

Isaiah Chapter 41- John Karmelich

1. I was thinking of calling this lesson "Comfort Part 2", as Isaiah continues to explain to us why it is we should take comfort in trusting God for our future. It then occurred to me that a better title is the phrase "Why does God have to judge us anyway?" as this chapter focuses on the issue of why it is that all people, both believers and nonbelievers have to be judged by God and what does that entail? I thought since God claims He loves us so much why doesn't He just admit all people into heaven and forgive all of us once and for all? If someone commits say mass murder, why doesn't He make that person suffer for a 1,000 years and then let him or in heaven? Does the punishment fit the crime if we exist forever or have to suffer forever if we reject His free gift of salvation? It is those types of questions that are underlying the text of this chapter.
2. With that said, let me start over and explain a few details about this chapter, and hopefully you'll see why I focus so much on God's judgment. Hopefully after reading a page of this, you'll find it interesting enough to want to read the rest of it. Therefore, I ask that bear with me for a bit as I'll explain what God wants us to realize about the end and beginning of life as we know it as well as our own life spans.
 - a) First, realize that much of this chapter is about the entire world (think nonbelievers) being brought before God for judgment. As my regular readers know by now, I'm convinced of the fact that since God created time, He lives in a world where time doesn't exist. I've also argued that when we get there we'll have some sort of body that don't wear out as it must last for eternity. I'm also convinced our new bodies exist in more than three dimensions so we can all get close to God at the same time. Enough of my "how" speculation, the point's that God will judge all people. Most of this chapter focuses on unbeliever's judgment.
 - b) It's almost as if God says to people, "Well, is that the standard you chose to live by as you lived out your life? Let me show you the faults in that choice and why you deserve to be eternally judged by Me for the choices You've made".
 - c) OK too bad for nonbelievers, however John you write these lessons for those of us who do already believe Jesus is God, why should I care about all of them? First, it's a reminder for us to realize it's not just about us. God's very much into relationships with people and He calls us to tell others about Him and help others draw closer to Him. That is another way of describing the Great Commission, which is how God calls Christians to live. Second, all of this (understanding our bible and it's implications) gives us ammunition to show others the danger of trying to live without God ruling over us. If someone went to the trouble to explain to us how believing in Jesus benefits our eternity, shouldn't the least we should do in gratitude for that effort is make some effort to lead others closer to God? He created us for a purpose, to give Him glory by how we live out our life.
 - d) OK, enough guilt for an opening page. The point is much of this chapter focuses on God's judgment on nonbelievers. Mixed in this chapter is the reminder to believers that how we should live is "worth it" despite our struggles. This chapter will also give us a reference to a key figure in Israel's future, which is the king of the Persian Empire. The reason he is so important is he leads the conquest of the Babylon Empire, and he lets the Israelites return to their homeland. This coming king is an example of how God works behind the scenes to control the events of history, to work it out for His glory. Another significant historical figure referenced here, is the common ancestor to all Jewish people, Abraham. It is God's way of saying I promised that the land of Israel would be given to his descendants and I'll keep that promise despite the issue of the Babylonian captivity. The point is to remind us that God will keep His promises despite the tragedies we face. We Christians should take comfort in that promise: if we can trust God to keep His word to the Israelites, that means we can also trust God to keep His word about His promise of Jesus saving us from all our sins for all of eternity. It's a reminder that God keeps His word in His judgments.

3. Finally, realize this chapter spends a lot of text dealing with the issue of idols. It was common in Isaiah's time for nations around Israel to make "household idols" to represent what they worship. God forbids that idea even if it represents Him because the God we worship is beyond our ability to grasp who He is. While idols are not as common today, people still make symbols of what it is they worship. As the old saying goes, if you want to see what someone worships, find out where they spend their spare income or spend their time and in effect you'll discover their god.
 - a) The point is God created us with a need to worship Him. People will turn to other things in order to fulfill that need. Even atheism and agnostics spend time arguing for their view and that fills their spiritual need by arguing for their lack of god. False religions do attract people because for example they promise riches or satisfaction by worshipping their way. As a prime example, false teachers will say, "If you promise to send me money, I promise that God has to bless you financially or give you eternal life." All I'm saying is while idols in people's homes aren't as common today as it was in Isaiah's day, alternatives to what is desired by God for our lives is all around us and always a danger we face in this world.
 - b) In summary, this chapter is worth studying as it reminds us of the danger of turning from the God we're called to worship and the consequences of living that way. This chapter's a reminder that Gods still on the throne, and He's still working out His plans for our world on His timing despite whatever it is we have to deal with in life.
 - c) Therefore, I invite you to follow along as I go through the details of this chapter, so we as believers can understand a little better what God has in store for us for our eternal future. It is to continue to give us comfort as believers as we get a better understanding of the end from the beginning of what God has planned for our lives. With that said, time to start on the details of this chapter.
4. Chapter 41, Verse 1: "Be silent before me, you islands! Let the nations renew their strength! Let them come forward and speak; let us meet together at the place of judgment.
