

## Isaiah Chapter 5- John Karmelich

1. Some commentators think Chapter 5 is part of the same speech as Chapters 2-4. Others say it's a separate speech by Isaiah. Personally I don't care as either way, Isaiah wrote it next for a reason. OK good for Isaiah I suppose, why should we care? Glad you asked.
2. Let me begin by explaining my title for this lesson: "How we're not good enough for God." Let's be honest, before any of us can accept the good news of why we need Jesus, first we need the bad news of why we're not good enough to please God based on our efforts. In other words we don't need Jesus to pay the price for all of our sins unless we realize we need Him to do so. For most of us Christians, that's old news. I'd like us to consider is the danger of thinking, "Hey, God must be pretty impressed with me now. I go to church most Sundays. I'm involved with a group doing a good project or I'm helping all of these people. I must be pleasing God." Chapter 5 is warning us when we start to think that way. The reason we need the reminder of "we're not good enough for God" is not realizing we're imperfect, but during those times when God's blessing us and we start getting complacent, or worse we think He's blessing us because we're something special. During such times is when we need the reminder of that key point of this chapter.
3. Gee John, are you going to give us another lecture on how we're not good enough for God? No I, through Isaiah am reminding us how God sees us: As imperfect people who desperate need Him for every aspect of our lives. I'm guessing we all have areas of our lives we tell God in effect "I'm in charge of this area of my life while everything else I'll let You run." A reason Jesus gave us the Sermon on the Mount is He effectively goes through all areas of our life as if to ask us, are each of us turning this part or that part of our lives over to God to be in charge of"? Effectively that's also Isaiah Chapter 5 in a single thought.
4. Chapter 5 is also Hebrew poem where God says how the Israelites have fallen short of what He expects of us as His followers. This chapter is also Isaiah telling us how He expects us to live and how the Israelites of that day were actually living.
  - a) I wanted to take Chapter 5 as a separate "entity" as Chapter 6 tells the story of how Isaiah was called by God to be a witness for Him.
  - b) The question I pondered is why does Isaiah spend five chapters effectively telling us what is wrong with our lives even before Isaiah explains why God called him?
    - i) As best I can tell, it was to get our attention. Let's be honest, if the first topic is all about us, we're more likely to pay attention to what Isaiah is saying than if the first topic is about how God called Isaiah. Think of Chapters 1-5 as if God's speaking to us in order to get our attention before Isaiah explains to us how God called him in the first place.
    - ii) However, this isn't a lesson about Chapter 6, but Chapter 5, speaking of which:
5. As I implied already implied the first part of the chapter is a poem comparing the Nation of Israel (all of it, not just the Southern Kingdom) to a vineyard.
  - a) No it doesn't mean God gets drunk on wine or we're to get drunk on wine.
  - b) It's just meant as an illustration that just as a good vineyard produces lots of good grapes so God expects Israel (and yes us Christians) to "bear fruit" for Him. As I love to put, God does not say to us, "OK, you believe Jesus paid the price for all your sins, no go away live your life and I'll see you in heaven." Instead God expects us to use our lives so we make a difference for Jesus in our lives.
  - c) The short version of this poem is that the Israelites were like sour grapes in that they were failing to be a "fruitful vine" in making a difference for Him.
  - d) The rest of the chapter is also a poem, as it continues to express how the Israelites weren't living, as God desired they live. To state the obvious some more, the issue isn't them but us. The way for us to read this chapter is to ask ourselves if we are living as God desires we live so we can make a difference for Him.

6. I can just hear many of you saying, "OK, I'm not perfect, but I'm trying. I've dedicated my life to serve Jesus. I know I'm not perfect but I know Jesus died for every sin I ever committed or I ever will commit. Why should I make myself feel guilty about not being good enough for God?"
- a) First, take a deep breath. It's not about being perfect. It's about the important practice of taking inventory of our lives every now and then from God's perspective and seeing if we have anything we need to work on. In effect, that's the main goal of this lesson. It's not so we can learn Israelite history. It's for us to learn how God expects us to live so we can use our lives to make a difference for Him.
  - b) With that said, I ask you to join me as we take a personal inventory by looking at how the Israelites were living back then and seeing if the "shoe fits" for our lives as well.
  - c) OK enough rambling about the chapter. It's time for Verse 1.
