

Isaiah Chapters 2-4- John Karmelich

1. Well, I said I was going to speed up the pace in the last lesson, so I'm going to do a rare thing for me and cover three chapters in one lesson. I have an alternative motion to teach this way, as all 3 of these chapters are in effect a single speech by Isaiah. Therefore, I thought it best to tackle all of this text that way. Yes we're going to cover a lot of text, but it's effectively all one big message.
2. To explain this text, it's probably best if I back up and explain it in context. When we get to Isaiah Chapter 6, we'll discover in that chapter, Isaiah is discussing how he was called by God to deliver this message, which essentially is the whole book. It describes Isaiah being somehow transported to God's throne and seeing God Himself. What I pondered is why wait until Chapter 6 to tell us that Isaiah's been called by God to speak for Him? Why not mention that in the opening verses of the book? To state the issue another way, why start the book with a bunch of chapters discussing how God's going to judge Israel collectively for not being the type of witness God wants them to be? We all know God's standards don't change, so reading about their judgment as a witness for Him also affects us as a witness for God.
 - a) My point was the opening lesson was a tough one about God's judgment on all of us as a witness for Jesus. These three chapters don't let up. The reason Isaiah starts off being so tough is he's trying to get everyone's attention in a dramatic way, even before he tells us how God called him to be a witness for Him.
 - b) OK John, in the last lesson you "beat us up pretty hard" explaining how all of us are called to live a life as a witness for Jesus and what that meant. So are we going to suffer through another lesson like that? That's the good news, the answer is no.
 - c) Instead Isaiah is going to shift from a "here's how you're messing up badly now" message to here's what's going to happen when the Messiah comes. Since the God who created all things is telling us this, we better accept it as Gospel truth.
3. Which leads to my next point. Before I explain the specifics of what Isaiah will say in these three chapters, it's time for a quick understanding of "future prophesy" in the bible.
 - a) A lot of Christians are either obsessed with future prophesy and others ignore it. I've tried over the years to develop a balanced perspective. In other words, future prophecy is part of the bible and we have to deal with it. Why? It's how we know God's outside of time as we know it. If God tells us the future hundreds or thousands of years before it occurs, it'd validate the speaker as a prophet of God. Also realize that prophecy is "patterns". Often in prophecy we'll get a short term fulfillment to validate the speaker as a prophet and also a long term fulfillment which also validates the bible as God's word.
 - i) The most famous example of this is the modern nation of Israel. Ezekiel predicted how Israel would come back to be an independent nation again. He made it when the Babylonians already took most Israelites out of that land. Ezekiel's words were validated in the short-term as some of them returned to that land fairly soon after he died when a new Empire let Israelites go back to their homeland. However the Israelites were still part of that new Persian Empire. It wasn't until 1948 when the prediction by Ezekiel came fully true as not until this fairly recent date, when that nation once again be an independent one again.
 - ii) My point is simply that one can read the bible and see predictions come true in the short run while other predictions may not come true in our lifetime. We'll see that in this lesson as well, which is why I'm stating all of this here.
 - b) There's a classic illustration that works well here. Suppose someone shuffled well a deck of cards. You're convinced they didn't cheat while shuffling. Then by revealing one card at a one, the cards came out in perfect order. Again, assuming they weren't cheating how

is that possible? Only if "time is going backwards" for the dealer. The point is God knows history in advance which is why He'll accurately predict the future through the prophets.

