

Isaiah Chapter 48- John Karmelich

1. I want to start with something I've been thinking about as of late. If you've ever taken on a really big project, there usually comes a point about the three quarters mark where one is thinking, will this ever end? If you've ever ran a marathon, veterans will tell you a point comes where one does not want to go on, and has to push themselves onward. I've taken on other large projects like this book and I've come to this "wall" before. My point is when one hits that wall, one has to mentally push themselves forward and eventually a finish line is in sight. That's my way of explaining the fact that we're about three-fourth's done with Isaiah and barring tragedy we'll make it to the end.
2. Speaking of the end, this chapter ends another section of Isaiah. One has to remember that Isaiah didn't write this whole book at one time. He wrote it over a good portion of his life and this book cover a lot of things God told him to say. My point is Isaiah wrote a "marathon" of a book, so we have to develop a long distance runner's attitude to get through the whole thing. It can be done, and I'm pretty sure God wants me to cover all of it, so here we are.
3. I just stated that this chapter marks the end of a section. Let me explain what I mean: We've been talking about the fall of a great ancient city called Babylon. As my regular's know, it's considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was a major city and it was conquered without a significant battle. Two lessons ago the text focused on Babylon's fall from the perspective of the conquerors a group called the Persians (essentially Iran today). The last lesson focused on the fall of Babylon from the "loser's perspective", which was the Babylonians. This leads Isaiah to a final discussion of this major historical event, the fall of that empire as it affected God's chosen people (the Israelites) and what that should mean to them.
 - a) OK, I can just hear a lot of you thinking. This is all ancient history, and truthfully I've got enough on my plate to worry about than to care how any of these people who lived a long time ago. To quote one of the mottos of my ministry, "Who cares about the Amorites and the Philistines, I've got bills to pay and my kids are sick." We shouldn't study our bible in order to learn ancient history. We study it to see how it applies to our lives today.
 - b) With that said, this chapter focuses upon is the Israelites failure to trust in God despite all of the great miracles He's performed for them over centuries of time. It's like God saying, just what does it take for you to be obedient to Me? I've announced centuries in advance all I (God) am doing and plan to do in the world. The bible tells us how the world began and how it will end one day, so why worry about the future, when I've already explained it to you in the words of this book? (By the way, the final chapters of this book will tell us more about the end of the world than Revelation does. We'll eventually get to that when we get to the last few chapters of this book.)
 - c) In other words the message to you and me in this chapter is, "What does it take in order to be obedient to God?" He's given us eternal life. He's brought the Messiah into the world, as to pay the price for our sins so we don't have to try to please Him with our lives. What that means is we're called to use our lives to make a difference for Him since we no longer have to worry about the consequences of sin.
 - d) So is that it? Another lecture on "We'll never be good enough for God, so let's stop trying to earn our salvation and let's use our lives to make a difference for Him?" The answer is both yes and no. The yes answer is much of Isaiah fits that theme. However, most of this chapter gets into the specific question of "What are you doing about what I'm doing? It is God saying, "Look, I've done all of this for you, why are you sitting around as if nothing I (God) have done is that important?" That's the lecture we get for this chapter.
 - e) Believe it or not, all that leads to my lesson title: "How God expects us to react for all that He has done for us." That fits well with my bible study theme of why we should study the bible in the first place, to understand how God expects us to live based on what He's done for us in the first place. This chapter is a good summary of that major issue.

4. I have to admit I was tempted to take on two or three chapters in this lesson. If we're going to get through this marathon of a book, it helps to speed up the pace. However, we're at the end of one section in this chapter, as the next chapter moves on to another theme. Let me explain that a little better as it shows how one theme ties into the next one.
- a) One of the main issues discussed in this chapter is essentially, "You Israelites are blowing it despite all that I'm doing for you. Since you've stubbornly refused to live as I've called you to live, and still worship other things despite the obvious evidence of My existence as I've lead you this far through life, I need to do something else!" I think this is Isaiah's way of saying, since the history of Israel has proven that one can't be obedient to God based on one's effort, I will pay the price for your sins Myself, which is the next section of this book is going to focus upon. We're transitioning from why the Israelites are failing to see how God is working to bring them back from captivity to the necessity of God Himself having to pay for our sins, which is the next major section of this book. Again, one can see why it is a marathon to get through all of Isaiah as he covers a lot of history and the reason for us to study that history in this book.
 - b) Let me explain it practically. There were probably a few million Israelites that were living in the Babylon Empire at that time. Many of them were taken captive when the Assyrians conquered the northern Israelite kingdom. When the Babylonians conquered them, it also meant they inherited all the people the Assyrians had previously conquered and scattered all over their empire. This was no small transition of history. The Assyrian Empire lasted for 700 years. The Babylonian Empire was powerful but only lasted for roughly a century before the Persians took over. What's amazing about all this ancient history is that Isaiah wrote it before any of it occurred. The point for you and me is that if we can trust God to state the history of Israel before it occurs, why do we lack to trust Him as He tells us about Jesus return to literally come and rule over the world one day?