7. Isaiah Chapter 5 Verse 1: I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.
- a) It might be best to start by reminding us how Jewish poetry works. The last syllable does not rhyme in either English or the original Hebrew. This type of poetry is about the first thought connecting to the second thought. The most famous example of Hebrew poetry is probably, "spare the rod, spoil the child". (Roughly based on Proverbs 23:13). All I'm saying is the first thought in Hebrew poetry is designed to connect to the next thought.
  - b) That "poetry theology" leads us to Verse 1 Chapter 5. It starts with "I will sing". I suppose the "I" is God "singing" through Isaiah. As most of us know, we recall the words of a song much better than a lecture. Isaiah wrote this in poetic form for them and us to remember.
  - c) The next point I pondered is who owns the vineyard and who works the vineyard? As we go through this chapter, we'll discover that in this illustration, God prepared the vineyard and all the workers had to do was "harvest the grapes" for Him. By the way, Jesus uses a fairly similar illustration in Luke 20. This parable is very similar to the one Jesus uses to describe the nation of Israel in that chapter.
  - d) By the way, if you have any doubts about who planted the vineyard, the answers will get very blunt in a few verses.
  - e) I should also state that the national symbol for the Southern Kingdom of Judah was also a vineyard. My point is that the Israelites of Isaiah's day as well as in Jesus' day understood that comparing Israel to a vineyard was a commonly held illustration.
  - f) Now notice the word "My loved one" has a vineyard. Who is the loved one? Some argue it refers to God Himself, while others say it refers to the Messiah (Jesus) as He effectively prepared the land of Israel for the Israelites to occupy it. The idea is that God "prepared" the land of Israel by allowing the Israelites to conquer. The reason for that conquering is so the Israelites could "bearing fruit" for God. That's the key point of this poem. If you're thinking, "This is about them and not us", remember that as Christians what God's called us to do as His followers, "Bear fruit" for Him, by giving of our time and our resources to make a difference for God's kingdom.
  - g) Okay, enough theology for the moment, back to the vineyard.
  - h) The reason the poem mentions "hillside", is that most of Israel's geography is hills. If you have ever seen grapes growing on a hill, it's usually organized in "tiers" (different levels) to make it easier to work on that hillside. It's not steep cliffs. It's rolling hills where they could plant grapes. The point is the Israelites could live and work in hills as they make a difference for God by living as He desires they live and we live.
  - i) While I'm painting a picture of how Israel looked and how they originally started out as a big group of farmers, let's quickly talk about what God means by "bearing fruit". First and foremost, it meant by obeying His commandments. Too many Christians think they don't have to obey God's laws as they're only saved by His grace. Think about it this way, is the law to not steal or not murder "still on the books"? Of course. Yes the sacrificial laws were fulfilled in Jesus, but God still wants us to be obedient to Him as we live out our lives.

- i) My point here is that being a good witness for Jesus is not just "doing things to go help others". It's also based on how we live our daily lives. Do we pray and study His word as part of our daily habits? Do we seek Him to guide our lives? Do we get together with other Christians on a regular basis? That's "bearing fruit" just as much as any special projects we may take on for God.
  - ii) Speaking of studying His word, I believe it's time for "Verse 2":
- 8. Verse 2: He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.
  - a) Remember that we're reading an illustration. The Israelites could relate to it, as a vineyard was a common site in that country both then and now. I can't resist stating that I know my last name "Karmelich" is Croatian that means "Son of Carmel". "Ich" means "son of", as in "Son of Carmel." (Pronounced like "Goodrich"). I was told my name came from Catholic missionaries that went to that area about 500 years ago. When I visited Mount Carmel in Israel, I learned that "Carmel" means "fruitful vine". The point is my last name effectively says (in Hebrew) how God's expecting me to be "fruitful" to make a difference for Him.
    - i) Enough history about my last name, let's see if we can all be fruitful for God.
  - b) In this illustration, it tells us that God did all the setup work for the vineyard: He did all the "hard stuff of clearing out the rocks, building a tower to watch for enemies, and made a spot to crush the grapes." To use an illustration most of us can relate to, if you have ever seen the famous "I love Lucy" episode where she walked around in her bare feet in a wine vat crushing grapes to make wine, you get a rough idea what a winepress looked like.