 - a) To start I need to explain the Hebrew word translated "islands". Hebrew has fewer words than English and a lot of words have more than one meaning. It's best to think of "islands" as being distant lands from Israel. It's Isaiah's warning to all the nations who trust in any god other than the true and living God. The key point of this verse is that all people have to face His judgment no matter what it is they have believed in all of their lives.
 - b) So why does God have to judge us both individually and collectively? As for individual judgment, it's to remind us that we live in His world, and therefore, He has every right to tell us whether or not whether we can be with Him forever or away from Him forever. It is essentially a reminder of who's really in charge around here anyway. So are you saying we are judged by our good deeds versus our bad deeds? No we're judged based on what we do know about God and what we did with that knowledge. Since we live in an age of instant access to most information, we have no excuse of a lack of knowledge today.
 - c) Let me also touch on "group judgment". This is not about individual salvation, but about for example, what nations will continue to exist as nations. It comes down to how each of these nations treat God's chosen people, be it Israelites or Christians. My point is God will protect those He loves and punish those who desire to harm those He loves. God calls on us to love what He loves and hate what He hates, which is evil. All I'm saying is there are forms of group punishment in this world as well as eternal judgment of individuals.
 - d) As to children who die before an age of accountability, I trust in a fair God that'll judge all people fairly. I sort of see God saying, "I know your future before it occurs and effectively I'm giving you what you want even though you didn't know it". The point is how He will judge the "innocent" is His business and not mine.
 - e) OK, with that speech about judgment out of my system, let's return to the verse. Notice it says that people have to be silent before Him. I see the silence as saying, "whether people like it or not, they have to accept the fact that God will judge them, so deal with it." That silence is paired with the concept of "Come everyone, let's have the strength to do this."

- i) What that means is people need to have the courage to face God's judgment. Yes it will happen no matter what they think of that idea. Still, God's daring people, as if to say, "Hey, you think you did the right things in your life, great, come forward to face Me and we'll just see about that!"
 - ii) Does that mean Christians are condemned for every sin we've ever committed? No because Jesus paid the price for those sins, so they're never even brought up as we face judgment. We Christians will only be rewarded based on our faithfulness as a witness to Jesus. All others will be judged based on what they do know of God or on what they should have known about God during the time they had to live.
 - iii) Is that a fair way to judge people for eternity? First who are we to argue with God about what is fair? Second I think it's a very fair way to judge, with God telling us in effect, "Is that the way you want to live your life? Great I'll let you continue that way for all of eternity, either close to Me or away from My presence forever."
 - f) Time to bottom line this verse and move on. God's saying we have to face His judgment. So be silent in His courtroom, let Him decide your case, but at the same time we should be able to have the courage to accept the fact that this judgment exists and we must accept it as God judges our fate for all of eternity. Since time and physical space aren't an issue for the God who created those concepts, the "how God does it" aspect has never been an issue for Me. I figure if God is God, He'll make it possible and make the "time" so all people can be judged His way on His timing.
 - g) OK, I've now beaten Verse 1 to death. Time for Verse 2:
5. Verse 2: "Who has stirred up one from the east, calling him in righteousness to his service? He hands nations over to him and subdues kings before him. He turns them to dust with his sword, to windblown chaff with his bow.
- a) A debate question among bible scholars is who is this "one from the east"? Some argue it's talking about Abraham, since he is discussed later in this chapter. I disagree as I don't see God describing Abraham here conquering kings by killing them with his sword.
 - i) Some scholars bring up the story in Genesis, of Abraham having enough servants to raise up his own private army to rescue his nephew lot in a war between cities. (All that is told in Genesis 14.) I wanted to briefly describe that event here as again some scholars take the "Abraham" view of this text.
 - b) In many movies and in classical concerts, there is a style where the orchestra or the movie builds up moment of a big scene to come, by starting slowly with hints of what's to come. Roughly two hundred years after Isaiah's time there was a Persian king named Cyrus. He is mentioned by name in Isaiah in a few chapters. Those bible "scholars" who can't accept the idea that Isaiah knew history that well in advance have to "late date" this section of the book because they refuse to accept that Isaiah could name Cyrus by name centuries before he came on the scene. There are many ways to prove there was only one Isaiah. For those of us who are Christians, the easiest proof is that Jesus effectively said there was only one Isaiah as He quotes from the first "half" and the second "half" of this book in three verses, with the middle verse literally stating that people refuse to believe that the same Isaiah is the one who said what was quoted in the first and second halves. (John 12:38-40.)
 - i) All I'm saying is I'm convinced Isaiah is talking about this king named Cyrus who is the one who "blow by blow" conquered the Babylonian Empire and also started another empire which was the union of two different groups: The Medes and the Persians. The point is Cyrus "fits the bill" as a future emperor who kills kings (in that era of time a king was a ruler over one city, or over a nation or an empire). If you know a little about history, this empire defeated the city of Babylon without a battle, and 17 days later Cyrus entered Babylon as the new emperor of this united group of two conquering nations: The Medes who lived to the east of Israel and the Persians (Iranians) who lived to the north of Israel.