4. OK John, that's all well and good. Assume that we already believe Jesus is God and we already believe He lays out the future for us in the bible. Why should we specifically study these chapters here in Isaiah and what do they teach us? Thought you'd never ask.
 - a) First, after all of that "hot and heavy" judgment of Chapter 1, Isaiah wants to lay out what is our ultimate future as believers in God. We'll get references in these chapters to the last day or "latter days" in some translations. The good news is we don't have to worry about whether or not those predictions have come true yet. They describe a world where people from all nations come to Israel to seek God when He'll literally rule from Israel. Since that obvious hasn't happened yet, it's future to us as well as to Isaiah's readers. So how do we know that will happen? Because Isaiah also makes predictions in this book that happened during his lifetime and soon after his lifetime. The point is if God's 100% accurate with the things that have occurred in history to date, why do we doubt His predictions about what will happen in the distant future?
 - b) Next, if all this is "someday", why should I care now? As I love to joke, we've got enough to worry about without focusing on Jesus inevitable return to rule the world one day from Israel. The reason is to put our lives in perspective. Are our problems that bad, if Jesus is going to rule the world one day? We still have to deal with our issues at hand, and God's word gives us guidance to make good decisions, but He also wants us to keep in mind the big picture, which is no matter how bad things are, or will get, God's already given us the ultimate victory in life despite of whatever we have to deal with before that occurs.
 - c) The shorter version is life is hard. In Isaiah's time, life is bad as a foreign empire is about to conquer the Northern Kingdom and threaten the Southern Kingdom where Isaiah was living at the present time. Yet God's saying here that despite the fact that His people isn't seeking Him as He desires, He's got great eternal plans for our eternal future not because we deserve it, but because God can't stop loving what He already loves.
 - d) Since we've got a lot of text to cover in these two chapters, I'll stop my introduction here so we can get rolling with all the text. First let me give my lesson title, which is "Why the big picture matters while we deal with the issues of our lives now". That's what Isaiah is going to cover in this three-chapter speech that I'll try to cover in one lesson. Here goes:
5. Isaiah Chapter 2, Verse 1: This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:
² In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.
 - a) To understand these verses, put yourself in the shoes of an Israelite living in the Southern Kingdom at that time. The Northern Kingdom is on the verge of being totally destroyed. That same foreign army is threatening the Southern Kingdom as well. My point is if you think you have problems imagine living in a world where its very existence is threatened by outsiders. If Isaiah can promise good things in those conditions, imagine the good that God wants for us despite whatever issue's we're currently facing. Keep that tough idea in mind as we go through these verses.
 - b) Let me begin with a technical note. Israelites in those days didn't have last names. They would refer to themselves as "name, son of another name". For Isaiah to refer to himself as "Son of Amoz" is like stating his last name. By the way, in Hebrew the word Amoz is the same spelling as "Amos" as in the book of Amos. No they're not the same people.
 - c) Now that we have the "who" established, next is the "where". Isaiah says he's describing a vision he saw about the future of Judah, which is the name of the Southern Kingdom and its capital Jerusalem. Verse 2 then explains the when: In the "last days". The question of the ages of course is when does the "last days" begin? What'll be obvious as we read the text is "those days" haven't happened yet, as nothing historical matches this text. So if it hasn't occurred yet, and it's been a few thousand years, how do we know it will happen?

- d) Let me put it this way: The Old Testament is very accurate about Jesus first coming. What makes us think it'll be any less accurate about the events of His Second Coming?
 - e) Let me recap for a moment: The who is the speaker, Isaiah speaking on God's behalf. The where is what will happen in the future in the city of Jerusalem. The when isn't known to us, but is as certain as fact, because we believe in a God who knows all things, and tells us history in advance. Isaiah gives us these long term future prediction as to put our present issues in perspective of the big picture of what will eventually happen to that kingdom. In other words, despite the dangers that lay ahead, God's still controlling things for glory.
 - f) Enough of that. Let's get to the prediction itself. First let me say what the text isn't saying. God's not saying the mountains where Jerusalem is located will be raised up higher than say Mount Everest in elevation. God doesn't want us to be "expert mountain climbers" in order to see Him. The idea of elevation is a metaphor meaning of all the possible places in the world one can visit, there will be none more important than Jerusalem. I admit I have always been fascinated by the fact there's nothing "special" about Jerusalem in terms of its location or natural resources. Yet God's saying in effect, "This is the exact place where I'll literally rule the world from one day, so deal with it!"
 - g) Finally when the text says, "all nations will stream to it", think of it as a prediction that it'll be the number one place people will go to. Why? Because the God who created all that is created will rule from that place. In a sense that's become partially true in the last century or so. Today Jerusalem is a highly ranked destination spot and it gets 3.5 million visitors per year. As many as that is, I don't think that's what Isaiah had in mind. People come to that city for its historical significance. Isaiah's predicting a day when people from all over the world will come there because it'll be the center of the world in terms of government.
 - h) Every now and then I'll joke that the entire bible is effectively the story of two cities. One of them is obviously Jerusalem and the other is Babylon. I say that because much of what nonbelievers worship (i.e., power, money, success) has its roots in the Babylonian system. The bible is in effect God's way of saying whether we accept it or not, He's going to win in the end and Jerusalem is going to be His capital. If you get nothing else out of this lesson, realize that we should "bet on the winning horse" and realize that God will win in the end as He'll set up His Messiah (which in Hebrew means eternal king and we believe is Jesus) will rule from that city forever one day.
 - i) OK, two verses down and lots more to go. Time to move on.
6. Verse 3: Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
- a) Remember how I said Jerusalem gets 3.5 million tourists a year today? Do any of them go there to learn about God's ways? Yes in that bible studies are held there all the time for all people to come learn more about what He expects of us. So if that's true, is this prediction fulfilled? Partially yes and partially no. For both religious Jews and religious Christians it is still future in that we wait for a literal person to rule the world from that city.
 - b) Let me repeat a cute joke I recently heard. Many religious Jews will argue that Christians only care about Jerusalem because they believe Jesus will rule there. To quote one of my favorite religious Jewish people on that point, "Who cares? Either way we win. If Jesus is going to rule there, the Messiah has come and the world will look to Him as the leader of the world. If Jesus doesn't come we still get multitudes of Christians caring about Israel."
 - c) Now stop and think about Isaiah making this statement to a bunch of people living there in about 700BC. Obviously Jesus doesn't even make His first appearance for many more centuries, let alone rule there. Why should the Jewish people of that day, or us Christians today, think about this stuff, assuming it will still happen one day? The point is they had problems just like we have problems. The point is no matter how bad life gets at times if we see the long term picture of God winning, it helps to put our problems in perspective.