  - c) The "punch line" of this illustration is that despite all the work to prepare the vineyard, it only produced bad fruit. If you've ever tasted a sour grape, there's nothing you'd want to do faster than spit it out. Again, the point is simply that those Israelites who heard Isaiah give this speech or read his book could relate to it as a vineyard was a common sight back then as well as today. Even for us non-grape growers, we can understand an illustration of someone doing a lot of preparation work on a farm and yet nothing good grows there despite all that hard work. The point is we don't have to be farmers or grape growers in order to understand this illustration.
  - d) Now for the tough part: What does this mean for you and me? The answer is to realize what it is God expects of us as believers? To trust in Him to guide our lives. To pray to Him for guidance and gratitude for what we have in life. To study His word so we can better understand how to serve Him and live our lives differently enough so that we do become a good witness for Him based on how we live out our lives. That lifestyle is the "good grapes" that God desires we produce for Him.
- 9. Verse 3: "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.
  - a) Time for a reminder that Isaiah primarily addressed this book to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. While the Northern Kingdom of Samaria at this time, was either conquered or will soon be conquered, God's message to the Southern Kingdom, is see the consequences of not using our life to make a difference for God. This is God speaking through Isaiah to the Southern Kingdom, "Hey guys, you want to be conquered and taken out of the land of Israel like the Northern Kingdom? Continue to ignore Me! You want to live your life as I command all of you to live, then pay attention to Me!"
  - b) The scary part is that's God's message to us Christians as well. The issue isn't salvation, it is what are we "doing" with that salvation God's given us. In the book of Acts, Chapter 5 is the story of God ending the life of a married couple for failing to be a good witness for Him. For all I know that couple is saved. Let me put it this way, if we can't do anything to earn our salvation, how is the believer rewarded in heaven? Based on how we use the time God's given us. That's the warning given to those Israelites back then and it in effect is the same warning being given to us Christians today.

- c) That little lecture leads me back to this verse. The second sentence says, "Judge between me and my vineyard". That's God saying to them, "Hey guys, I brought your ancestors into this land for a reason. I've separated you (that's us Christians too) from the world so each of you can be a good witness for Me. Live as I desire you live so you can and will by My help to be a good witness for Me.
10. Verse 4: What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?
- a) Now for the "guilt" portion of this lecture. Picture God saying to us, "What more could I have done for you? I got you to where you are today. I provide the weather system that allows crops to grow (as well as animals and sea creatures), so why are you wasting your life only living to do things that please you or your family? I (God) have designed life to be so much more than just doing things to bring pleasure to your own lives. Even if you are in a very lowly state right now, you can always bring joy to your life by caring for the person "next to you", or praying for them or doing something to help them."
- b) Remember that God wants our lives to be full of joy. Jesus told His disciples they would have joy in Him. Jesus never explained how to have that joy. They would just have it as they trusted in Him. That's the point here. God wants us to have a joyful life. We can't do it by just living for ourselves. That's what Isaiah is lecturing them and us in this little poem here. Isaiah is comparing the life of Israelites to "sour grapes" because they failed to live as God desired. That's the same message He's preaching to us Christians as well.
- c) OK, enough of the guilt. Time to give the really bad news to those Israelites back then:
11. Verse 5: Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. <sup>6</sup> I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it."
- a) It may help to give a little background to what was happening in Israel at the time Isaiah wrote this letter. The big threat to all of Israel being conquered was Assyria. This was an empire based out of the northern portion of Iraq. One has to remember that governments were based primarily out of "cities" and not countries. My point is the capital of Assyria was the real base of their power. While God didn't let the southern Kingdom of Judah be conquered by this growing empire, in about 100 years, another empire, which at this time didn't even exist yet, would be the one that eventually conquered the Southern Kingdom.
- b) My point is simply that God allowed both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms to end as neither one of them in the long term, were good witnesses for God.
- c) Now let's come back to the imagery of the vineyard. What Isaiah is predicting here is just as God led the Israelites into the land of Israel so they could be a witness for Him, so He's about to let them be conquered. Isaiah's making that prediction using "vineyard imagery" by describing what would happen to a vineyard if it wasn't taken care of. What happened to the Southern Kingdom as described in this imagery here, within two hundreds after his lifetime is a historical fact that help solidify Isaiah as a true profit of God.
- d) The scary part for you and me is just as God allowed horrible damage and destruction to the Southern Kingdom as Isaiah predicted can just as easily happen to you and me when we fail to be a good witness for Jesus. To other words, if and when we get complacent in our witness for Jesus either as a church body or individuals, God can "remove us from the ballgame" if we too fail to be a good witness for Him. OK, I warned you this lesson is full of guilt, time to move on.