5. Anyway, I ask you to join me as I go verse by verse through this final discussion of the fall of the Babylonian Empire, not so we can learn more about ancient history, but so we can understand a little better why it is God wants us to trust Him with our lives as He explains to us through Isaiah history written in advance. Therefore, I ask that you join me as we go verse by verse through the 22 verses of this chapter as we understand what Babylon's fall means to God's chosen people (yes that's you and me as devout Christians as well the Israelites of that day).
6. Chapter 48, Verse 1: Listen to this, O house of Jacob, you who are called by the name of Israel and come from the line of Judah, you who take oaths in the name of the LORD and invoke the God of Israel-- but not in truth or righteousness--
- a) Let me start with one of my loose translations, "Hey all of you who claim to be trusting in Me for your life, why don't you put your time and your money where your mouth is?"
 - b) That's the essence of this verse. Now for the details. Whenever you see the old name and the new name for all the Israelites in one verse, that's God's way of saying, "I'd like you to realize who you're messing with!" Remember that the common ancestor of all Israelites is a man (Jacob) whose name essentially means deceiver. God renamed that man Israel as to show God is working on changing that man to be the type of person He wants him to be.
 - c) Realize Verse 1 is meant as an insult. It's God saying I took you as a "worthless nothing" and separated you to be "My people". The second line isn't any better. When the Southern Kingdom went into captivity via the Babylonians (again a future event to Isaiah's time) he is saying you living in the Southern Kingdom weren't any better. Most of the residents of the Southern Kingdom were descendants of one of Jacob's children named Judah. Notice the reference to Judah in the second line. My point is if you read about Judah himself way back in Genesis, he was no "saint" either. He was guilty of murder (along with his brother Levi) and had sexual relations with his daughter in law. My point is that God's saying to the Israelites, "Don't think you're anything special because the common ancestors of your family were not anything special when I picked them!"

- d) That leads a point about you and me. The short version is God didn't choose us because we are anything special. Never think that, "I'm saved because I'm something special!" We were picked, simply because we were. How do we know we are saved? If we've made a commitment to serve Jesus and trust that He's God and paid the complete price for every sin we've ever committed or ever will commit, then accept the fact we've been picked. My point here is simply to realize that like the Israelites, we were not picked because we were something worth picking, God just chose them and us because He did, so accept it.
 - e) All of that leads back to the "insult" of this verse. God's saying yes I picked all of you and the Israelites claim they follow Me but they're not putting their money where their mouth is, as the old expression goes. No, I'm not asking you to send me a check. I'm asking that each of us who claim we're Christians act like it! God's effectively saying, if we believe in Him, live as if we must use some of our valuable time to make a difference for Him as we turn away from things that effectively are a waste of a life. That's the insulting message to the Israelites back then and the same to us Christians today.
 - f) With that insult out of my system, let's continue:
7. Verse 2: you who call yourselves citizens of the holy city and rely on the God of Israel-- the LORD Almighty is his name:
- a) More of my loose translation: Do you have any idea who you're messing with? This is the not so subtle reminder that to be saved is more than just thinking, "I call on the God of the Israelites as my God and believe He will rule the world one day from Jerusalem".
 - b) The proof of our salvation is again if we put our time and our money where our mouth is. I'm not saying our works saves us. I'm saying as James did that if we do claim to be saved, we're going to do something about it. (James 2:18). I believe it was Billy Graham who put it this way: "Faith is like breathing. If we just naturally want to breath in the message of the Gospel, we should naturally want to breath out our works because we believe in that message." That's the challenge being demanded in these first two verses.
 - c) OK, so why is God getting so "hot and heavy here? The short version is we're watching a proof of His existence by this Cyrus person conquering Babylon and allowing Israelites to go back home. However most of those Israelites were not seeing the obvious even though they claim to be "Jewish". They were not putting their "money where their mouth is".
 - d) I can just hear a lot of you saying, "I go to church every Sunday and I'm involved in this or that particular project, isn't that putting my money where my mouth is? It could be. Only you and God know your heart and whether or not you are truly committed to Him.
 - e) I'm not here to judge you. I'm here to say what it is God expects of his people, a full-time commitment to be willing to serve Him. That's what the Israelites failed to do at that time and that's what Isaiah is effectively asking each of us in these opening two verses.
 - f) Now that I've beaten that point to death, let's get back to God lecturing us through Isaiah:
8. Verse 3: I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.
- a) You need evidence God is real? Study the bible from the perspective of evidence that does shows He is real. For example, Jesus claimed there was only one Isaiah, who lived about 700BC and who wrote of Cyrus two hundred years before He came on the scene. Even if you have your doubts about that, when we get to Chapter 53, Isaiah will write in detail of the events of the cross, seven centuries before it occurs.
 - b) My point is if you're experiencing a moment of doubts about all of this Christianity stuff just take a look at the evidence that the bible contains history written in advance. Even if you accept that, realize that the bible does not contain your and my history. None of us can study the bible in order to learn for example how long we'll live or what'll happen to us in the future of the time we have on earth. What it does teach is how God wants us to live and how He expects us to react to the fact He exists and He died for our sins. To put it simply God's saying, "I've done My part, so what'll you do in response to My part!"

