidance and then make the best decisions we can based on the principals as taught in His word. Most decisions we make have nothing to do with us possibly violating any of His laws and in those cases, I'm convinced we're free to do what ever it is we want to do. When it comes to tough decisions, if we think in terms of what it is God desires us to do and then make the best decision possible, we are living as He does desire us to live. OK, why am I getting into all of that here? Because this verse reminds us of how God's guiding us and protecting us all the time and how He cares for each of us as we make the best decisions possible in whatever situation we face.
  - d) It's the reminder of whatever we have to face, it's only for this lifetime. Pleasing Him will bring us eternal rewards far greater than any reward we have in this lifetime. Because He cares for us we can have peace through whatever it is we have to face in this lifetime.
  - e) With that said, Isaiah's next logical point is in effect, who are we to argue with God?
14. Verse 12: Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? <sup>13</sup> Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? <sup>14</sup> Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?
- a) I have to admit, these verses remind me a lot of the book of Job. Many people wrongly do think that the purpose of Job is to explain why the innocent suffer. If that is true, Job does not give us an answer. The last part of that book is my favorite, when God effectively says to Job, "Who are you to question Me? Who made all of this in the first place? Who's really in charge around here anyway?" When Job realized he had no right to question why life's as it is, then God blessed Job because God wanted to bless Job just because He did.
  - b) OK, most of us have read that book and read how Job got lots of "stuff" after suffering for some unnamed time period. Where's my "stuff" for trusting in Him? The short version is that "stuff" and trusting in God are not related topics. In effect we as believers will inherit all things when we rule with Jesus in that day which is why "stuff" should be a secondary issue in life is comparison to using our time to make a difference for Him.
  - c) That's all fine and dandy, but we still have a life to live now. Why should I care about all of this "utopia" when we have "bills to pay and our kids are sick"? Believe it or not, these verses are the answer. They remind us of who God is, and who we are in comparison to who God is. With that said, let's talk about then quickly:
    - i) Think how much water the world has. God "holds that water" in His hand, which is a reference to the fact He knows how much water (and dust, next reference) are in our world. Then Verse 13 asks, "who instructs God and who are we to question Him?" When we question who made God, sooner or later we must come to some entity, that must have always existed and who just "knows" and can't learn things.

- ii) I've always held the view that the God I believe in is perfect. That means He can't learn and He knows all things. These verses are a reminder of that fact.
  - iii) That leads me back to the issue of our lives. If God knows all things and we can't teach Him anything and more importantly that He cares for us like a mom caring for a baby, why doesn't He just make it obvious what He wants us to do? The way He guides us is by His word. He then wants us to make the best decisions we can within the framework of those laws. That's how we honor Him with our lives.
  - iv) OK, enough of that, time to get back to Isaiah.
15. Verse 15: Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. <sup>16</sup> Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. <sup>17</sup> Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing.
- a) In effect, I interrupted Isaiah as he got on a roll. The last few verses before these remind us of how powerful God really is. These verses remind us how "small" we are compared to God. One of the amazing aspects about our relationship with a God that powerful is the fact that He does care for us and wants to guide our lives. The great question to ask is "Why us?" God's response is "Why not us? I've chosen whom I've chosen. Accept it and use our lives to make a difference for Him because we've accepted it. Even though we are essentially nothing compared to God, He wants us to realize just how much He loves and cares for us, despite the difference in size between God and ourselves.
  - b) That's why Isaiah is busy describing people as "nothing" compared to God in these verses.
  - c) To understand the reference to Lebanon in Verse 16, one has to put oneself in the mindset of an Israelite in Isaiah's day. When an Israelite back then thought "forest" they thought of Lebanon, as that was the closest piece of real estate that was "all forest". That's why Isaiah uses it as a reference to "That place over there with all the trees and animals living there is not sufficient to please Me." Remember tin that culture, they associated burnt offerings as a sign of dedication to one's God. What Isaiah is effectively saying, is there is not enough wood or animals around to satisfy Him. Since we can't earn God's love by sacrificing we show our loyalty to Him by using our lives to make a difference for Him by using some of our time to seek Him for guidance through His word, prayer and spend time with other believers. That's the essence of living how God desires we live.
  - d) In summary, these verses are saying even though we are "nothing" compared to God, He still loves and cares for us. He wants us to serve Him not because He needs that worship but only because it's the best way to live out our lives.