12. Verse 7: The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.
- a) The "short version" of this verse is Isaiah's starting to give examples of what's occurring in Israel at that time and why this heavy hand of judgment was upon that nation.

- b) Notice in Verse 7 that it makes reference to both the Northern Kingdom (Israel) as well as the Southern Kingdom (Judah). It's God saying to the Southern Kingdom effectively, "Do not think you're more holy than the recently destroyed or about to be destroyed Northern Kingdom just because that Northern Kingdom abandoned Me collectively centuries ago.
- i) An important point here in this verse is that God saw innocent people murdered and suffering in the Southern Kingdom. God's going to make that whole kingdom suffer because the leaders didn't do anything to stop that suffering and murder.
  - ii) OK, why did innocent people suffer in that destruction if only some of them were guilty of those sins? As most of us know, the innocent always suffer during times of warfare. It's also a matter of a nation being held collectively accountable to God even if it was the sins of only a small percentage. It's kind of like the idea that we as a society are accountable for God's justice or we suffer the consequences.
  - iii) To explain this another way, it may have been common knowledge that people in that location did suffer or be killed by the hands of others, but all the people living there didn't do anything to stop it or bring the guilty to justice. The point for you and me is if we as a society fail to carry out God's justice, we can suffer as a nation just as the Israelites suffered back then.
  - iv) Also realize another reason why Isaiah is writing all of this. What God desires for all people is to turn and acknowledge the God who created us in the first place. If we as a society abandon God, His wrath comes on a nation sometimes in a subtle form and other times as we look back at history and see a nation conquered, we'll realize God allowed it to happen when that nation failed to live by the standards as taught in the 10 Commandments.
13. Verse 8: Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land. <sup>9</sup> The LORD Almighty has declared in my hearing: "Surely the great houses will become desolate, the fine mansions left without occupants.
- a) For those who don't know, I was a real estate major in college and I learned a lot on the topic of real estate development. However, this verse is not talking about building say a residential subdivision. Verse 8 is talking about someone being so financially successful that they kick people out of their "backyard" in order to build a bigger place for them and their family to live. There's a classic American expression called, "Not in my backyard". It is the idea of saying things like, "Yes the poor people need places to live but not by me as I want to protect the value of my own home." It would be like thinking yes we need to help others but again, "not in my backyard".
  - b) What Isaiah is predicting here is the mansions of the "rich and famous" will be left empty as the Southern Kingdom of Judah will be conquered as they collectively refused to obey God's commandments for their lives.
  - c) Remember what's going on here: Isaiah is stating the consequences of what happens to a nation when they refuse to honor God. It's not just the "little people" who'll suffer loss in a warfare, the "rich and famous" will lose all their goods as well.
  - d) The specific condemnation here is about rich people taking advantage of their success by kicking out rightful owners of homes in order for the rich to have even larger mansions.
    - i) Remember how God intended the Israelites to live. God desired that the Israelites live "by tribe", which were divided into clan groups which were further divided into greater families. My point is God wanted the Israelites to respect the family structure and not let families get kicked out of their ancestral homeland just so someone could have a bigger house.
  - e) So is God "anti-success" in these verses? Of course not. As I like to point out every once in a while, one of the 10 Commandments is to "Not steal". That means God's in favor of us owning private possessions. The issue isn't success. The issue is about using success in order to take advantage of others. That's what's to be avoided here.

14. Verse 10: A ten-acre vineyard will produce only a bath of wine, a homer of seed only an ephah of grain."
- a) This is one of those verses that gets lost a little in translation and not understanding how much wine 10 acres should produce and how much grain a "homer of seed" produces. In case you care, I did a little "Google research" to answer those questions.
    - i) As to wine, I've read that vineyards usually produce anywhere between 2 and 10 tons of wine per acre. Each "ton of grapes" is about 300 bottles of wine. A "bath" is about 8.5 gallons of wine.
    - ii) The point is if 10 acres should produce (300 x 10) 3,000 bottles of wine, instead the land where grapes grow will only produce 8.5 gallons.
  - b) To repeat some "Google math" again for wheat what I sort of guessed by reading between the lines of some commentaries is the farmer's only produced about 1/10 of what would be the normal output of both these crops.