- c) Let's return to the important question of why is God announcing all of this? Because the Israelites were getting "comfortable" in their slavery to the Babylonians and with their fall to the Persians. The bible tells us through the book of Ezra that only a small percentage of Israelites actually returned to Israel after they were set free. Most of the Israelites did stay where they were. It's a little like their enslavement to Egypt. It's like thinking, "I'm aware my situation is bad, but what can I do about it? Might as well accept the status quo as not to rock the boat to change things." My point is most people go through life just accepting what "is" without making an effort to do something about it.
 - d) I'm a big believer that God won't do for us what He expects us to do for ourselves. We see here in Isaiah of God doing His part, by allowing this Persian emperor Cyrus to conquer a mighty city like Babylon without a battle and make a major public announcement that the Israelites can return to their homeland. However, only a small percentage of them will go there. So are you saying only the Israelites who chose to go back were the one's who were saved? Of course not. All I'm saying is if we claim we believe Jesus is God and all of that that goes with that belief, we should "put our money where our mouth is". That's the idea behind this verse. With that point made, we can move on.
9. Verse 4: For I knew how stubborn you were; the sinews of your neck were iron, your forehead was bronze.
- a) Apparently Isaiah's not done insulting his fellow Israelites. To say one's neck is like iron, and one's forehead is like bronze, is Isaiah's colorful way of saying, "You are so stubborn about wanting to change the way things are, you're wasting the salvation plans I do have for you!" Remember that "salvation" is much more than just going to heaven. It can also refer to making the effort to change the way things are, so that we will appreciate the life God gives us more. It's realizing the more effort we make to make a difference for Him, the more we'll appreciate life to begin with! I'm not saying we have to work harder to get more "stuff", I'm saying we have to make the best use of our time and to live as He wants us to live so we have more joy in our life.
 - b) To put it simply, God's not going to do for us what we can do for ourselves. If you study all the miracles in the New Testament, Jesus never did for people what they could do for themselves. He only did miracles that allowed people to realize who He was and in turn they could then use their lives to make a difference for Him.
 - c) OK, where's my miracle? Why hasn't God "opened my eyes"? Why do I still have to live with this or that problem if God truly cares about Me like you claim He does? First if you realize who Jesus is, and you believe in Him, you've gotten a far greater miracle than just if some "thing" happened as if you could walk after being bound to wheelchair! God will allow us to go through tough things for a reason. We may not learn what the reason is in this lifetime, but I'm positive that no Christian life is ever wasted that is committed to be used for His glory.
 - d) To put this another way, if you're privileged enough that you can read words on a screen like the one's I'm typing here, you have witnessed the great miracle of our age. If you are using your life to make a difference for Jesus, then you are doing what God's called you to do and you are "putting your money where your mouth is".
10. Verse 5: Therefore I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, 'My idols did them; my wooden image and metal god ordained them.'
- a) It seems we can't go a chapter without Isaiah bringing up idols. Again one has to realize just how common the were in that era of time. It was an accepted practice if one lived in the Babylonian empire to have a statue in one's home to represent what it is we worship.
 - b) The point of this verse is it's really easy to think of instead of giving God the credit for any great event that happened, that we give credit to something else or say it is a coincidence that "this" happened at this time.

- c) I have to admit, it never ceases to amaze me how people will credit their success based on their hard work or their good fortune. I've had the privilege of meeting many people who have built up successful businesses and I'm amazed how they think it was only because of their hard work that God allowed them to be where they are today. I'm not condemning the idea of hard work. If anything, it's usually necessary to achieve a good life. My point is simply that we too often fail to realize how He has allowed us to have what success we do have in life. Or worse, we give credit to things other than God. Or worse, we think it was only because of what we did, that we got to wherever we are in life at this moment.
 - d) The underlying point that Isaiah's pounding home is that the Israelites were allowed to go back to their homeland not due to the "good luck" of their idols or the good fortune of that the man named Cyrus pulled off by conquering the Babylonians. If something good does come along in our life, the question is, do we give God the credit for that good thing? It's the central question of the text being asked here.
11. Verse 6: You have heard these things; look at them all. Will you not admit them? "From now on I will tell you of new things, of hidden things unknown to you.
- a) Of all things, I need to explain the idea of a "mystery" as used in the bible. When we think of a mystery, we think of a story where the key fact is discovered at the end of the story. It is like the classic reference to "The butler did it" at the end of a novel. In the bible, the idea of a mystery is something not revealed up to that moment. The famous example given in the New Testament is the concept of the Christian church. Paul makes the point that the concept of the church was not revealed in the Old Testament, but was a mystery that was revealed when the church began. (See Ephesians 5:32.)
 - b) OK, that's all well and good we know that. What does any of that have to do with Verse 6 here? The point is in Verse 6, God tells the Israelites through Isaiah that from now on, it'll be obvious to them that God is working. So what is it referring to?