  - e) OK, I interrupted Isaiah as he's still on a role. Let's get back to him:
16. Verse 18: To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to? <sup>19</sup> As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. <sup>20</sup> A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple.
- a) It's time to get back to the culture of Isaiah's day. To represent whatever god people did worship, they would make idols out of whatever they could afford. It was a way people could try to satisfy the built in need we all have to worship something. Those who have more money can make such "small gods" out of gold or silver. If one can't afford an idol of gold or silver, they made it out of wood. One has to understand how common that is in the ancient world. In archeological digs in Israel before versus after the captivity time of Babylonian invasion, the biggest difference is the amount of idols found in homes. All I'm saying is it took that invasion to rid God's chosen people from making such things.
  - b) Also realize that people living back then weren't stupid. They understood those statutes aren't real gods, just representatives of what they could worship. It's like "let's save us a trip to go to church as we could worship our god here at home". God hates such idols as it can prevent people from collectively seeking Him as a community.



- c) OK John, that may have been true in ancient cultures, but we don't have such statues in our homes. Remember what an idol is, it's anything we worship or value more than God Himself. I'm not saying we can't enjoy other things. I'm saying we should invite Him to be a part of every aspect of our lives. That's what He desires of us: to be in charge of all aspects our lives. I'm not saying we have to think about God "24/7". I'm saying that we make decisions based on biblical principals as if to say, is what I'm doing pleasing or not pleasing to Him with my life?
  - d) All I'm saying is that while it's hard for us to relate to these "household idols", they still do exist today in the forms of things we seek to achieve other than God. If all we care about is to seek fame, fortune or power for ourselves, we've made those things idols whether we realize it or not. My point is "idols" very much exist today even though we don't have any of the statues as discussed in these verses.
  - e) After spending the last few verses stating how bad people are without God's influence in our lives, Isaiah turns his attention back to God Himself:
17. Verse 21: Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? <sup>22</sup> He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.
- a) Let's suppose for the moment that none of us (as adults) ever got any sort of religious type of education growing up. Still we should see the stars in the sky and the sun as it appears to go around our world and we us realize that something greater than us must have made it in the first place. The more you know about how finely tuned our universe is, the more one realizes there must be a God greater than us who made it. To quote one of my favorite Christian apologists, "If there was a big bang, there has to be a big banger to light the fuse of that big bang". (Greg Koukl). My point and Isaiah's point is simply that there has to be a force (we call God) that's much greater than us, who created the world that we live in. It is describing the universe from the perspective of one who's outside of it as God created it in the first place.
  - b) If you want, you can listen to some interesting lectures about how vast our universe really is and there are far more stars than people living at any time. Yet astronomers will tell us that there is a limit to the universe as if there is an "end" to it all. OK John we get the idea that God is really big and beyond our comprehension. To steal one of my favorite quotes on this topic, "Every time I think about how big God is, all I do is get a headache" (David Hocking). The point is to remind us that even though God is that much bigger than we'll ever be, He still cares for us and for whatever reason He loves us, cares for us and wants to spend eternity with us. Since we live in His world and "we can't get out of the game" the best use of our time is to use it to tell others of His love for us so that others can share in that eternal love He has for us.
  - c) One has to understand that God does not have moods. God is always fully loving to those of us who are trusting in Him. He always hates sin and the affects of it. My point is that we have to accept the idea that we can't fully comprehend God, but we can understand enough about Him to realize that even though He is far bigger than we can comprehend He still cares for us, loves us individually and collectively, and desires we use the time we have our lives for His glory.
  - d) Even though we are effectively like the size of grasshoppers to a human scale, so He is far greater in size than we can comprehend, the idea is that we live in His world, and He has every right to do with it what He wants as it's His in the first place.
  - e) By the way, the purpose of these verses is not to study science. They're here mainly for us to comprehend how big God is and how He sees us. God's not some sort of a big creature who only see us through a magnifying glass. He has the ability to see the whole thing at a glance or focus on all of us individually or collectively.

- f) Let's be honest, most of us don't think about how God sees us. We just accept the idea He does hear our prayers and guides our lives. We worship Him because He created us and we accept the idea that He's in charge of our lives both collectively and individually. Just how God sees us physically is probably beyond our ability to understand. Like my quote earlier, "Every time I think about how big God is, all I do is get a headache." If He wanted us to understand how He sees us better than what's described in this text, He'd tell us. It's one of those situations where if we accept God as being perfect, then we accept the idea of Him perfectly being able to see all of us.