  - c) If you forget the math five minutes from now, just remember Isaiah is predicting that due to the Israelites failure to be a good witness for God, just realize that the evidence of their collective failure to trust God was their failure in producing an adequate crop from their efforts to grow those crops.
  - d) OK John, so the crop failed. To quote the famous line attributed to Marie-Antoinette, "Let them eat cake". Historically she never said that, but it's attributed to her. The issue is far more than having a bad year of crops. The issue is starvation when a group fails to live as God commands. Let me try a famous example from the 20th Century. Russia infamously allowed the death of millions of Ukrainians by letting them starve to death in 1932/33. Is that an example of God allowing them to suffer due to some sin they'd committed? No, it was the sins of the Russians that allowed it to happen and eventually led to the collapse of the Soviet Empire. My point is I can't explain all tragedies. I don't know why they occur. I just accept the fact that God's in charge of our world and allows horrible things to occur because sin exists and free will exists and God ultimately will win when we use our lives to make a difference for Him in the world around us.
  - e) All right, I went way out in left field on that one. Let's get back to Isaiah:
15. Verse 11: Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine. <sup>12</sup>They have harps and lyres at their banquets, tambourines and flutes and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the LORD, no respect for the work of his hands.
- a) It'd be best to put these verses in context. Back in Verses 8-9 we read of evidence of God's judgment by the "rich and famous" losing their big houses. In Verse 10 we read evidence of God's judgment by crop failure. Here in Verses 11-12 we read evidence of judgment by the fact people are more interested in getting "wasted" and enjoying music than they do in seeking God Himself.
  - b) More literally, these verses are describing people who get up early in order to start their drinking festivals. Verse 12 describes having music at their parties. The point here is that a sign of God's judgment is when a society that has been called to serve God ignore Him in order to do other things.
  - c) Remember that the issue isn't non-believers, but believers. Of course a society suffers if no one is productive and people care more about getting drunk than serving God. Keep in mind who was Isaiah's main intended audience: The Israelites living in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. My point is Israelites were called to live differently enough from the world around them so that people would know that they serve God. If all they're doing collectively is "party all the time", how are they different from others around them?
  - d) So does this mean a Christian can never go to a party or to celebrate something? Of course not. The Jewish holidays were meant as a time of celebration. A wedding is a time to go celebrate with others. The issue is our daily lives and are we honoring God with it.

- e) Let me also address the issue of Christians and alcohol while I'm in the neighborhood:
    - i) Nowhere in the bible is a Christian permitted to get drunk. Christians vary on the issue of drinking in the first place. The issue comes down to the fact that we're to be a good witness for Jesus at all times. Some Christians choose to never drink alcohol and some will on some occasions. I'm not going to end that debate.
    - ii) Among the things what God's called Isaiah to do here is to remind us that we're always to be a good witness for Him at all times. We never know who's watching us or what'll be the results of our actions. Therefore, I advise you to act on the side of caution when it comes to drinking alcohol and realize we're always on the clock as a witness for Jesus whether we like it or not.
    - iii) OK, I'm in enough trouble here as it is, let's move on to Verse 13.
16. Verse 13: Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding; their men of rank will die of hunger and their masses will be parched with thirst.
- a) From here Isaiah starts to make it clear that the nation of Israel will suffer horrible things not just because they didn't listen to him, but because they ignored what God called them to do. What Isaiah is preaching to them and us is there are consequences when we fail to do what God commands us to do. I've met many a Christian who thinks that just because they believe in Jesus, they can now do whatever they want whenever they want. Yes all of us who trust that Jesus is God and died for every sin we've ever committed is saved. The real question is of course, what are we doing with that salvation?
    - i) Those living in Israel at the time of Isaiah's writing may have believed in God and even gone through their religious rituals, but their hearts weren't in it and they'd spend all their time on their "stuff", without living by biblical principles He wants us to obey. My point here is simply that there are consequences when we who are called by God turn from Him.
    - ii) In these verses, Isaiah is accurately predicting the future of the Southern Kingdom as many of them died when they were taken into captivity.
    - iii) The scary part for us Christians today is effectively we run the same risk when we give God "lip service" and don't serve Him as He desires. We may still be saved, but we will suffer in this lifetime if we fail to be a witness for Jesus. That's the key message of Isaiah here. In the meantime, we've got more verses to go.
17. Verse 14: Therefore the grave enlarges its appetite and opens its mouth without limit; into it will descend their nobles and masses with all their brawlers and revelers. <sup>15</sup> So man will be brought low and mankind humbled, the eyes of the arrogant humbled.