 - i) In the present case, it could be the obvious case that God allowed this foreign king to conquer Babylon so that he would make the proclamation that the Israelites can return to their homeland.
 - ii) You have to realize from the standpoint of most Israelites living in the Babylonian Empire at that time, they had no idea if God was through with them or not. They must have thought God had let them down given the fact His temple no longer is standing. They must have thought their history as a people separated for God is now over. They might as well make the best of life in Babylon as that's as good as it'll ever get. That's why God "revealed this mystery to them" that it's not over as they are allowed to return to Israel to start over.
 - iii) It's another not so subtle reminder that God is a God of "Second Chances".
 - c) So is this verse also a "clue" of the idea of Jesus being revealed soon? Well, it'll be a good 700 years before that event happens. However, I do believe this verse is a "clue" as Isaiah will next get into the issue of the Messiah suffering for the sake of the Israelites. However I'm jumping ahead of what's coming up soon in the text. Still the idea of Isaiah revealing what is unknown up until that moment in time is given in "clues" here and there.
 - d) That reminds me, why is it the Old Testament never blatantly says, God will Himself die for your sins? Why have clues all over the place? To explain, I need to explain what was called "Hostile jamming". For example, if you wanted to announce a message on the radio on frequency "am800" (I picked that number at random), an enemy could broadcast on the same frequency with a much more powerful signal and "jam" what we're trying to say. In World War II, they learned to spread secret messages across the spectrum to prevent any hostile jamming of that message. All I'm saying is God does the same thing. That is why the bible says a little here and there to spread the message out. My point is if we removed any page of the bible, the whole message would still be there, just a little less clear. That is why the bible gives "clues" here and there, but no whole message at any key spot.

- e) That little lecture leads me back to Verse 6. Isaiah says here that God has revealed what His plans are in the pages of the scripture and at that time revealed a new thing by having a new non-Israelite king come on the scene to be "a" (not the) Messiah who is allowing the Israelites to return to their homeland. It should be obvious to the Israelites living then of how God is working and that's the mystery being revealed at that time.
 - f) With that said, Isaiah continues that thought in Verse 7
12. Verse 7: They are created now, and not long ago; you have not heard of them before today. So you cannot say, 'Yes, I knew of them.'
- a) Remember that Isaiah's saying, "You Israelites didn't know until this time in history that I God will bring "a" savior to allow you to return to Israel from captivity."
 - b) Pause and remember when this was written: Two hundred years before it occurred. It is also written roughly 100 years before the Babylonians even brought to an end the Israelite Southern Kingdom. The idea for the Israelites going into that captivity is to realize this is not "the end", as God still has plans to work through that nation despite all that's going to happen to them in the future.
 - c) The point for the Israelites today is I'm positive God's not through with them as a nation. Why do you think God allowed them to have their own country again after thousands of years? There was a debate among bible scholars for millenniums whether or not God was literal as far as the Israelites having their homeland for themselves again. You'd think the debate would have ended in 1948 since that country was born again. I see God starting to work through that nation again as the scene's being set up for Jesus' return.
 - d) OK John, this is all neat history, but what does any of it have to do with you and me? It's the reminder that just as God's not through working with the Israelites as a nation, so He's not done in working in Christians individually or collectively. Despite whatever problems the Christian church faces or we may face individually, as long as we're breathing, He can and will continue to work in our lives if we're willing to make that commitment to Him.
 - e) Let me think of an extreme example. What if we're on our deathbed and just know realize all of this? Then we can pray that God comfort us in our last moments and pray that He'll still work in the lives of those around us and continue to make a difference in the world. If one is in serious pain at the moment, be willing to let others help us just as we have to be willing to help others in their time of need as well.
 - f) Meanwhile while I've wandered away from the text, Isaiah's still lecturing his countrymen how they are missing the big picture that God's called the Israelites to separate themselves from the world around them to be a witness for Him. To put it simply, "I (God) am giving you the opportunity to return to the land that I've given you. All you have to do now is go make the effort to return to where I want you to be!" For us Christians today, to be where He wants us to be may not be a physical place, but a mental place of a commitment of our lives to make a difference for Him. That's the idea of this message here.
13. Verse 8: You have neither heard nor understood; from of old your ear has not been open. Well do I know how treacherous you are; you were called a rebel from birth.
- a) Remember that Isaiah is speaking to his fellow Israelites. He's also saying all of this before the captivity has even begun. It's God's way of saying, "You are missing the obvious. I've separated you to be a part of "My people", yet you go on living as if I (God) don't matter in the first place. You've turned against My will for your live by ignoring the commands I have made for you and living however you feel like it." A reason why we should make an effort daily to seek God, is because we like those Israelites easily wander away from what it is God desires of us, a personal intimate relationship with Him where we let Him guide our lives for His glory.
 - b) What if you say, I go to church pretty regularly and I do "this and that" for God? I'm not in any way knocking that. I'm just reminding us that a commitment to God is more than just saying I believe in Him. A commitment is then acting upon that belief in Him.