- c) OK John, this is all interesting ancient history from 2,500 years ago. How does any of this affect you and me and what does it have to do with God's judgment? To understand, we have to remember one of the basic rules of bible interpretation: Put Jesus in the middle of a passage and see if it fits. All I'm saying is just as God used Cyrus to judge the future of the Babylonian Empire, and let Cyrus kill kings who ruled over that empire, so Jesus will be the "ultimate judge" over mankind who will subdue kings as He establishes His eternal rule over the world. It's another example of biblical "double prophecy" fulfillment.
- i) As an old bumper sticker says, "Jesus is coming back and He's really angry!"
 - ii) Remember that the topic of this chapter is about God's judgment. Isaiah tells us of a future king that will arise in order to judge the Babylonians who were to become the dominant player in that region.
 - iii) Think about this from Isaiah's perspective. A few chapters back he told us that all of Israel's treasures that the king showed to the Babylonians would be taken there, as that empire would soon conquer what was left of the Israelites after the damage done by the Assyrians. Here Isaiah's telling us centuries before it'll occur, how the Babylonian's themselves will be judged by God. All I'm saying is this description of ancient history is an example of God's group judgment as well as the individual judgment we all must face in the future.
 - iv) The point for us is not to learn ancient history, but to realize that God will judge us both individually for eternity as well as group judgment as He permits empires or nations to exist as long as He desires they exist. It's a way of showing that God is working behind the scenes to control the events of mankind way back then as well as today.
 - v) Ok then, how do we know if our nation has been judged? A good clue is whether or not we're collectively living as God desires. Are we as a nation ignoring what it is He desires of us, or turning from Him? Well what about non-Christian nations? Why do they exist? For us to witness to them and lead some of them closer to Him and make a difference for Him. As to whether or not the United States has already been judged, I'll let God decide that and we'll find out one day. All I know is that God's called you and me to be a witness for Him and we'll leave the judgment part to Him, as that's His role.
 - vi) Speaking of judgment, time to get back to Isaiah.
6. Verse 3: He pursues them and moves on unscathed, by a path his feet have not traveled before.
- a) First question, who is the "He"? I'd argue historically it refers to Cyrus as he worked his way (with an army of course) through what was the Babylonian empire as well as other lands in that area to form the Medo-Persian Empire (or Persian for short). The point is no one will stop this new conquering king from doing what God called Him to do.
 - b) There is a Jewish tradition that when Cyrus showed up in the city of Babylon shortly after it was conquered, Daniel himself handed him a copy of an old scroll that was the book of Isaiah. If you've read the book of Daniel, it teaches how the Persians conquered Babylon without a battle. The back-story is the Persians diverted the river that surrounds the city and they got under the city gate to conquer the city leaders without a battle. History tells us that 17 days later Cyrus entered the city as the new emperor without a battle. There is a famous historical artifact now in the British History Museum that tells us all of this. The point is judgment did occur centuries after Isaiah wrote this and it's an example of group judgment and how God's "pulling the strings" behind the scenes as the "he" (Cyrus) will travel where he never traveled before "unscathed" as he takes over that empire.
 - c) Let's be honest, it's also a hint of the ultimate judgment coming. A basic part of Christian philosophy is that Jesus will return to judge the world. Jesus stated He would return the same way He left so that He'll judge the world. So why has it been so long? It gives time for God to gather many believers to Him before He brings this "show" to an end.

7. Verse 4: Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD--with the first of them and with the last--I am he."
- a) As I love to state, when the word "LORD" is in all capitals, it refers to God's most holy name, which today we transliterate "Jehovah". It essentially means, "I am that I am."
 - b) The main point here is that God is saying that He knows the beginning of all things and He knows the end of all things because He is God, so deal with it. Therefore, we will all be judged because He says so, so deal with it.
 - c) I have to admit, I can't resist sharing what I'm about to share: There are cults who refuse to acknowledge that Jesus Himself is part of the "LORD" being described here. Let me at this point show you a couple of verses and then ask yourself is Jesus Lord?
 - i) Here in Isaiah 41:4, it says that LORD is the first and the last.
 - ii) Isaiah 44:6 effectively says that the LORD is the first and the last.
 - iii) Isaiah 48:8 also says that God is the "first and the last".
 - iv) My point is the next time some cult members come to your door, show them these three verses and ask, "ok, who is the LORD"? They'll usually say, God the Father".
 - v) Then have them turn to Revelation:
 - vi) Revelation 1:1 refers to Jesus as the "Alpha and the Omega". That's Greek for the same concept of who is the "first and the last".
 - vii) Revelation 1:17 effectively says that Jesus was the "First and the Last" as in He was the one who knows all things about life including what comes first and last.
 - viii) Revelation 22:3 describes Jesus Himself as being the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last." (NKJV).
 - ix) My point is if you think Isaiah's only talking about God the Father when he refers to Him as the First and the Last, realize how Isaiah's multiple references tie well to the multiple references in Revelation of the "first and last" and how well this ties to Jesus as He Himself is the First and last.