- a) One has to remember that while Isaiah is being literal in the sense that when we turn from God, we suffer the consequences. Those of Isaiah's day did literally suffer as that country was allowed to be conquered by God because collectively that nation turned from Him.
  - b) At the same time Isaiah uses figurative language to get his point across of how tough it's going to be for the Israelites as they literally turn from God. That idea leads to these two verses. Does death literally "open its mouth" to greet people? Of course not. The point is that death will become so prevalent due to war and defeat from that war it will be as if the grave has opened its mouth wide to receive so many dead bodies.
  - c) OK John, we get the idea that millenniums ago, many Israelites either died or were taken into captivity for a lack of obedience to God. Are you saying God may allow for example the United States to be taken into captivity or say our town or city if we don't all say go to church this Sunday? Remember the issue isn't "them" but us. God cares for those who are called by His name to be a good witness for Him. Just as these people did suffer all those years ago for failing to let God guide their lives, so I wouldn't put it past God to act now as He did back then. My point is He's more than capable of punishing us today as He did those Israelites so many millenniums ago and He's willing to do so if that is what it takes for us to live as He desires we live and "get our attention" focused on Him.

18. Verse 16: But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness. <sup>17</sup> Then sheep will graze as in their own pasture; lambs will feed among the ruins of the rich.
- a) Every now and then Old Testament prophets "throw us a bone" to remind us that despite any and all promised "doom and gloom" it won't be that way forever. In these two verses God promises that despite the corruption of the Israelites at that time, despite the fact they will be taken into captivity, God will win in the end and He'll rule over His people again in that land one day.
  - b) There's a view among religious Israelites that every generation of them has to fight their own battles as a witness for Him. I'm sure that's true for Christians as well. My point is if we're saved we don't get to kick back in this life and just "enjoy it", we're called to make a difference for Jesus or like the Israelites back then, suffer the consequences of the failure to do so. Ok, if life is going to be that tragic, why "throw us this bone" that God will one day in the future rule over Israel peacefully in the land? We Christians believe that Jesus will return one day to rule the world from Israel, but how does that help with all that I have to deal with right now?
  - c) The answer is God's reminding us that life won't be like this forever. Just as God's telling the Israelites living at that time that despite their problems, A Messiah will literally return to rule over Israel one day in the future, so God's reminding us that He'll win in the end in our lives no matter what it is we're dealing with. So are you saying we should just make the best of it until Jesus returns? No I'm saying we make the best decisions possible given whatever we have to deal with without violating biblical principles knowing that it won't be like this forever. One day as Christians we get to rule with Jesus when He'll rule over the world as we know it today. That's the hope as laid out in these verses.
  - d) All of that leads to Verse 17. Remember earlier the passage about those Israelites living at that time who had great wealth and were taking advantage of others? The verse lays out a picture lambs grazing on grass growing where those mansions once stood. That visual picture is there to remind us that what "is" will not be forever. If people are doing things that there not supposed to be doing, it won't last forever like that. It's a reminder that we live in a world where a just God rules over it and won't tolerate forever injustice existing in our world. Just as that Israelite world came crumbling down within a relatively short time after Isaiah preached, so the injustice and collective turning from God in our world won't go on forever as it is today. On that scary thought, we can move on.
19. Verse 18: Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes, <sup>19</sup> to those who say, "Let God hurry, let him hasten his work so we may see it. Let it approach, let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so we may know it." <sup>20</sup> Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. <sup>21</sup> Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. <sup>22</sup> Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks, <sup>23</sup> who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent.
- a) I wanted to take these four verses as a group, as I want you to notice the word "woe" as it is repeated four times in these five verses. What this should remind the bible student is in the Gospels, Jesus gave a bunch of "woe to you" statements to those who were religious in Jesus day. (See Matthew Chapter 23 or Luke Chapter 11). The point that Isaiah is making in His day is similar to the one Jesus is making. That is, "You think you're pleasing to God as you go through your rituals and then do what you want the rest of your life? You need to realize how much trouble you're in by not living as God desires you all live."
  - b) Yes I'll get into the specifics of what they did wrong in a moment. First, I need to make it as clear as possible that we collectively as Christians can receive the same "woe's" as Jesus made or as Isaiah made here. The real issue is whether or not we're living as a witness for Jesus with our lives. We'll suffer in this life and lose eternal rewards if we fail to do so.