- c) That leads us to another reminder why we need Jesus to pay the price for our sins. None of us can ever be pleasing to Him based on our efforts. We make a difference for Jesus not to earn His love, but only because it's the best way to live our lives. In other words, we do it out of gratitude, not to earn His respect. However, I'm jumping ahead of Isaiah, as he is still making the point about the Israelites failure to see the obvious of how God's working in their lives and they should respond to His working by using their time and resources to make a difference for Him. That's the underlying message of this text.
14. Verse 9: For my own name's sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to cut you off.
- a) There is a statistic I've been dying to give this whole lecture. Of the multitudes of Jewish people living in the Babylonian empire (possibly in the millions, or at least hundreds of thousands), only about 50,000 returned to the land of Israel after Cyrus gave the decree to let them go home. My point is only a small percentage of Israelites took up the offer to go return to their homeland. I base my statistics on the number of Israelites listed in the book of Ezra, (Ezra 2:64-65). So are you saying only those 50,000 are saved? No idea. The issue of the moment is not eternal salvation, but a commitment to be willing to use our lives to make a difference for God. That's why we read of God being angry here.
- b) That reminds me, let me talk quickly about God and "attitudes". I don't see God as a thing who's in good and bad moods. If God is perfect by definition, then He knows all things. I see it as He's always joyful with those who's committed to serving Him. I also see Him as always angry at sin and the effect it has on people. I see Him holding back on executing a form of wrath on us that we deserve "always" because He knows we're imperfect people who need Him as we wander easily like a dumb animal like a sheep.
- c) So if God is that perfect and He knows we easily wander, why would He want to execute wrath on us to begin with? Because He also knows what we're capable of doing when we set our minds to it. Stop and consider some great project that people accomplished when they've set their minds to it. Stop to consider "ordinary people" doing amazing things, as they trust in God to help them through that project. Sometimes all it takes a single person who's willing to say, "Enough is enough, we can't go on like this" to start a "revolution" of sorts to make the world a better place around us. Just as an ordinary person can also start a revolution to allow evil to reign, so a person can be used by God to go make a difference for Him in the world around us. All I'm saying is God has every right to be angry at us as we fail to live as He desires and He has every right to wipe us out if He wants to as we do live in His world to begin with.
- d) So will that wrath occur one day? Of course, as sin has to be judged one day. Does it also happen through history? Of course! Look at how Babylon fell without a battle. Wars will eventually come to an end as one-side surrenders. My point is simply that whether we see it or not, God's working behind the scenes allowing events to occur and people to rise and fall ultimately for His own glory. There has to be a final wrath one day, as He won't allow what He created to go on forever without punishing sin. We can't change whenever that inevitable day occurs. When we pray "Thy kingdom come", we're asking God for that day to come, but the timing is strictly His business. Our job in the meantime is to use our time to make a difference for Him until that day of His wrath does occur.
- e) In the meantime, God's saying, I'm holding off a complete destruction of My people as I'm still in the process of doing something great among all of you Israelites, which is to bring My Son into the world so as to do what it is You can't do, which is to fully use your lives as a commitment to Me.
- f) Again, remember that Isaiah's writing this centuries before it occurred. I can just see all of the religious people of Isaiah's day going "You tell him, Isaiah, let them have it". Little did such religious people realize that God has them in mind too, as people desire to justify the lifestyle they live as being good enough for God. That's why Jesus had to die for our sins.

15. Verse 10: See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.
- a) John's very loose translation: Yes I've put you through a lot of testing, but in no way am I done with you.
 - b) The more literal idea of this verse is that if one works with silver, there's a worthless thing called dross that accumulates on silver. Someone who works with silver tries to get rid of all the dross to make the silver more valuable. Isaiah's comparing those Israelites living at the time when Cyrus allowed the Israelites to go home to a pile of silver that still requires a lot more work.
 - c) OK John, most of us have a pretty good idea that Israel as a nation has suffered a lot over the millenniums. Is that what this refers to? One way of looking at this verse is to realize none of us are perfect and God's always working on us until the day we're together with Him in His presence.
 - i) However, I don't think that's Isaiah's point here. I think Isaiah's trying to say how God's gone to all of this time and trouble to bring Cyrus in as a redeemer and only a small percentage of Israelites are taking God up on His offer to go home.
 - ii) That's an example of saying, see how God still needs work on us, because none of us are being obedient to Him as He desires we live. It's never about being perfect, but simply about a willingness to commit our lives to serving Him and as I like to say, "putting our money and our time where our mouth is".
16. Verse 11: For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.
- a) My first issue is the phrase "I do this". My question is "I do what?" In context, I'm sure it's referring to the idea of allowing the Babylonians to conquer the parts of Israel that weren't already conquered by the Assyrians and ending Israel's existence as a separate country.
 - b) It also refers to the fact that God allowed "a" redeemer to bring that captivity to an end.
 - c) Remember that God did all of this, because both Israelite Kingdoms that existed way back then were collectively turning to idols and being taken out of that land was God's solution to the fact He was being ignored by His chosen people.
 - i) Shorter translation: Don't mess with God, we can't afford to lose!