 - d) Which leads us back to God's judgment. The reason 30% of the bible is predictions about the future is so we can know for sure among other things that the bible is the word of God as well as the fact that judgment will occur for all of us. The reason I laid out all of these verses isn't just so that we know they're talking about Jesus, but to show us that God will judge all of us both as individuals on "judgment day" as well as our existence in nations as we work our way through history. The point is not all judgment is on "Judgment day". It also occurs throughout history as God raises up and brings down cities, nations, empires, or even churches and ministries. The point is group judgment exists and Isaiah gives us a prime example of that judgment as it occurred in history within a few hundred years after Isaiah wrote all of this.
 - e) With that speech in mind, it's time to get back to judgment over the whole world:
8. Verse 5: The islands have seen it and fear; the ends of the earth tremble. They approach and come forward;⁶ each helps the other and says to his brother, "Be strong!"
- a) Remember that the Hebrew word translated "islands" can mean distant lands. It is a way of God communicating through Isaiah that all places have be judged by God. Yet we read of Isaiah sort of encouraging those nations to "Be strong, go forward to face that judgment by God." It's about realizing we can't get out of the game (judgment) so we might as well go forward and face what we have to face!
 - b) If you ask most people if they believe God exists, they'll say that He does and they believe that their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds, so they don't fear His judgment. To state the obvious the "good news" is we don't have to face that judgment if we accept that He'll pay the price Himself for our sins, so we don't have to face that judgment. The bad news is for those who must face that judgment, that it's not a matter of our good deeds being a greater quantity than our bad deeds. God's standard is perfection, and He doesn't grade on a curve, so that idea won't work, and that's why people have to face His judgment.

- c) All I'm saying is while nonbelievers may encourage each other with "be strong as we must face this judgment", they have no idea what they're in for.
 - d) What about the naïve about God? A fair God would judge all people fairly based on what they do know or could have known based on the time they had to live.
 - e) Speaking of how God judges the naïve, that leads me well into the next verse.
9. Verse 7: The craftsman encourages the goldsmith, and he who smooths with the hammer spurs on him who strikes the anvil. He says of the welding, "It is good." He nails down the idol so it will not topple.
- a) The focus here is on the production of "household idols". These small statues represented whatever false god people worshipped. To bow down to worship such an idol was how a person honored what they believed is the entity that rules over their lives. For example, if a person respects power, their god represents power. If someone desires to have financial success in life, the god they worshipped promised that success if they'd worship them. In the bible are stories of people who sacrifice their children to such false gods, as to say that they trust these gods so much, they're willing to sacrifice their children to prove loyalty to that god. My point is people took those false gods seriously.
 - b) From the manufacturer's standpoint, this is "big business". Acts Chapter 19 tells us a story of a city that manufactured silver shrines to their god. They saw Christianity as a threat to their business. That chapter describes the danger of letting Christianity continue as it will be bad for business. It's kind of like thinking I'll believe in Jesus unless of course it affects my pocketbook, and then I have to reconsider what I believe in. God wants us to trust in Him through all circumstances including situations where believing in Him is a crime.
 - c) I could lecture all of us on how idols still exist today but I'll keep it simple. If you find out how a person spares their spare time or spare income, in effect you've found their god. If a person cares more about their favorite sports team or movie star than they are about the true and living God, then that is an idol. All I'm saying is "idols" are alive and well today even though household statues are not as common as we think. Yes religions exist today where one builds little shrines in their homes and that's another example. God forbids an idol even to worship Him because He wants us to grasp the concept that what He is and what He's capable of doing is far greater in scope than can be made by any image of Him.
 - d) A household idol is also forbidden because it discourages us from gathering together as a group of believers in order to worship the true and living God.
 - e) With that speech out of my system, it's time to come back to Isaiah to understand what it is it's describing: A person who's in the business of making idols. The technical aspect is it's made well enough that it can stand up on it's own. It's made well enough that people would be attracted to purchase it and have it around the house. Yes it's forbidden as one of the 10 Commandments. Isaiah is discussing it as despite that fact, it was around to the point where his readers would understand what it is they're supposed to avoid. This is a chapter about judgment and Isaiah wants his readers to understand that if they're part of this group in the shrine business or have one of these things in their home, that's a sign of the fact they're in big trouble come judgment day. That leads us perfectly to Verse 8.
10. Verse 8: "But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, ⁹ I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, `You are my servant'; I have chosen you and have not rejected you.
- a) One way to describe the Israelites, and Christians for that matter is we've been separated from how the rest of the world lives in order to be a witness for God. Much of the laws of the bible can be summarized as saying, you know how the rest of the world lives, but here is how I (God) want you (us) to live that's different from the rest of the world. That leads us back to the topic of household idols. Isaiah's point is that it's common for nonbelievers to have such idols. One way to tell we are separated for God's use is not by saying, we're Jews or Christians by our family history, but only because we're separated for His use.