- c) With that scary warning hanging over all our heads, let me now come back to focus on the verses to see what Isaiah is warning about. Verse 18 starts with what appears to be Isaiah responding to his critics. It's as if Isaiah is saying, "Let's see God come down and strike us for the way we're living" and what we're doing isn't wrong. It's always amazed me how people can justify their lifestyles without fearing the consequences. It's as if those hearing Isaiah are saying, "Who cares what you preach, it won't happen in our lifetime, we can go on doing what we're doing and no one's going to stop us!"
- i) That leads to the second "woe". Woe to those who call evil good and good evil. In effect, that's what Isaiah's critics are doing. This is a warning to those who should know better about what God's laws state and don't do anything about it. Again I need to emphasize the issue isn't salvation it's being a good witness for God. If He allowed them to suffer, what makes us Christians think we get off any easier if we fail to be a good witness for Him?
- d) I'll be the first to admit, it's tough to hear this stuff. It's easy to point the finger at a person or group that's not us. The challenge is always to look at bible verses as to ask if the "shoe fits" in our life? I'm not saying God expects us to be perfect. I'm saying our deeds have to match our words or else we're wasting our time preaching God's word. We each have to examine our own lives on occasion to ask ourselves if we're living as God desires we live as a witness for Him. Bottom line is I never want to hear those woes for my life, so we go through them as to realize what it is God expects of us as we live for Him.
- e) That leads to the third woe, those who think they're wise in their own eyes. This warning is about those who think they're smart enough on their own and don't need God's help to run their lives. The danger for Christians is to think I believe Jesus is God and died for all of my sins, now I can go do what I want when I want. It's about avoiding God's guidance over our lives by thinking we're good enough just as we are.
- f) Need something more specific? Great let's look at the fourth woe: It mentions a few types of people. First is those who are "champions" at alcoholic drinking games. This is talking of people who think they're special because they can drink more liquor and not pass out. Most of us have seen movies with scenes like that. The second illustration given is about justice not occurring because bribes were given. So what do these two illustrations have in common that they were put together? In both cases, it's about those who think they're something special because of who they are or what they can get away with. What all this comes down to is people think that God will never judge them in this life and they can do whatever they want, as predictions of God's judgment go in one ear and out the other.
- g) You might say, I don't get that drunk or I don't pervert justice and you might even say I'm something special because I go to church or I'm involved in this project. God's pointing a finger (figuratively speaking) at those who claim to be religious but aren't practicing what they claim they believe. The main point here is that God expects us to actually live based on what the bible teaches and not give Him "lip service" by going through rituals and not practicing what He expects us to as His followers. Just as those Israelites suffered back in that day for their arrogance, so we can receive the same punishment if we fail to use our time as a witness for God.
- h) I know this is a tough lesson to read, but all of us, need to hear this to realize how we're expected to live as a witness for God. The good news is that there are only seven verses left in this chapter.
20. Verse 24: Therefore, as tongues of fire lick up straw and as dry grass sinks down in the flames, so their roots will decay and their flowers blow away like dust; for they have rejected the law of the LORD Almighty and spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel.
- a) OK, we made it through the tough "woe to you" section. That'll lead to the consequences of turning from God. Again Isaiah uses visual word pictures to describe how bad life will be when we turn from God. The short version is we'll suffer when we fail to live this way.

- b) The longer version is that Isaiah uses a word picture of a fire consuming all things in its path, and as dry plant life also burns up in a field fire, so the "life as a living witness for God" will come to an end. Around the lifetime of Isaiah, much of the Northern Kingdom is transported out of Israel to other parts of the Assyrian Empire. In around 100 years of Isaiah's speech the survivors of the Babylonian invasion will be moved to other regions in their empire. A couple of points here:
- i) Not everybody in Isaiah's earshot will be killed. Others will just lose their witness for God as they'll be transported everywhere.
  - ii) Also realize it was the philosophy of these empires to relocate and separate people they've captured so they won't organize any rebellions against their empires.
  - iii) God knew all of this in advance as the God we believe in, can't learn anything. He allowed His people to be taken into captivity for a season as a strong reminder of what is their purpose in life.
  - iv) Of course Israel is back in the land today and is mostly secular, which is a big topic for another day. My point is simply that the relocation of those Israelites was not a permanent relocation of that nation.
