

1. As we continue Isaiah's seemingly endless commentary on the future of nations near Israel, we'll now get into the issue of "What's the end of all of this"? We've been discussing the future of a lot of countries near Israel for a bunch of lessons now. I can just hear a lot of you thinking when's all this going to end? Realize these three chapters are the last one's in this long set of speeches about the short and long term future of nations near Israel. The first reason we should understand all of this is to realize what those nations and empires mean to God's chosen people. Another reason is to connect what God want us to know about the inevitable end of the world we live in and how it compares to our relationships with both believers and nonbelievers.
 - a) Speaking of things I can just hear you asking, the logical question of course, is why should I care about all of this ancient history? As most of you know by now, I love that question.
 - b) The clue as to why God wants us to know all of this is given in the text here in this lesson. In the middle of this lesson, Isaiah turns his attention back to Israel as if he's asking, "Why are you acting like everyone else around you? Your facing the end of your existence as a nation and you're acting no differently then everyone around you. These other groups are not called to be witnesses for Me." As we study the end of empires and nations all around Israel way back then realize God's reminding us that we too were called to live differently than nonbelievers around us or else we will suffer our own "end" as a witness for Him.
 - c) As we read about the ending of nations that existed in Isaiah's time or will exist soon after his time, the issue isn't the fact that Isaiah is reciting history before it occurred. The issue is Israel's not doing anything about it. God called Isaiah to preach to those Israelites who lived around him at his time, to separate themselves and not act "just like everybody else".
 - d) The point for you and me, of course is that God's called us to separate ourselves from the "world" to make a difference for Him. No that doesn't mean we go isolate ourselves from say our neighbors or our non-believing relatives. The issue is we should be living in a way that others know we're using our lives to make a difference for Jesus. I was just reminded that the way one can tell of one is a Christian is if "one abides in Christ and He also abides in us". Again, the issue is about examining our lives as if to ask, "OK, am I living as Jesus desires I live or am I living like everyone else around me?"
 - e) Finally, as we study all of this ancient Middle East history, the issue isn't for us to become experts on history. The issue is to read how all of these groups were acting and as I like to say, "See if the shoe fits" to any part of our lives.
 - f) As I also state pretty regularly, bible prophecy is patterns. That just means the fulfillment of bible predictions often happens more than once and often includes "end time" ideas. By the way, this wouldn't be an Isaiah bible study without some "end time" stuff tucked into the lesson. As I said in the last lesson, the bible as a whole says more about the events of what we call "Jesus Second Coming" than it does about all the events tied to the time that Jesus did walk the earth as taught in all the gospels.
2. With that said, we're going to cover a lot of ground in this lesson. I'm going to discuss "the end" of the Babylon Empire which hasn't even started when Isaiah wrote this, the end of nations who were involved with the rise and fall of the Assyrian and the Babylonian Empire, what'll happen to Israel at this time, and a few other nations. The good news of this lesson is this is "the end" of this section of the book.
 - a) Stop to realize that once you've read this lesson, you've now made it to the one-third mark of Isaiah. If you've gotten this far, odds are good you can handle the rest of the book.
 - b) If you haven't figured it out yet, my lesson title is "the end" but that's pretty obvious.
 - c) Therefore, I encourage you to follow along with this final "history lesson" written prior to these historical events occurring not to learn history, but to see how these lessons can and do apply to our lives as well as a few more clues of how "the end" of our world will occur.