- d) To put it simply, the reason we should honor God, is He'll win in the end. We can count on His promises coming true just as we know much of the bible history already did occur.
7. Verse 4: He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.
- a) If you're thinking, "OK, Jesus will rule the world one day from Jerusalem, so what? Why should I care about that future day?" Consider what that will mean for our descendants. The text says that when that day occurs, there will be no more wars. War weapons will be converted into other uses, which is the point of this verse. If one's studied world history, I don't think there's ever been a year where a war didn't occur somewhere on this planet.
- i) We, we all want world peace so we can enjoy life and not worry about having to fight other groups. Isaiah is saying there that once the Messiah comes to rule over the world, days of fighting will no longer exist.
- b) OK suppose that all of us reading this believe that day will come one day. How does any of this affect my life here and now? Isaiah's calling people then and today to worship God and live as He desires as not only it's the best way to live out our lives, but also because in the future, He'll rule the world as promised here and all through the bible and we'll get to enjoy being on the winning team when that day does occur. The issue isn't so much what will happen in the distant future as how we should live based on the certainty of who's in charge of our lives and what we should be doing about it.
8. Verse 5: Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.
- a) Here we get our first "transition" of the speech. Isaiah is saying since God's Messiah will rule from Jerusalem one day, get past your problems of the moment, (which to be honest are very serious as their very lives are threatened by an empire) and come worship God as He desires to be worshipped.
- b) The point for you and me is no matter what we're dealing with in our lives right now take some time to worship God, see the big picture and not just focus on our present issues.
- c) Will worshipping God make our problems go away? Of course not. But looking at what we're dealing with from God's perspective helps to put life in perspective. That's what we read Isaiah preaching here in this verse.
9. Verse 6: You have abandoned your people, the house of Jacob. They are full of superstitions from the East; they practice divination like the Philistines and clasp hands with pagans. ⁷ Their land is full of silver and gold; there is no end to their treasures. Their land is full of horses; there is no end to their chariots. ⁸ Their land is full of idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their fingers have made.
- a) Since Isaiah has already laid out the long term future for Israel, it's time for him to focus on the issues of the moment: That issue is their country was prosperous at the moment. It's a little like the old joke God blesses us, so we become complacent and focus on how we're blessed as opposed to being grateful to the God who's blessed us to begin with.
- i) Verses 6 to 8 give us specifics of how the majority of Israelites were living at that time. When the text says they were full of superstitions from the East, think of it as checking out other religions. The idea of practicing divination is kind of like if someone is asking a fortune teller to predict the future for them. A similar idea is when is when the text says they "clasp hands with pagans". The short version of all of this is simply that the Israelites were abandoning God to the latest trends of that day. The modern equivalent is about everyone doing what they feel is best as opposed to trusting in the God who's blessed us in the first place.
- b) What all of this boils down to is the concept of being blessed by God and not appreciating it was God Himself who gave us the income so that we could enjoy things. Today think of this in terms of people being so busy with for example, playing on their cell phones or just focusing on whatever they enjoy, and never taking the time to honor the God who made it

all possible in the first place. How did God make it possible? By letting us live so that we don't have wars at the moment and can work for "leisurely stuff".

- c) So John, are you saying we can't enjoy our stuff if we've made enough money to enjoy all of that? Of course not. All I'm saying and all Isaiah's saying is don't give God "lip service" by either ignoring Him or not doing what He expects us to do as a witness for Him. If we have eternal life, what He expects of us in exchange is to use our lives to be a witness for Him. Yes we can enjoy things, but as Christians we should have a light touch on them as if to realize time's the most precious thing we own, far more than any of the blessings we have in life and God wants us to focus our time for His glory. If you get that, you get the essence of Isaiah's message here.
 - d) Unfortunately since the Israelites were pretty much ignoring Isaiah's warning, he shifts to the bad news of what happens when we ignore God:
10. Verse 9: So man will be brought low and mankind humbled-- do not forgive them. ¹⁰ Go into the rocks, hide in the ground from dread of the LORD and the splendor of his majesty! ¹¹ The eyes of the arrogant man will be humbled and the pride of men brought low; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. ¹² The LORD Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty, for all that is exalted (and they will be humbled), ¹³ for all the cedars of Lebanon, tall and lofty, and all the oaks of Bashan, ¹⁴ for all the towering mountains and all the high hills, ¹⁵ for every lofty tower and every fortified wall, ¹⁶ for every trading ship and every stately vessel. ¹⁷ The arrogance of man will be brought low and the pride of men humbled; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day, ¹⁸ and the idols will totally disappear.
- a) We're back to the "hot and heavy" judgment that we read in Chapter 1. To paraphrase all of this in one thought: "You collectively want to ignore Me in because you're so busy with other stuff? You better go hide in a hole somewhere, because judgment is coming."
 - b) Earlier I mentioned the danger of ignoring God's blessing leads to complacency. That will usually lead to disaster as God will do what He has to do to get our attention. If you and I were called to live our lives to make a difference for God, we've got a huge price to pay if we refuse to honor Him. Think of this text as God doing what He has to do in order to get our attention. It's not like God enjoys allowing disasters to happen. When we as a society or a church or a nation refuse to honor the God who created us in the first place, God will do what He has to in order to get our attention back on Him.
 - c) All of that lecturing leads me back to the text itself. The text describes hiding in the rocks as if it's possible to escape the disaster that's about to occur. Remember that even though the Assyrian Empire didn't destroy the Southern Kingdom, in about 100 years they'll be destroyed by another empire, the Babylonians. Understand that Isaiah uses visual images that the Israelites of his day can relate to in order to describe the disaster that will come in the near future on the Israelites. That language includes references to a forest located just north of Israel in Lebanon. It includes references to tall walls built around cities to protect people. It includes the idea of no more ships coming to Israel to bring goods.
 - d) All right, too bad for those people living millenniums ago. Realize the key issue isn't them but us. The reason we study Isaiah is not to learn ancient history. It's to realize that God's got the same standards today as He did back then. Yes we're saved only by our trust that Jesus is God and paid the complete price for our sins. The important question is what are we doing about it? If we live in a group that's supposed to honor God and we collectively turn from Him, we can suffer the same consequences. To use a classic joke, "I've seen the enemy and it is us!" When I read of our society doing things that God doesn't approve of, part of me shrugs my shoulder, as they don't know better. The issue is us believers. If we choose to join them and ignore God's desire for our lives, that's when we're in big trouble.
 - e) All of that leads me to a key point. Notice Verse 17 where it says "the LORD alone will be exalted in that day". The point is whether we accept it or not, God's going to win on His timing no matter how our society is acting. Since we can't fix "them", the issue is if we are