- g) OK, speaking of things God can see and do, time for Verse 23.
18. Verse 23: He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.
- a) No matter how powerful any ruler becomes, the longest they can rule is a single live span. God wants to remind us that even though there have been many horrible rulers as well as some good ones, God's still "pulling the strings" in that ultimately He allows such people to rule simply because it is His will.
- b) What just popped in my head is the fact my lesson title is the word "comfort". My point is no matter how good or how bad our current government leaders are, we can take comfort in the fact that God allowed these people and He's in control of the time length that any of them will rule. To borrow one of my favorite lines about Christians and American politics, "I am neither a Democrat or a Republican. I am a Monotheist". That just means I desire to live under the rule of a king, and Jesus is my king. Do I still vote? Yes but when the other candidates win that I don't care for, I remind myself of that truth.
19. Verse 24: No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.
- a) To understand this verse, we should read it in context of the last one. The last one was on the topic of our political leaders. Therefore, I'm pretty sure this verse is also talking about the relatively short time span that any leader is in power.
- b) Isaiah's giving one of his now famous illustrations to get people to grasp just how fast any given political situation can change. As an example, recall from a few chapters back how the Assyrian army surrounded Jerusalem and it looked like the end for the Israelites. We then read how God wiped out that large army in one night. My sole point is we have no idea how the future will play out, but the God we worship does. Therefore we should be able to pray for election results, as we don't know God's will, but no matter what happens politically we do have to accept the past and the present as His permissive will. We get a reminder here in this verse that no matter how bad things may seem at any given moment God can always change the situation at any moment.
- c) I suspect part of the reason God had Isaiah preach this is because He knew the Babylonian captivity would happen relatively soon. Therefore, God wanted the Israelites who'll be all scattered throughout the empire to have comfort that no leader lasts forever and God still has a plan for His people. Therefore as we face our own issues, we should take comfort of the fact that God's still in charge and if it's His will, can change a situation at any time.
- d) On that positive thought, Verse 25:
20. Verse 25: "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.
- a) Let me paraphrase the last few verses: When the world is falling apart, who else can you turn to for help? Who's equal to God for help and who's the entity that desires to guide us for His glory! This is the reminder that no matter what, God's knows what's best for us as He desires to lead us down a path where we use our lives for His glory. Isaiah's saying in effect, "Who else can do that? Who else can help you? What can foreign powers do that I am not capable of doing? Isaiah's reminding us to take comfort in what He's capable and can do in our lives. There is no need to look elsewhere for spiritual guidance as He'll give us the satisfaction we crave to live a life worth living if we live it for Him.

21. Verse 26: Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.
- a) Isaiah's getting poetic here as he reminds his readers (that's you and me) to look up in the sky and try to explain the existence of all the stars in the sky other than God Himself. It is practically impossible to count the number of stars in the sky even without a telescope, if there's no man made light blinding that view. If one goes to a deserted location where no manmade light exists, the number of stars one can see is very difficult to count.
  - b) With that said, the bible says God knows each of those stars by names. I recall listening to a radio commercial that one can have a star named after them. After discovering just how many stars there are even compared to the human population, it's beyond our grasp that a "thing" (i.e., God) knows each of them by name.
  - c) This reminds me of the classic line, "Do you think there is life elsewhere in the universe?" My favorite answer is, "I don't know, but I do know that the eternal salvation of such a life is dependant upon what occurred on a wooden cross roughly two thousand years ago on our planet." (I got that line from Chuck Missler.)
  - d) The important point again is that the God we worship is beyond our ability to understand or to fully comprehend. That doesn't bother me as I figure a God that's big enough to fully understand is not big enough to worship. However, we can take comfort in the fact that a God this big and vast does care enough about people that He's willing to die for us so that we can be with Him forever, however that'll exactly play out.
  - e) In the meantime, I still have five more verses to cover.
22. Verse 27: Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"?
- a) To translate, hey everybody, why do you complain that you can't fully understand God? A god that can make all of this is beyond our ability to fully comprehend. Accept the fact He exists and live trusting that He cares about individually despite the fact He's so grand in scope we can't fully comprehend him.