- b) That leads back to these verses. Isaiah's reminding his fellow Israelites, that like all their common ancestors Abraham was separated for God's use, so they and us for that matter have been separated in order to be a witness for Him. Remember the issue is judgment. All of us, believers included will be judged based on how we've separated ourselves for God and how we've lived with that knowledge we have about Him.
 - c) Remember back in Verse 2 how I said that some interpreter's argue that the "one coming from the east" (Verse 2) is Abraham, as he was first called by God in a land northeast of Israel. All I'm saying here is because Abraham is a topic in Verse 8, and whoever Isaiah is talking about in Verse 2 is not listed by name, some scholars think it's Abraham back then.
 - d) Speaking of Abraham being called from another country, the underlying point of this text is simply that just as God called Abraham to "separate himself" for God's use, so God calls on us to separate ourselves for His use. OK what does that mean practically? How do we interact with nonbelievers if we are separated? It's easier than you think. It's as easy as if we were asked the question, if we were arrested for being a Christian, is enough evidence there to convict us?" Remember how I said this lesson is about judgment? A way we are judged by God is on that question, what did we do with the evidence of Jesus being God and in charge of our lives? Did we act on that evidence? Are we living our life differently because of that evidence? While God doesn't condemn believers for sins, I'm also equally convinced we'll be rewarded in heaven or suffer a lack of rewards based on what we did with the opportunities we had to be a witness for Him. That's why Verse 9 says that God does not condemn Abraham for the sins he committed as described in Genesis.
 - e) The short version here is God separated Abraham and that's why God separated you and me so we can make a difference for Him. On that convincing note, time to move on:
11. Verse 10: So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.
- a) Keep in mind what the Israelites living around Isaiah were going through at this time. He is warning them about the upcoming Babylonian invasion and the fact that like the North Kingdom, they (living in the Southern Israelite Kingdom) will be wiped out in a relatively short time period. Isaiah's attempting to give comfort to his fellow Israelites still living in that land, that God's still with them despite the fact they are being judged by being taken out of that land for a specific time period.
 - b) OK John, you're slipping into ancient history again. The point is the next time we're down in the dumps about whatever we're dealing with, God wants to remind us He's still there as He still wants to guide our lives for His glory. I never claimed that living the Christian life is easy. I've seen some pretty horrid things myself that believers have suffered. What He wants to remind us is essentially, "It's all worth it." The worst it will last is for one life. The plans He has for us after our judgment and the rewards He has for us for trusting in who He is and what He's done for our lives far outweighs whatever we have to face at the present time or in the future. Bottom line, Verse 10 is a good one to memorize when we're feeling "down in the dumps" about life at the moment.
12. Verse 11: "All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish.
- a) Remember I said this chapter is about judgment? We'll we're back on track on that topic. We took a detour to comfort us through hard times, but the chapter's main issue is those who refuse to trust in God will suffer. Those who hurt God's people suffer forever. All will be judged based on what they do know about God or what they could have known. As I say regularly, a perfect God will judge all people perfectly.
 - b) What scares me for nonbelievers living today, is essentially they have no excuse. With all the technology we have at our fingertips, anyone can easily learn more about God with an electronic device such as a computer or a smart phone. I'm convinced the naïve suffer less and I'm equally convinced most living today have no excuse to avoid judgment.

13. Verse 12: Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all.
- a) Speaking of those suffering eternal judgment, I present Verse 12. Visualize going around in a new world after all of this judgment had occurred. You start thinking, "whatever did happen to that person or group of people that didn't care for the fact I read my bible every day or went to church every week? They're not around any more.
 - b) If that's too tough, think about all the billions of people who literally want Israel wiped off the face of the earth. If you want a simple definition of evil, consider any group of people that desire God's chosen people to be permanently eliminated as a nation. If you want to know why there is such a hatred of His people, it's because their existence reminds them of the fact that all people are accountable to God and will be judged by Him.
 - c) The underlying point here is that while those of us who are trusting in the true and living God do face persecution when we're using our lives to make a difference for Him, there is coming an eternal day when that is no longer an issue. Is it fair that such people suffer for all of eternity as punishment? Who are we to question God's rules? We all live in a world He created and He has every right to judge it as He sees fit. Remember that the real crime is living a life of rejecting God's free gift of salvation. That choice of rejecting that gift and is a sign of people's non-belief. That leads us back to this verse that essentially says there will come a day in eternity when we won't see the condemned anymore.
 - d) As I love to state, bible prophecy often has short-term and long-term fulfillment. In these last few paragraphs I was focusing on the long-term fulfillment. A short-term fulfillment is that the Babylonian army that defeated the Southern Israelite kingdom will not be seen as they will be defeated by the Persian army. Remember that the reason the bible gives us prophecy in patterns is the "short-term" fulfillment validates the speaker as a true prophet of God while the long-term fulfillment is the reminder that we all face His judgment!
 - e) On that scary thought, we move on to some good news:
14. Verse 13: For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you. ¹⁴ Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob, O little Israel, for I myself will help you," declares the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.