joining our society or living as God desires we live? So how are we supposed to act? It's about obedience to His laws (10 Commandments) as to be a witness for Him.

11. Verse 19: Men will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the ground from dread of the LORD and the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth. ²⁰ In that day men will throw away to the rodents and bats their idols of silver and idols of gold, which they made to worship. ²¹ They will flee to caverns in the rocks and to the overhanging crags from dread of the LORD and the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth. ²² Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he?
- a) There's an old saying in Israel. It took the Israelite captivity from those foreign empires to finally end the idolatry most Israelites had back then. When archeologists study ancient Israel, a big difference of before versus after the Babylonian captivity, was the amount of idols found in the homes of the average Israelite before versus after that time. My point is that's what it took in order for God to get their attention and turn them away from idols.
 - b) Yes modern Israel is mostly secular and that pattern may repeat. Just as the USA today is mostly secular as God will judge this country that's also been called as a witness for Him. To take a famous quote from Billy Graham, "If God doesn't judge the United States, He'll owe Sodom and Gomorrah an apology, and God doesn't apologize."
 - c) Remember a few verses back how Isaiah was talking about how the Israelites back then were so busy enjoying their possessions and flirting with nonbelievers, that they ignored what God commanded them to do (be a witness for Him). Here we see the consequences of turning from God in colorful languages. Remember that Isaiah uses word pictures that the Israelites of that day could relate to. There are caves all over Israel. Isaiah's saying the people will kick out the animal residents of caves in order to flee from judgment. They'll stop enjoying their "toys" as they have to go hide in caves.
 - d) By the way, these verses came literally true. When the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom were being invaded by the Assyrians, many tried to hide in caves at that time. That story was repeated about a hundred years later when the Babylonians conquered the Southern Kingdom and relocated the Israelites to elsewhere in their empire. Both of those empires had the philosophy to separate communities so that they wouldn't unite in order to rise up against those empires. So you know that's when Isaiah did get accepted as a prophet was after his time, when what he predicted literally came to pass. The point of all of this for you and me is just as God literally condemned His own people back then for turning from Him. That's always a danger for us Christians as well if we do fail to use our lives as a witness for Him.
 - e) All of that leads to the last verse of this chapter. God's pleading with the Israelites through Isaiah to stop trusting in what their society does, and go back to being a witness for God. As I read of our society for example, publicly accepting homosexuality and arguing that all of that "God stuff" no longer matters, yes I fear for the judgment of our society. At the same time, I also realize God's still in charge and He won't be mocked. God's going to do what He has to get His people's attention again, and He's not above allowing a disaster to occur in our lives if that's what it takes to get us to focus on Him again.
 - f) My point is as you read of God's heavy handed judgment in these chapters, don't think in terms of feeling sorry for the Israelites, but think in terms of using our time to make some sort of difference for God as that's how He's called us to live in the first place.
 - g) With my judgment statement out of my system, time to get back to Isaiah's judgment.
12. Chapter 3, Verse 1: See now, the Lord, the LORD Almighty, is about to take from Jerusalem and Judah both supply and support: all supplies of food and all supplies of water, ² the hero and warrior, the judge and prophet, the soothsayer and elder, ³ the captain of fifty and man of rank, the counselor, skilled craftsman and clever enchanter. ⁴ I will make boys their officials; mere children will govern them. ⁵ People will oppress each other-- man against man, neighbor against neighbor. The young will rise up against the old, the base against the honorable.