 - ii) Second translation: I (God) can't afford to let those I've called to be My witnesses, fail to do what I've called them to do!
 - d) The scary part for us Christians is if God doesn't mess around with "them", what makes us think life and judgment in this life will be any easier on us? No I'm not saying we can lose our eternal salvation. I'm saying just as God can bring to an end any particular person or group's witness for Him, so He can do with us. Remember in the book of Acts, there was a husband and wife couple who's life was suddenly brought to an end when they made it a point to lie to the church about how much they were giving. The issue wasn't not giving but the fact they lied about how much. The point for you and me is God's called us to be a witness for Him, and a failure to do so, means that He can do to us what He did to those Israelites for His name's sake. Does that scare you? Me too. It motivates me to use part of my life to make a difference for Him.
17. Verse 12: "Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: I am he; I am the first and I am the last.
- a) If you're a regular reader of these studies, you might recall that I said in Chapter 41, there were three times in Isaiah where he uses the phrase "I am the first and the last". The same phrase is also found in Revelation several times to speak of Jesus. All I'm saying is Isaiah's speaking of "God the Son" as well as "God the Father" in this verse.
 - b) Now that we know who's doing the speaking, the next question is who is God speaking to in this verse? The obvious answer is the nation of Israel, who is referred to as both Jacob and Israel here in this verse.

- c) When I taught on Verse 1 of this chapter, I explained why God uses both the "old" name of the common ancestor of all Jewish people "Jacob" and the new name for the same guy, which is "Israel". The short version is God's reminding them (and us) that they have been separated for God.
 - d) OK, now that we know who's doing the separation and who's been separated, let's move on to the next verse to understand why it is God's separated them as "His people".
18. Verse 13: My own hand laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I summon them, they all stand up together.
- a) This verse is another "who do you think you're messing with" verse. Isaiah reminds all of his readers that the God they should be worshipping is the one who made all that they see in the sky and the world they stand upon.
 - b) Remember why Isaiah's giving this little speech here. The Israelites living in Babylon did turn to the gods of that land and ignored Him. Even the Israelites living at the time Isaiah wrote this was a land full of idols. That's why Isaiah's gives the "who do you think you're messing with" line here again.
19. Verse 14: "Come together, all of you, and listen: Which of the idols has foretold these things? The LORD's chosen ally will carry out his purpose against Babylon; his arm will be against the Babylonians.
- a) You have to love Isaiah's challenge to his listeners, "Hey, which of these foreign "gods" is the one telling you the future before it occurs? Who's been the one telling you that you'll go into captivity in the first place? Who's the one who's been telling you that a redeemer will come to bring that empire that took you into captivity to an end?"
 - b) Notice the phrase translated "chosen ally". I'm pretty positive that refers to Cyrus, who's the leader of the Persian Empire that overthrew the City of Babylon without a battle as is predicted by Isaiah centuries before it ever actually occurred. Cyrus was the one who put together the plan to stop the river flow and go under the city gates to attack the city. As I have said in earlier lessons, Cyrus' tomb has an inscription to the Israelite God who Cyrus gives credit to for his victory over Babylon.
 - c) I'm starting to realize now the better title for this lesson is "Don't mess with God" however I'll stick to what I wrote as it works just as well.
 - d) OK John, we get how God worked in Middle East History 2,500 years ago. We get the fact that we're His chosen people as well. What does this have to do with us today? All that I am saying is just as those Israelites got in trouble for not living their lives as God's witness to the world, so we too, "shouldn't mess with God" or else.
 - i) What about all those people who ignore God? Why isn't He punishing them? The short answer is this life is all that they get. We who "know better" are now held to a higher standard. As I joke every now and then, the good news of knowing what God requires of us is we know what He requires of us. The bad news is we're now accountable for living that way.
 - ii) With that said, eight more verses to go.
20. Verse 15: I, even I, have spoken; yes, I have called him. I will bring him, and he will succeed in his mission. ¹⁶ "Come near me and listen to this: "From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there." And now the Sovereign LORD has sent me, with his Spirit.
- a) Verse 15 is God "pounding the point" home that He (being the Father and the Son) are the one's behind Cyrus bringing an end to the Babylonian Empire. Remember that Isaiah said all of this before roughly a century before the Babylonian captivity ever began. He wanted to warn his fellow Israelites, "All of this will happen in the future, accept it and deal with it and realize God's still there in spite of all of this."
 - b) So why doesn't God tell us our future? He does, which is why the bible says a lot of when Jesus returns and what life will be like then.

- c) Yes we know that, but what about our individual future? If God told the Israelites what'll happen to them over the next 200 years, why doesn't He make it obvious to us when we'll die or what it is He wants us to do with our lives? For starters, Isaiah wanted to teach the Israelites "at that time" as a model for us to learn. In other words, if they could survive as a nation through all of that, what makes us think God will ever abandon us during a very difficult moment in our life? The bible can't possibly tell every believer what'll happen to them in their lives. My point is this book is here to show us examples of how it is we're to make a difference for Him despite the worst of circumstances one can imagine so we will also make that difference when life isn't that horrible at any given moment.