- a) If you were facing being captured by an enemy and being deported a long way away, it is easy to see how one can be scared about the future. Let's be honest, life itself can be scary at times and it's easy to fear what can happen to us in our own future. Problems in life are always there and we don't usually know what the future holds. In times like that is when we have to remember that God's there, effectively holding our hands is if to say, "Don't be afraid, I'm still here guiding your (our) life for My glory" if we're willing to let Him guide us as He desires.
 - b) Back in Genesis 32, God told a grandson of Abraham (Jacob) that He will now be known by the name "Israel". Jacob is the common father of the 12 tribes of Israel. The reason we get both names mentioned in Verse 14 is it's a reminder to the Israelites that even though Jacob was a "nothing" of a man, God called him, renamed him, and reminded Jacob of the fact that God is Jacob's redeemer for all of eternity. This reminds me a little of the time of when Jesus was confronted by some nonbelievers on the concept of living forever. All of those nonbelievers did believe the first five books of the bible were God inspired, but they are only a guide of how to live today, and it's not about living forever. Jesus responded to that doubt by quoting from those five books as if to say, God is not the God of the dead, a reference to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but to the God of the living. That's how Jesus did argue against the false idea of we die, and that's that for our life. Jesus argued that God is the God of the living and even people who lived millenniums ago are still alive and in the presence of God. (See Matthew 22:32 as a cross reference.)
 - c) I admit I got off track here, but I wanted to show us that Jesus Himself validated the idea of God judging all people is a consistent idea all through the bible.

- d) I think the other point for you and I here is that we as Christians don't have to fear God's judgment in the sense we're not condemned for our sins. We can trust God to guide our life despite all the mistakes we made as our judgment is only for "rewards" for how we've lived our life as a witness for God.
 - e) So does mean we're free to sin all we want? Yes and no. As Christians we're free to do all and everything we ever desire to do, but the real issue is why would we ever want to sin? Why would we ever want to displease the God who created us in the first place? If we do choose to sin, we're choosing to displease the God who saved us in the first place! All I'm saying is we as Christians do face God's judgment, but we don't have to fear it because we are not condemned for our sins, as we realize Jesus paid the price for those sins. When we do mess up, when we realize it, we must confess it. We may suffer in this life based on the consequences of those sins, but if God chooses to forgive us eternally for those sins, that is His business and not ours.
 - f) My point is as we read in these verses of God "holding Israel's hand" individually as well as collectively as they go through all of their troubles, realize that in effect God desires to "hold our hand" as we go through our own trials in life. It's another way of reminding us that God desires a personal relationship with us as we go through our lives.
 - g) On that positive note, it's time to move on to the next set of verses.
15. Verse 15: "See, I will make you into a threshing sledge, new and sharp, with many teeth. You will thresh the mountains and crush them, and reduce the hills to chaff. ¹⁶ You will winnow them, the wind will pick them up, and a gale will blow them away. But you will rejoice in the LORD and glory in the Holy One of Israel.
- a) To explain these verses, I need to "make us" into farmer's back in Isaiah's day. A crop that was common in Israel was wheat. When the wheat was harvested, there was a device that is called a threshing sledge used to help them harvest wheat. One side of that device had sharp teeth that would cut the wheat and allow it to be sifted. Isaiah used an illustration that the Israelites of his day could relate to. Just as this device separated the edible part of wheat from what was waste, so Jesus will one day separate believers from nonbelievers.
 - b) That's what eternal judgment is all about: To separate people who desire to be with God forever, from those who choose out of their own free will to turn from Him forever. Our actions are the evidence of the choice we do make about that decision and that's the point being made here.
 - c) OK, John, how do you know Jesus is the "LORD" being described here? As one example, I stated earlier how the "end from the beginning" describes God in Isaiah and it is also used to describe Jesus in Revelation? Even if that doesn't convince you, wait until we study the events of Chapter 53 of Isaiah, as that is strong proof that the LORD being described here is the same entity that we Christians call Jesus today.
 - d) Bottom line is if we're trusting in Jesus for the complete payment of all our sins, both past, and future, and we believe Jesus is God and is guiding our lives, then we can be sure that we are "betting on the right horse" for our eternal salvation. If we choose to live that way, we can "rejoice in the LORD and give glory to the Holy One of Israel" as Verse 16 states.
 - e) Let me "bottom line" it another way: Do you want to have joy in your life? Nothing we'll do in life will bring us as much joy as using our life for His glory. That's why I'm teaching all of this in the first place as I'm trying to encourage all of us to have more joy in life. My desire is to see people be full of joy. Of course I'm well aware of the fact we all have lives to live and things to deal with. All I'm saying is the best way I know to have a life full of joy is to use it for God's glory.
 - i) If we're willing to live that way, we don't need to fear God's judgment no matter what we've done with our lives to date. We can't change the past, only learn from it so we can use the rest of the time God's given us to glorify Him through how we do live out our lives. On that happy note, time to move on.

16. Verse 17: "The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the LORD will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. ¹⁸ I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs.