- a) As we read this heavy judgment, remember that Isaiah's been called to be a witness to the Southern Kingdom, which is why the focus is on Jerusalem and Judah, which is that area.
 - b) The sad reality of these verses is that when that kingdom is destroyed, literally town by town and "brick by brick", not only will many people die and the rest taken captive all the way to modern Iraq, but even for the poor people who remain there, God will take those with no leadership experience and make them leaders as there will be no one else to lead.
 - c) OK John, all of this is horrible and I hate to think about this stuff. As you like to tell us we have enough problems to worry about without having to care about people who lived all of those millenniums ago. What should scare you is just as God judged those people who failed to be a witness for Him, so He can and will judge us if we fail to do the same. We'll suffer a similar disaster. History is full of "repeat stories" like this when a society who did worship God at one time, did turn their back on Him and suffered a horrible fate. But we have armies to protect us and we can focus on our issues, as we trust in say, our army and our local police to protect us. The issue is God's bigger than those trying to protect us. He will allow disaster to strike us if we fail to use our lives as witness for Him. To repeat my key line, "I've seen the enemy, and it is us!"
13. Verse 6: A man will seize one of his brothers at his father's home, and say, "You have a cloak, you be our leader; take charge of this heap of ruins!" ⁷ But in that day he will cry out, "I have no remedy. I have no food or clothing in my house; do not make me the leader of the people."
- a) So you know there's some good news coming later in this lesson. In the meantime, Isaiah needs to focus on the extent of the damage so we understand how seriously we're to take the concept of the danger of turning from God with our lives.
 - b) These verses have more word pictures that I'm sure came literally true in that day. Verse 6 describes one man asking his brother to be the leader simply because that brother has a possession that the brother doesn't have. Notice how the men describe their land as a big "heap of ruins". That brother who was asked to be the leader, essentially says, I can't do anything to stop this. Don't make me a leader as I can't fix this situation."
 - c) You might say, there are always horrible stories in the news that I hate to read, but it does not mean God's judging us based on those stories. It doesn't mean life as we know it will go to hell because Christians are for example too busy living like nonbelievers to return to seek God as He desires. The real issue is, why push it? If disaster hasn't struck, why mess around and avoid living as God's called us to live? It's all about realizing God's pattern of blessing leads to complacency, which can leads to disaster as we're reading here, and that hopefully leads to repentance.
 - d) The sad part of the story of Isaiah, is at the end of his life, he had to deal with a king who refused to repent and according to Jewish and Christian tradition, he was killed for being a good witness for God.
 - e) I can just hear some of you saying, "OK, enough of all this judgment stuff, you're making me feel guilty about not doing enough for God!" The issue isn't "enough" the issue is if we are just giving Him "lip service" (i.e., going through the motions of seeking Him without putting our hearts into it) and caring about other stuff other than using our lives in order to make a difference for Him. That's the underlying point of this lesson. In the meantime it's time to get back to judgment:
14. Verse 8: Jerusalem staggers, Judah is falling; their words and deeds are against the LORD, defying his glorious presence. ⁹ The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves.
- a) John's loose translation: The Israelites were not being conquered because they were very much outnumbered by the Babylonians who conquered them. They were being defeated as they collectively refused to trust in God. Remember Billy Graham's joke that God will judge the United States or else He'll owe Sodom an apology? In effect, Isaiah is saying the same thing here. The sins of Israel at that time were no better or worse than how Sodom

did act right before God judged that place. Notice the last phrase "brought disaster upon themselves". This is Isaiah saying it's their own fault for the disaster that's coming.

- b) So John, are you saying that if we Christians don't fight against society's "norm's" we too will be judged like them? The issue isn't so much fighting them, but not living like others around us are living. God expects each of us to take a stand for Him by not living like any non-believer is living. I'm not saying we're saved by "works". I'm saying that as a witness for Jesus, God expects us to live differently. To use an example that's in the news today, it would be like saying we love all people but wouldn't attend a homosexual wedding. Not as we don't care for them, but we can't compromise God's standards for the world's way of seeing things. It's the classic balance of God's love and God's justice at the same time. The point for Christians is if we fail to live by His standards, then we too will be judged as the Israelites were back in that day.