 - d) With that statement out of my system, notice something else about these two verses. They mention the "trinity". We've already established that when Isaiah says, "I am the first and the last", it's almost identical to several quotes in Revelation that definitely refer to Jesus. (See Revelation 1:8, 1:11, 21:6 and 22:13.) John claims when he wrote that book that it was Jesus describing Himself as He used that term "beginning and the end".
 - i) That leads me back to these verses. Notice Verse 15 says, "I have called him. I will bring him, and he will succeed in his mission." Yes in one context it refers to Cyrus but as I say every so often in this book, Isaiah loves to speak in "double references" meaning in this case, the "short term" reference is to Cyrus and in the "long term" it refers to Jesus. I say that because Verse 16 says, "And now the Sovereign LORD has sent me, with his Spirit." All I'm saying is the reference to LORD is a reference to God the Father. The reference to "sent me" applies to the "Son" and the referral to the Spirit fulfills the trinity.
 - ii) Can't you simply argue it's God "sending" Cyrus by His power (spirit) to allow the Israelites to go home after the Babylonian captivity? Of course. However, one has to accept the idea of "double fulfillments" of prophecy. It's the idea that God loves to work in patterns. It's the idea that we can learn from ancient history that just as God worked "way back then" so He can and does work in patterns for us today if we're trusting in Him to guide our lives. Just as a "Trinity" worked then, so "the" trinity works in our lives today when we're willing to allow Him to be in charge of our lives so we can make a difference for Him.
 - iii) Speaking of God leading us, let's move on to Verse 17:
21. Verse 17: This is what the LORD says-- your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go.
- a) If you thought I was going way out in "left field" on my theories on Verse 16, notice here in Verse 17 that Isaiah "pretty much" repeats what I've been talking about.
 - b) Let me put it another way: Want a good verse to memorize from this chapter? Verse 17 is an excellent choice. It reminds us that God desires to guide us through our life as He tells us "what's best for us" and directs us in the way we should go.
 - c) Isn't this verse an argument that speaks to us outside of His word? I hold the simple view that if "God is God" He can do what He wants when He wants. If He desires to give us a specific message, I'm positive we don't have to strain to hear it, as God's more than able to make it obvious to us what it is He wants to say. However, we shouldn't "live or wait" for those types of messages. Again if God wants to communicate something specific to us He will do it on His timing and make it obvious to us. We can't push Him to say something.
 - d) My point is the most common way God guides us is usually in hindsight. We go through our lives trying to make the best decision possible and in hindsight we can see how God's been there, guiding us the whole time. We use the bible as a guide of the best way to live and make the best decisions possible within the framework of those commands.
 - e) As I've been taught, God's commands are not there to make us suffer and think we won't be able to really enjoy life due to His commandments, they are there as He knows best as to how to live our lives and wants us to be full of joy. Those laws give us that joy.

- f) Does that mean I have to wear a beanie and eat kosher? No. The "New Testament" is our guide on how we're to live under those laws. Remember we're not saved because we obey those laws. We obey them out of gratitude for what He's done for us, not to earn His love in the first place. That in effect is also part of the Gospel Message.
 - g) I have to admit that every time I'm thinking, "Gee, I've really wandered away from what it is God's trying to communicate to us in these verses, I look at the next verse coming up as I realize "I'm right on track."" Bottom line is we should trust that God is guiding us as we try to make the best decisions we can living under the framework of the bible commands that God wants us to learn by studying His word. With that said, Verse 18.
22. Verse 18: If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea. ¹⁹ Your descendants would have been like the sand, your children like its numberless grains; their name would never be cut off nor destroyed from before me."
- a) If Verse 17 was the good news, Verse 18 and 19 are the bad news. These verses remind us of the penalty of not living as God commands us to live.
 - b) I want to give an illustration that may help here. Not too long ago, I read a book written by the President of Israel before he became that leader. He was meeting with a top leader from China. They were discussing the fact that both nations have had a long history as a nation. Yet China has billions of people and there are about 12 million Israelites if I recall correctly. I'm not claiming the Chinese are better people because they're numbers are far greater. The point is because the Israelites have had a history of failing to live as God did demand they lived, they suffered tremendously as a nation and their numbers are far less than what they could have been if they've just trusted God more over the millenniums.
 - c) OK time to personalize this. The point here is that God knows what's the best way for us to live out our lives. Each of us has an unknown specific amount of time to live. We can use that time just to say entertain ourselves or try to make as much money as we can, or if we are wiser than that, we can use our time to live as God desires we live, which is to use our time to make a difference for Him in the world around us. So does that mean I should not try to make more money or enjoy things? Of course not. My point is we're built for a purpose, that purpose is to glorify God in our lives by making a difference for Him in the world around us.
 - d) So you're saying that if we obey God, the Christian "numbers" will be like "China" in that we will be "billions" in numbers? First of all, consider how much the Christian church has grown over the millenniums from being an obscure cult in an obscure part of the world to a point where there are billions of people who claim to be followers of Jesus today. All I'm saying is that God desires to bless our lives. He wants us to have a life full of joy. It's not a matter of doing "this or that" and then we'll have joy. It's a matter of trusting Him in the best and worst of times and trusting that He's still there guiding us through such times.