  - b) Isaiah uses a "double reference" to the Israelites. The common ancestor of all of them was named Jacob. God renamed that person Israel, and that's how the Israelites got that name. To make a long story short this name change occurred in Genesis 32:28. The idea conveys the concept that man has struggled with God and prevailed. That doesn't mean we'll fully understand God, but that He allows us to prevail (live forever) simply due to our trust in what He did for us by paying the price for our sins. I believe both the old and new name for "Israel" is given here to remind us that although we don't fully understand God, we'll have that eternal life because we too have "struggled with God and prevailed." Like all of this lesson that fact alone should be a source of comfort through whatever we deal with.
23. Verse 28: Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.
- a) Speaking of things that are hard to comprehend, imagine a God so powerful that He has a ability to create everything and not be tired. He has an ability to understand all mysteries of the universe and still care for us as individuals and desires to guide us. As I have been beating the point to death for the past few pages now, the God we worship is beyond our ability to comprehend, yet God asks us to accept the fact not only that He exists, but also that He cares for us as individuals and as a collection of believers and desires to guide us for His glory. If you get that, you are getting the essence of who He is and who we are in comparison to who God is. That's what this verse is trying to convey.
  - b) Again, back to the idea of taking comfort. It's amazing how we worry about how we will deal with our problems in life when there is a God this powerful, who never tires, who is willing to help us through whatever we have to deal with in this lifetime.

24. Verse 29: He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. <sup>30</sup> Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; <sup>31</sup> but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.
- a) My comments on the last few verses leads to the question, "OK, exactly how does He help us in the first place? After all my problems aren't going away just because I'm thinking of God at this moment. Where do we get the power to deal with our issues?"
  - b) There's a classic illustration that fits well here. "A man was struggling to push a car up a hill. Then the man remembered that the car has an engine. The man thought, why should I push this car, when I can drive it up the hill?" That little story is a reminder that He will give us the power to face whatever we have to face. It doesn't mean life will ever go like we desire it to go. It means if we're trusting in God and seeking His will by using our life to make a difference for Him, He promises to provide the power to accomplish whatever is His will for our life. To use my life as an example, I can't explain how I'm able to write all that I write. I just realize that God gave me this gift and I use it to the best of my ability so that I can glorify Him through this ministry. The results of it are His problem as I have only been asked to write and let Him worry about the results.
  - c) While that illustration may not work for every person, I just know that if we're willing to use our time to glorify God and combine what we enjoy doing anyway in a way that can glorify Him with our lives, that combination brings us joy as we rely upon His power to accomplish what is His will for our lives. All I'm saying is that if it works for me, it'll also work for anyone willing to commit some of his or her time for God's use.
  - d) Some of the commentaries I read on these verses point out that the "order is strange": We first soar on wings like eagles, then we run, then we walk. The idea is that we trust in His power to make a difference (that's the "soar on eagle's wings" part), then we set out to use our lives to make that difference (that's the run part, speaking metaphorically), which will lead us to good place to walk. The idea is once we do trust in God to guide our lives, then we plan our race then we "walk our way through it" trusting that God is guiding us.
  - e) Let me explain that concept another way: When I first started this ministry, it wasn't like God just said, "Start writing every day, and I'll tell you what to do with it." It started with me teaching a class in a church. Then I noticed some people taking my notes and leaving. Then I asked the pastor if I could put those notes on the church web site. Then a few days later I got some e-mails from people around the country saying how they liked my notes. All of that lead to this ministry. All I'm saying is once we learn to rely upon God's power, then as we go through life trying things to make a difference for Him, He'll lead us down a path we can walk upon to make a difference for Him. I hope all of that helps.
25. With that said, I want to end this lesson on a related note. Let's return to my opening question of what gives us comfort? As I said to start this lesson, I'm not discussing a comfortable chair. This is about what would put our minds at ease about what the future would bring?
- a) To me, it is knowing that no matter what happens in this life, "I win". In order to win, we must accept the fact that God exists, we can't fully comprehend Him, but we must accept that He desires to guide our lives for His glory. Once we next accept the idea that we can not earn His love, but can have eternal life just by trusting in what He did for us, we can then use our lives to make a difference for Him. That's the Gospel message as well as the summary of this entire lesson in one thought. Therefore, let us take comfort in the fact of no matter what happens in this life, we'll win in the end. That's a comforting message.
26. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, I can't explain well how You guide us or fully understand how You want to use us for Your glory. I just accept the fact You exist and although I can't comprehend of how You work or how You exist, I've come to realize that You're the one who's given us gifts so we can make that difference for You. Help us to use our time wisely so that we can use some of it as we "walk through life" making that difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.