- 15. Verse 10: Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds.
 - a) Notice the "ray of sunshine" in this chapter of disaster. If you're reading all this horrible stuff and thinking, "wait a minute, I volunteer to do things to make a difference for Jesus and I'm not like these people", then take Verse 10 to heart.
 - b) Let me put Verse 10 in perspective. Verse 10 does not say that if you do good deeds, you will receive a great income and won't have to support yourself. The idea of enjoying the "fruits of our deeds" is about seeing the benefit of what we do for God. We may not see the benefit in our lifetime, but often we do get a glimpse of how we do make a difference for Him benefits others.
 - c) Pause and think about the small percentage of Israelites back then who were seeking God and not living like the rest. Were they deported to Babylon or Assyria as well? Probably. My point is just because we're using our lives to make a difference for God doesn't mean we don't suffer in this lifetime as being part of the society around us. Let's be honest, we may have to suffer in this lifetime even if we're doing the right thing. Isaiah's point here is that we will enjoy the benefits of the good we do either in this lifetime or in the next one and it's worth the effort despite whatever is going on around us.
- 16. Verse 11: Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them! They will be paid back for what their hands have done. ¹² Youths oppress my people, women rule over them. O my people, your guides lead you astray; they turn you from the path. ¹³ The LORD takes his place in court; he rises to judge the people. ¹⁴ The LORD enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of his people: "It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your houses."
 - a) So much for the "ray of sunshine" of the chapter. In fact, think about the positive aspect of Verse 10 in direct comparison to the danger warnings of Verse 11. Remember why Isaiah was called to be a preacher for God in the first place: Most of those Israelites were so busy enjoying the benefits of their society, they've forgotten to honor God. When the Northern Kingdom went into captivity, it was a time of prosperity right before it happened. All I'm saying is don't let the economy, either good or bad keep us from doing what God's called each of us to do.
 - b) One of the great challenges to living the Christian life is keeping the balance between our understanding of God's love and God's justice. Christians tend to overemphasize how He loves us and underemphasize His judgment. Many Christians do the opposite. As people who've dedicated their lives to being a witness for Jesus, it's essential to keep both aspects in mind. To use a simple example we realize God loves all people, but we also know His word is "the truth" and there is no compromise from that truth. Yes there are minor issues that are debatable, but the fundamentals are not.
 - i) I state all of that here, because Isaiah's focusing on God's judgment in these verses. He's giving examples of who the wicked are that God will punish. After giving a few examples, the real focus is on the fact that God will judge us all.
 - ii) I've always held the view that Christians will be judged based on two questions:

- a) First, do you believe Jesus is God and died for all your sins?
 - b) If you said yes to that question, what have you done about it?
 - iii) I have to admit that second question always scares me and motivates me to keep going with this ministry. Think about Paul in the New Testament. He worked as hard as possible, endured all sorts of trials and horrible things all because he was convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that he'll face both those questions on his own judgment day.
 - iv) So are you saying that we have to quit our lives and be missionaries? I'm saying we are all missionaries whether we realize it or not. God doesn't call all Christians to go to foreign countries and preach Him. Most of us are called to be a witness for Jesus right where we are. The bible does speak of rewards in heaven and they are determined based on how we answer that second question.
 - c) My point of all of this is simply that there is judgment in heaven and we have to deal with it. That's what Isaiah is saying to those Israelites. But Jesus wasn't around then. How did they get judged? The same way we do? God's effectively asking them, "What did you do with the knowledge you had about Me? Even if you didn't learn that much, what did you do with the knowledge you could have learned? In our era of unlimited knowledge that we have at our fingertips, it scares me to think of the judgment that'll occur among those who didn't make a difference for Jesus given that knowledge that exists today.
 - d) Am I scaring you with all of this? It scares me too. Do we still have to "do the dishes and clean our homes?" Of course. Do we still have to provide for ourselves? Of course. Are there times when we just need to rest or have fun with those we love? Of course. But if we're not using some of our time not only to honor God as God, but to make a difference for Him, then we've wasted the greatest asset God's given us, our time. That sort of fear is what Isaiah's preaching in these verses and the same sort of warning that God's giving us today if we're not using some of our time to make a difference for Him.
 - e) Meanwhile, it's time for me to stop lecturing you as I'll "tag-team" Isaiah to take over. (Yes I'm kidding.)
17. Verse 15: What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?" declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty. ¹⁶ The LORD says, "The women of Zion are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes, tripping along with mincing steps, with ornaments jingling on their ankles. ¹⁷ Therefore the Lord will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion; the LORD will make their scalps bald."
- a) Verse 15 is a specific condemnation against the Israelite religious leaders who know the law but were elevating themselves above others. It's more than just thinking we're better than others because of one's knowledge, it's about taking advantage of the less fortunate in life by one's power or prestige.
 - b) Then in Verse 16, Isaiah changes his focus to women enjoying their financial success. It describes them as "showing off" with a colorful example of wearing ankle jewelry in order to be noticed by others. One has to remember the culture of that time era. Women didn't go flirting to look for dates. Marriages were arranged between families. Isaiah is talking about here are those who turn against their family values to seek other men and show off.
 - i) So is God anti-jewelry? Of course not. Does this mean we can't get fixed up to go to a fancy function? Of course not. The big picture is about turning away from a trust in God as we go through our lives. The example given here is about specific women who are turning from God because they're more interested in showing off their looks then they are in seeking the God who created them in the first place.
 - c) I combined these verses as to show that God's not picking on any one group. Verse 15 is about men who oppress others and take advantage of their status in society. Verses 16 to 17 are about women who take advantage of what they own to show off. In both cases the issue is about turning from God in order to focus on power or prestige. By the way, that

punishment we read in Verse 17 became literally true, as women had their heads shaved as they were taken captive into the foreign countries that I mentioned earlier.