 - e) In short, "We can't always chose our circumstances, but we can always chose our attitude through those circumstances." A quote roughly based on what I've heard Dennis Prager preach on this topic. Which surprisingly leads me to the next verse:
23. Verse 20: Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians! Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it. Send it out to the ends of the earth; say, "The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob."
- a) Recall how I said earlier in the lesson that only a small percentage of the Israelites living in the Babylonian Empire made the choice to go back to the land of Israel. Yet here is God pleading with them, "Hey folks, who do you think allowed Cyrus to take over this place and allow all of you to go back home? What are you doing "sitting there" when God has made it possible for all of you to flee from there? Remember that it's not just about them. It's about being a witness to others. That's why the last part of this verse states the fact it is a witness to the world if and when the Israelites actually left that place to return to their homeland. It's a proof that God really is working through them to guide their lives.

- b) OK John, Babylon as an empire died 2,500 years ago. Babylon as a city (called something else today) barely exists. How do we "flee" Babylon today? Thought you'd never ask!
 - i) What God calls us to flee from is a life of "bondage" to what the world wants, to go through life, enjoy it as much as we can and don't worry about anyone but our self in the time we've got to live. It's like realizing "We're in slavery, so let's just make the best of it and not try to change things for the better."
 - ii) OK John #2, you're preaching to choir again. Most of us reading this have already committed our lives to serving Jesus. In effect we've already left our "Babylon" as we do use our lives to make a difference for Him. If that's the case, reading verses like this remind us what is our daily mission. The hard part about living the life of a Christian is we easily wander away from how God wants us to live. That's why we need reminders like this that it's all "worth it". It's worth the trouble to live as God desires we live as the rewards in this lifetime and the next one are far greater than any joy one can have by only living for things of this world.
 - iii) On that happy note, two more verses to go.
24. Verse 21: They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and water gushed out.
- a) There is a biblical principal that applies to this verse: When in doubt how God can work on a grand scale, sight an example from the past. In this case Isaiah sites an example from when the Israelites had to cross from the wilderness on their travels from Egypt to Israel.
 - b) The simple point is when the Israelites ran out of water way back then, God performed a miracle by having water gush out of a rock. Israelite children were required to learn that story, as it's in the book of Exodus. All I'm saying is Isaiah picked an example where God has worked in the past in a story that's familiar to most Israelites.
 - c) To say it another way, "If the Israelites could trust God way back then, why won't all you trust Him now (when they could return to the land)? The point for you and me is if God's capable of working on a grand scale and an individual level way back then, why don't we trust Him to guide our lives and do for us what we can't do for ourselves. If we take that leap of faith to do "something" for God, we'll know soon enough if God's behind it as He'll make it obvious to us whether or not He's in that effort based on it's success. Don't get me wrong, a lot of great Christian projects took a lot of trial and error. The point is to keep on moving and do something that we believe He'll approve us and we'll know soon enough if He's behind us.
 - d) I'm not saying we can only do a project if a great miracle occurs in the middle of it. All I'm saying is that when we're willing to make that commitment, it'll be obvious in hindsight if God's there guiding us through that project. Meanwhile one more verse to go.
25. Verse 22: "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."
- a) Want the "negative motivation" to live for God? Here it is to end this section of the book.
 - b) What if you say, I know plenty of people who could care less for God and they seem to be happy with their lives. Because we're all built with this desire to worship something we'd be amazed how "unhappy" people are who we consider successful in life. If we ignore the need to worship God, that need is satisfied in strange ways. Consider those who only live for politics. They're never happy with their life as they always want something more. All I'm saying is if you want to see a lack of joy in people study carefully the lives of those we consider "successful" without God and not the Hollywood image of them. I've done work for some of those people and let's just say it's not the image Hollywood portrays of them.
 - c) What I'm getting at is the "wicked" isn't just say, those who've murdered lots of people. It refers in effect to anyone who turns from God's desire for how we should our live. We do live in an age whether we like it or not where "privacy is dead". All I'm saying is we can't get away with stuff in this lifetime and even if we do get away with stuff, God exists who will judge us based on how we've lived this life.

26. OK that's a tough way to end this lesson. Remember that Isaiah's preaching to a large group of people who are turning from what God desires of them. It's a reminder to us that we too are to live as He desires. It's a constant battle as it's easy to get our focus off of Him and onto the issues of the moment. Therefore, I ask that you join me in my closing prayer that He continues to guide us so that we make the best decisions we can given the situation that's in front of us:
27. Heavenly Father, we thank You that You've given us food to eat, water to drink, a place to live so as to have the opportunity to use our lives to make a difference for You. Help us not to waste the most valuable thing You've given us, our time, so we do use it as You desire. Keep us conscious of Your presence and guide our lives as to Your desire so that we'll use them to make a difference for You in the world around us. We pray for those around us who are hurting, and help us to be a good witness to a lost and dying world around us. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.