- Again, one has to see both the short-term and the long-term fulfillments of these verses in order to understand them. The "short-term" was that the Israelites Isaiah is preaching to, will be taken away into captivity after the Babylonian invasion. Picture being taken many miles away from where you lived in chains or ropes. We would long for some water if we are forced to endure a trip like that. That's why God reminds them that despite what they are going through, He's still guiding them and will lead them to where water is located.
 - Even if you relate these verses to the Israelites returning to their land of Israel in modern times realized that over the last 100 years they converted swamp land into usable land by planting trees to eliminate swamps and making that land usable again. All I'm saying is God fulfilled these verses several times in history as the fact that Israel still exists today is a proof that God's still guiding His people as a living witness that He promised them that land and that promise still exists to this day.
 - OK good for the Israelites I suppose. What does that have to do with you and me? If God cares enough about the Israelites to take care of a basic need like water, wouldn't that also imply that we can trust in His promises through Jesus made to us? Remember the topic at hand is judgment. The point is not only will God judge us based on how we've used all of the time He's given us, but that He'll provide what we need in life in order to be a witness for Him in this life. No it doesn't mean we can be lazy as we trust God to provide. He will provide as we make the effort to provide for ourselves. That's another example of how we are to live out the Christian life before we do face His judgment.
17. Verse 19: I will put in the desert the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive. I will set pines in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together, ²⁰ so that people may see and know, may consider and understand, that the hand of the LORD has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it.
- OK, speaking of planting trees, we get a bunch of them listed here. If you ever visit Israel, you'll see all over that land trees being planted and have been planted for generations. It's part of a long-term program to make that land fruitful. Notice that none of the trees listed in this list are fruit bearing trees. Trees are a source of shade in a desert climate like Israel. They serve other purposes as certain types of trees drain swamps better than others. All I am saying is that the double fulfillment of this prophesy is about what the Israelites have done when they returned from the Babylonian captivity millenniums ago as well as what they did when they resettled the land within the last hundred years or so.
 - We get the idea that Isaiah is predicting the planting of trees when the Israelites returned to that land. Why should we care? First, it describes the accuracy of bible predictions. It's also a reminder to the Israelites that despite the time they're not in that land, God is telling them about their return and one thing they'll do to make that land "fruitful" again. For us, it is a subtle reminder that God cares about those who are called by His name and want us to be "fruitful" for Him by making a difference for Him.
18. Verse 21: "Present your case," says the LORD. "Set forth your arguments," says Jacob's King. ²² "Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, ²³ tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear.
- From this point on, Isaiah's switching his focus from the Israelites back to all people from other lands. To paraphrase, "Hey all you people of other lands, since you're all going to be judged by Me based on how you've lived your lives, come forward, let's get on with it. Tell Me why you deserve to be in heaven."

- b) To continue my paraphrase, tell me how you've worshipped idols when it is obvious by nature that a supreme entity (Me) must have created all of this. What is your excuse for ignoring the God who created the world in the first place? Don't just stand there gazing at Me trying to figure out what to say, let's get on with this."
 - c) Personally, even with all my bible knowledge, if I was standing in front of the God who created me in the first place, I too, would be scared to death. Yes I know what the bible says about eternal life, but that's different than hearing it from Him directly. Remember that God's judgment is in effect, giving people what they want: If they want to serve the God who created the world to begin with, He'll grant us that joy for all of eternity. If we want to do what we want and ignore Him, in effect He gives us that too. That's why the eternal punishment is not based on how many sins we've committed. Sins are evidence of not caring about God if we're not interested in confessing them to Him. The reason many have to be sent to hell is because in effect that's what they want, eternity without God.
 - d) What about people who say, "I know all of that. I'll just sincerely confess Jesus is my Lord right before I die and have "fun" before that." My answer is how do you know you'll even get that opportunity? If you can't live for Him now, what makes you think you'd want to live for Him forever? It's the change of heart that matters, not saying the right words on a deathbed. You may think I've wandered from the text, but I haven't. The text focuses on people who worship other entities who want nothing to do with the God who created the world in the first place.
 - i) OK, what about since Muslims? I'd say God will judge them fairly based on what they do know about the God of the Israelites and how they've treated believers in Jesus. What about religious Jews? The ones I know are nice. However, I've seen them trying to prove their worth to God, and while they live good lives, they miss the point that God requires perfection. As to Christian cults, again, I see judgment based on what they do know and how they acted on that information.
 - ii) So why can't nonbelievers see God on judgment day as to realize who He is and at that point confess Jesus? Again we're back to the idea of if we're not willing to live for Him in this life, what makes one think He'll accept that confession when we're facing that judgment?
 - iii) Bottom line is God will judge all people fairly based on what they do know about Him. For Christians, when we face God, what we plead is "guilty as charged, but we would like the judge to be punished on our behalf". That's Christian judgment in one thought.
 - iv) In the meantime, we left Isaiah telling us what judgment will be like for those who refuse to trust in God for the complete payment of their sins.