- d) There's something to realize about God's judgment here. It's not only about the next life. As a church, society or a nation God has and will continue to judge us based on how we collectively treat Him. The Israelites going into captivity was only one example of God's judgment. Sometimes we wonder, why does God allow "this or that" to happen? Often we just need to look at how we have lived and see the consequences. As I've said earlier in the lesson, God's blessing leads to complacency and disobedience to Him. That leads to our punishment as a society and hopefully that leads to repentance. That's the pattern we are watching here play out in Isaiah and it's been repeated all through history.
- e) Speaking of Isaiah:
 - 18. Verse 18: In that day the Lord will snatch away their finery: the bangles and headbands and crescent necklaces,¹⁹ the earrings and bracelets and veils,²⁰ the headdresses and ankle chains and sashes, the perfume bottles and charms,²¹ the signet rings and nose rings,²² the fine robes and the capes and cloaks, the purses²³ and mirrors, and the linen garments and tiaras and shawls.²⁴ Instead of fragrance there will be a stench; instead of a sash, a rope; instead of well-dressed hair, baldness; instead of fine clothing, sackcloth; instead of beauty, branding.
 - a) Short version is Isaiah gets on a roll comparing how the financially successful women of that day were dressing at the moment in comparison to how they'll look when they will be taken into captivity. Keep in mind the Babylonians at this time were "nothing" in terms of power. Yet without mentioning them by name, Isaiah is predicting what will happen to the Southern Kingdom about 100 years after these predictions.
 - b) I don't have to give too much detail about these verses as they speak for themselves. They are giving colorful ways of describing women getting all "fixed up". Again, Isaiah is not saying we can't get all "fixed up" for a fancy evening. His point is he's using women who have the financial blessing in life to use it only for themselves as opposed to giving honor to God as God. Think of this as a visual picture of those who ignore God and only care of how they look. Realize that when the Babylonians took people away to what we call Iraq today, they literally tied them up in ropes after they took whatever they had of value. My point is simply that what Isaiah wrote here came literally true.
 - c) I can just hear some people thinking, "That's not me. I don't look like the girls of that day. I go to church every Sunday and do good works and I don't have fancy rings, perfumes or a lot of dresses". You can plug in "fancy toys" for men and paint the same picture here.
 - i) The goal is not to make us feel guilty about going out for a nice evening. The goal is to get us to put "stuff" in perspective of eternity. If we're primarily concerned of how we look or what we want to buy, then we've got the wrong attitude over how God wants us to live our lives.
 - ii) Let me try this another way: Do you want happiness and joy in your life? It won't come by buying more stuff. It comes by trusting God, making decisions based on His word, and making a difference for others without expecting anything in return for that help. That'll bring us far more joy than all that other stuff. Can we still go out or enjoy things if we have the means? Of course. The issue is putting all those things in the "eternal perspective" of what's important in life.
 - iii) OK, time to "tag team" Isaiah again and have him take over for me.
 - 19. Verse 25: Your men will fall by the sword, your warriors in battle.²⁶ The gates of Zion will lament and mourn; destitute, she will sit on the ground.
 - a) Remember how I said how we can trust in the army and police to protect us so we can go enjoy our lives? Here's what Isaiah is saying about an army in Verse 25. The point here is if our society is getting corrupt don't expect the government to rescue us. If God wants to judge a society who has collectively turned from Him, a strong army won't help.

- b) Verse 26 is a colorful way of saying Israel will be a "waste" despite its present success as those called to worship God have turned from Him. By now, I think you get the picture of what happens to a society that turns their back on God.
 - c) OK, let me take on the tough question now. The United States was founded as a place that has freedom of religion and freedom to worship God or not worship Him. Are we going to be judged as a society for turning from Him? What about other countries that were founded as predominately Christian countries? I'm convinced we were collectively blessed as a nation because for the most part, people sought God and were blessed for the effort. If we as a society collectively turn from Him, what makes us think we're not going to suffer the same fate of those Israelites back then?
 - d) The point is God's standards do not change with time. The issue isn't them, but us. We'll all be judged and the question each of us have to ask ourselves is what are we doing with the time God's given us? If we're called to make a difference politically are we fighting on His behalf? If we've got a gift for service, are we using it? As I like to say I've never met a Christian yet who says their spiritual gift is taking out the trash. The point is we all have to do what's needed to help as well as use our spiritual gifts to make a difference for Jesus in whatever way we enjoy as well as whatever way we can help. Can we stop all of the corruption of our society? Of course not. However, we can choose to live by God's rules and that's what matters for us as we use our time for His glory, not ours.
 - e) In the meantime, Chapter 4 only has six verses, so I'll crank them out here and now:
20. Chapter 4: In that day seven women will take hold of one man and say, "We will eat our own food and provide our own clothes; only let us be called by your name. Take away our disgrace!"
- a) Imagine living a society where most of the men are killed in war. For the surviving adult men this may seem like a nice fantasy, to have lots of women fighting over you as they're not many men around. However, that's not the issue here. The disgrace for those women is about not having a husband or a family. Let's face it, if we as humans don't reproduce, the human race cannot go on. This is not about every women being married. The issue is simply about God's people continuing to exist. If "judgment has come" and many men do die in battle, this type of disgrace will come.
 - b) Notice the women in this verse still have stuff. It's as if they're thinking we don't want to have to depend upon you to provide for us, we just want to have a husband so we'll fulfill our desire to have children. Realize that type of ratio is a consequence of God punishing a society by warfare that has collectively turned from Him.
 - c) Now for the good news, Isaiah takes a break from announcing all this horrible stuff to tell some good news about the long distant future. It's as if Isaiah is saying, life won't always be that bad. Good news will come in the distant future. By the way, that's something I do try to keep in mind in tough times: It won't last forever. Just like we can't count on riches so we shouldn't count on horrible things lasting forever either.
21. Verse 2: In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel. ³ Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem. ⁴ The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire. ⁵ Then the LORD will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy. ⁶ It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.
- a) My first question is why is this here? What's Isaiah's reason for mentioning a future day when the Messiah (who we Christians call Jesus at His Second Coming) will rule over all the world with Jerusalem as it's headquarters? I suspect a big part of this is because Isaiah has spent so much text in the first three chapters of this book telling of the horrors that do await the Israelites for collectively turning from Him. Keep in mind the common pattern