  - v) Finally the point for us Christians is if God can remove them from being a witness for Him, we too, should fear the God we serve again, not to earn our salvation but as to remind ourselves what we're called to do as Christians: be a witness for Him in all that we do. If you get that, you get the point of this lesson.
- c) That idea by the way, is why Isaiah is predicting the destruction of the Southern Kingdom and that's what Isaiah is warning us Christians about today if we fail to live as God wills.
- d) With that said, I'll make a run for the finish line and go over the last six verses together.
21. Verse 25: Therefore the LORD's anger burns against his people; his hand is raised and he strikes them down. The mountains shake, and the dead bodies are like refuse in the streets. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised. <sup>26</sup> He lifts up a banner for the distant nations, he whistles for those at the ends of the earth. Here they come, swiftly and speedily! <sup>27</sup> Not one of them grows tired or stumbles, not one slumbers or sleeps; not a belt is loosened at the waist, not a sandal thong is broken. <sup>28</sup> Their arrows are sharp, all their bows are strung; their horses' hoofs seem like flint, their chariot wheels like a whirlwind. <sup>29</sup> Their roar is like that of the lion, they roar like young lions; they growl as they seize their prey and carry it off with no one to rescue. <sup>30</sup> In that day they will roar over it like the roaring of the sea. And if one looks at the land, he will see darkness and distress; even the light will be darkened by the clouds.
- a) The good news of all these verses is that they go together. Isaiah is using Hebrew poetry to draw a visual picture of what God's judgment looks like "On His own people" who are refusing to live as He desires they live. Because this is poetry, keep in mind that it's not a literal picture as much as it Isaiah painting visual pictures that we can relate to of how bad the judgment is going to be and how literal it's going to be.
  - b) If a little bit from now, you can't remember any of the words used in this chapter, we just have to remember that when we "mess with God", "He messes with us" and the mess that we can find ourselves in, can come down to our failure to be a good witness for God.
  - c) OK, before I discuss some of this visual imagery, does all of this mean that if our life is in a big "mess", is it because of something we did wrong? I have to admit that whenever my life is in trouble, I do take inventory to see if there's a sin I need to confess and turn from. However, many tough things we deal with in life are just things that occur because "life happens". Like most Christians I hold the view that everything we go through is God "filtered" but not everything is due to mistakes we make or say our society makes.
  - d) So if we don't know if a disaster is God ordained, why should we care about all this tough imagery here in Isaiah? Because if we as a society do turn from God we can say that there are no excuses as God effectively warned us through Isaiah what happens to a society that is called to serve God and then turn from Him.

- e) As to the imagery itself, I summarize it as "What God aims to hit, He doesn't miss". All it means is we can't escape God's judgment if we are guilty either individually or as society from turning from Him. Most of the imagery in the text is self-explanatory so I won't go through these verses line by line to explain what they mean.
  - f) The important thing to get out of this lesson is that God calls us as Christians to live as He desires we live, which is about obeying His commandments, seeking Him daily in prayer and through His work and putting others' needs as others as priority over our own needs as we go through our lives. Obviously there is more to living the Christian life than that or else the bible would be a lot shorter.
22. Since this lesson is such a "downer", I thought I'd end it on a positive note. I'd like to explain why we should bother to live this way in the first place. The reason 30% of the bible is predictions of the future, not only to the prophets but also to you and me, is so that we can know for sure that the bible is the Word of God and "we're betting on the right horse" in life. Yes living the Christian life is hard at times. Throughout history, Jewish and Christian people are martyred for their faith and it's still occurring around the world today. There is an old Christian saying that it's easier to be a martyr for Jesus as it's over relatively quickly and then we get to be in heaven with Jesus for eternity. The hard part is to live as Jesus requires so we can use our lives to make a difference for Him. My point is it's worth it. It may not seem like it sometimes but the joy we experience living as God desires brings us more joy than anything else we can use our time for, and again, the bible gives us the confidence we're "betting on the right horse" not only in this lifetime, but for eternity. OK, on that positive thought, onto the closing prayer.
23. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, we don't know why You picked us to be a part of Your kingdom, but we know that You did, simply because we believe Jesus is God and He died for every sin we have ever committed or will ever commit. Since You have picked us, help us by Your Spirit to live as You desire we live so that we can experience the joy of using our lives to make a difference for You in all that we do. Guide us as we turn from our sins and live as You desire. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.