19. Verse 24: But you are less than nothing and your works are utterly worthless; he who chooses you is detestable.
- a) It's easy to repeat this verse to someone who doesn't care about pleasing God. Those who are like that pretty much know they're in trouble, but don't want to admit it.
 - b) Think about the person who's sincerely trying to please God by arguing that they're really a good person. They want to prove to God that their good deeds outweigh their bad ones. I see Verse 24 as God's response to our "works". That they're absolutely worthless to God.
 - c) Let me explain it another way. If God is perfect by definition, then He can't be impressed by anyone less than perfect. A perfect God can only spend eternity with one who is fully forgiven or better yet, "perfectly" forgiven. That's why we have to accept God's payment as full payment of our sins.
 - d) To someone who's reached an age of accountability to approach God and say "I'm really a good person", doesn't realize that they are born with a sinful nature sinner and our works can't ever be enough to please Him. Bottom line, this verse summarizes how God's going to respond to people who want to prove their worth to Him based on their works.

20. Verse 25: "I have stirred up one from the north, and he comes-- one from the rising sun who calls on my name. He treads on rulers as if they were mortar, as if he were a potter treading the clay.
- At this point, we're back to discussing Cyrus. I know that only because historically he did come from the north to conquer the Babylonian empire as well as surrounding areas. The reason we get this verse right after the last one is because judgment is not always eternal. Sometimes judgment is God's response to how we're living right now.
 - Let me put it this way: God allowed the Israelites to go into captivity to Babylon because of their idolatry they refused to give up. I'm also convinced God allowed the Romans to destroy Israel for their rejection of Jesus (despite the fact my Jewish readers will disagree with me on that point.) All I'm saying is not all judgment by God is on "judgment day". In the case Isaiah's making in this verse, the issue is the Babylonians are being judged based on how they treated the Israelites in captivity.
 - It's a little like God saying, "I'm behind the scenes allowing the Babylonians to conquer all of the Israelites still living in that land, but I'm also behind the scenes punishing that same group because they refuse to recognize that the God of the world is also the Israelite God." The point is everyone's accountable to God, even pagans that God uses to accomplish His will against His people.
 - Want a shorter version? You know those people who hurt you? Don't worry about them as I'll deal with them. You (us) just focus on using your lives to make a difference for Me, and I'll judge those who work to prevent us from being a witness for Him. OK then, four more verses to go.
21. Verse 26: Who told of this from the beginning, so we could know, or beforehand, so we could say, 'He was right'? No one told of this, no one foretold it, no one heard any words from you.
- Imagine those people who don't know God claiming, "It's not our fault. We didn't know any better." That's the type of defense being stated in this verse.
 - Remember that God not only judges us based on what we do know, but based on what we could have known if we "went in that direction". For the truly naïve, I'm positive the God I worship will judge fairly. For those who could have had the opportunity to learn more about God, He holds us accountable for that aspect.
 - Think about this from the perspective of those conquering Israel. They must have learned at that time that the Israelites worship the God who created the world. The point is God's to be respected even if the people living there are at fault.
22. Verse 27: I was the first to tell Zion, 'Look, here they are!' I gave to Jerusalem a messenger of good tidings. ²⁸ I look but there is no one-- no one among them to give counsel, no one to give answer when I ask them. ²⁹ See, they are all false! Their deeds amount to nothing; their images are but wind and confusion.
- To understand these last few verses, let's start with the word "I" to start the verse. Who is the "I" speaking? I'd argue it's God Himself. It's the same "I" who said He's stirring up the kings of the North (another reference to the upcoming Babylonian invasion and after that when the Persians take over). The word Zion is a nickname for the Israelites. With those 2 words understand, let me paraphrase: "Hey all you nonbelievers in Me, what excuse can all of you possibly give Me? Even those people who did know who I am, why didn't you come to me seeking forgiveness since I rule over the world."
 - Let me try this one final way: The real question being asked here is "What excuse can any person offer for not being obedient to God? All your deeds that you claim are your good works are not worth bringing up as I'm a perfect God and my standards are "perfection".
 - The point is God's going to judge the world and we have no excuse we can offer on any of our behalf's to say in that judgment. Our so called "good deeds" don't impress a God who is perfect by definition. That's why we can only approach Him by claiming we're trusting in His perfect payment for our sins and not our good deeds. I know most of us already do know this, but this chapter is a good reminder why this judgment is necessary.

23. Believe it or not, that leads to my closing prayer. We rarely think of thanking God for judging us, but that is one thing we should be grateful for. Let me explain as I close in prayer.
24. Heavenly Father, First, we thank You that You will give us the opportunity to stand before You as to explain why we should be allowed to live forever in Your presence. Thank You that You've already paid the complete price for our sins before the trial even begins. Help us and guide us so that we use our lives to share that good news with others so that when others also face You in the time of judgment, they too will plead, "I trust in Your payment for my sins" when we face you in that day. Finally, let us be grateful for "group judgment". It's a reminder that you're in charge of who gets to rule over parts of Your world as it reminds us that we're not only accountable to You as individuals, but also as communities, churches, cities and nations. Help us to keep our focus upon You as we live to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.