that's seen the bible for God's people: First He blesses them (and us) for obedience. Then we get complacent with God because we're getting blessed. Then disaster comes as God's trying to get our attention back on Him, and hopefully that leads us to repentance.

- b) That pattern is common all through the bible and let's face it is common for us Christians as well. My point is that pattern won't continue forever. Sooner or later He'll bring that pattern to an end because let's face it, none of us are perfect and we easily turn from His desire for our lives. That leads to this point. God wants us to realize there's a long term blessing for those of us who trust in Jesus. It's not just about our lifetime. It's to realize a great future will eventually come to our world if we're betting on God to win.
- c) But it's been over 2,500 years since Isaiah wrote this, or 2,000 years since Jesus first came, why hasn't this happened yet? The short version is God works on His timing as His delay makes it possible for you and I to enjoy this future day when we can see a world ruled by God, even if we see that world as spiritual beings. It's also a way to remind us that when bad things happen, it's not forever. Even if we don't live through the disaster of the day, God wants us to have confidence that a great day comes where He wins, and that's that.
- d) That little speech leads me back to this positive little speech in Chapter 4 of Isaiah. It talks about the Messiah (Yes Jesus) ruling from Jerusalem. Isaiah uses an image of women who wash away their filth. (The Hebrew is even more graphic.) The point is there will come a day when the filth of sin is no longer an issue.
- e) Now notice Verse 5 there are images that should remind us of the Exodus. When all those Israelites left Egypt, Exodus describes how God was a pillar of fire to keep them warm at night and a cloud covering by day through a very hot wilderness. (See Exodus 13:21 etc.)
 - i) My point is Verse 5 here in Isaiah has very similar imagery. Over and above the miracle of how that would look, the site alone would draw people to Jerusalem or at the least to see it on their video screens today. The point is God will protect all of us who call upon Him to live in a future world where sin is no longer an issue.
- f) OK John, that's all very nice and maybe one day we'll see all of that either from heaven or if it happens in our lifetime, from our video screens as I call it. Why should I think about any of this when as you like to say, "I've got bills to pay and a life to live"? The answer is when we face our own disasters like the Israelites were about to face in their future, all of us who trust in Jesus as both God and the one who paid the price for all our sins is bigger than whatever issues we're facing and we too have a glorious future over and above what issues we're facing at the moment. Are our issues still there? Of course. Do we still have to make the best decisions possible assuming we don't violate any biblical principals? Of course we do. What Isaiah wants us to realize is the same thing he wanted those Israelites to realize in his day: That despite whatever we're facing now, trusting God will not only bless us in this life, but in our eternal future as well.
- g) Hopefully that positive thought helps us to get through the tough aspects of this lesson as well as the previous one. Yes, Isaiah is a tough book to read as it has lots of predictions of our future both good and bad. The underlying point is God will guide us through all of it if we're willing to trust Him through the good and bad moments of our lives.
- h) Ending on that positive note, may we all use our lives to repent of our sins and honor God as God as He promises to guide us through the tragedies and joys of this life if we use it to make a difference for Him with our lives. On that thought, let me end this lesson with a prayer for God's guidance as we go through our lives.

22. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, help us to use our lives to glorify You in all that we do. Help us to turn from our sins and live a life that's pleasing to You in all that we do. Help us to trust You are guiding us no matter how good or how bad life is going at any moment in time. Help us recall if we get complacent in our trust in You, that leads to disaster, and hopefully that leads us to repent as we continue to use our lives for Your glory as we bless You for the good things You provide us as we do live to make that difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.