3. Chapter 21, Verse 1: An oracle concerning the Desert by the Sea: Like whirlwinds sweeping through the southland, an invader comes from the desert, from a land of terror. ² A dire vision has been shown to me: The traitor betrays, the looter takes loot. Elam, attack! Media, lay siege! I will bring to an end all the groaning she caused.
- a) The first thing to understand is that the issue is the city of Babylon and its empire, which at the time of Isaiah hasn't even begun yet. How do I know that? At the time of Isaiah, a nickname for Babylon was the "Desert by the Sea". That's because one of the things that Babylon did was dam up the waters in that area to form water pools around the city. It is a colorful way of saying "Even though Babylon is in a desert area it has the appearance of "being by the sea" due to all the water pools created around the city."
 - b) OK John, didn't you say a few lessons back that if we wanted to learn about the "end" of Babylon, we should read six chapters? (Isaiah 17-18, Jeremiah 50-51 and Revelation 17-18 to state them again.) So why not include this section in that list? The short version is this section is describing the end of Babylon as an empire when the Persians took over. If you recall a few lessons back, the Persians didn't destroy this city, but instead made it one of their capitals. Even when Alexander the Great conquered the Persians he made Babylon his home after he finished his conquering expeditions. All I'm saying is this little section about this city, talks about the end of Babylon as an empire while those other six chapters focus on the ultimate end of Babylon as an example of all who choose to rebel against God to worship other false gods.
 - c) All of this leads back to these verses. One has to keep in mind that when Isaiah lives, the city of Babylon existed, but there was no Babylonian empire. This "end" section describes how the Babylon Empire will fall and is almost scary how it mirrors actual history a long time before it ever occurred. With that said, here's a few details:
 - i) Also at the time of Isaiah wrote this, the word "Persia" didn't exist.
 - ii) The Persian Empire, which is the one who conquered the Babylon Empire as they made it part of their own empire, didn't exist either by name or even by principal when Isaiah wrote this. The Persians were a mixture of two groups. Both of them are based out of what we refer to as Iran today. Those two groups are referred to as Elam and the Medes here. Notice those two groups are mentioned in Verse 2.
 - iii) A famous fact of ancient Middle East history is how Babylon was conquered with no battle: The river that flows to Babylon was dammed. The attacking army went under the city gate and took it without a battle. Records show those living in that city didn't even know it was taken over for days. (By the way, the record of all of this is based on a famous recording of this event kept in a British Museum.)
 - iv) My point is if you re-read these verses about how Babylon was secretly conquered by the "Persians" they read as if Isaiah witnessed this event. Again, Isaiah wrote it long before Babylon was even a big power in that region.
 - v) By the way, there is a Jewish tradition that when the Persians took power, a scroll was given to the Persian king of Isaiah since he predicted all of this. That's why the Persians let the Israelites go back to their homeland. I'll discuss that later in future lessons as Isaiah will name the conquering king by name even before he was born.
 - d) Let me also address one other reference in these verses. Where I live, when we have wind blowing from the south, that's usually means it'll be a hot day. That's because to the south of where I live is a desert area, and wind from that direction means it'll be hot. In Israel it is a pretty similar weather pattern. The reason I say that is Isaiah uses a metaphor that the people living around Isaiah would recognize. To paraphrase Verse 2, it's saying, "Just as a south wind quickly, brings warm weather, a "horror" is will come to Babylon just as fast."
 - i) Remember how I said Babylon was taken over without a battle? That's just what Isaiah is saying using one of his colorful metaphors. OK then, Verse 3.

4. Verse 3: At this my body is racked with pain, pangs seize me, like those of a woman in labor; I am staggered by what I hear, I am bewildered by what I see. ⁴ My heart falters, fear makes me tremble; the twilight I longed for has become a horror to me.
- a) OK, what is Isaiah so upset about in these verses, and again, why should we care? First let me describe what Isaiah's seeing and then I'll get into the "why we should care" issue.
 - b) I don't think Isaiah is pro-Babylon as much as he's shocked by the idea that a great empire can end that quickly. One has to remember not only was Babylon a great empire, scholars consider it the greatest empire known to that date. I think the shock to Isaiah was the idea of a great power coming to an end without a battle.
 - c) If you've ever studied the book of Daniel, Chapter 5 also tells of Babylon's end. That scene is about 200 years after Isaiah wrote this. Daniel wrote it as he witnessed it first hand. The short version is Babylon knew the Persians were outside the gate, but because their walls were so high, they didn't fear them. As I stated earlier the Persians conquered that city by diverting the water flow and then coming in the city under the main gate.
 - d) OK, with all of the horrid things Isaiah's predicted so far in this book, why does this scene get Isaiah to react with so much trepidation? The answer requires you to recall my lesson title of "the end". Isaiah understood that Babylon represented the end of Israel, as he knew it. Now hear was this great power that was given the power to stop the Assyrian Empire and bring God's people to an end. Now God brings them to an end more suddenly than if they lost some great battle or war. I think the shock to Isaiah was how quickly all of these empires rose up and then came to an end just as quickly.
 - i) Think of it this way: The bible sometimes compares pain to a woman in labor. At such times, women suffer, but then it ends quickly when the baby comes and they forget the pain for the moment. I think that's also Isaiah's point where pain came from seeing the end of two great empires, but it ends in a moment just as the pain of labor ends with the birth of a baby.
 - e) OK, good for Isaiah I suppose, why should I care about any of this ancient history? What we have to remember is God used the Babylonians as His instrument of judgment. Then we read of God using the Persians as judgment on the Babylonians. The point for us is of course, if we fail to be a good witness for Jesus, we can be taken out of the ballgame just as easily or yes, just as painfully. It's a scary thought, but it's God's "carrot and stick" way to remind us of why He separated us as to live as a witness for Him. With that said, back to the story of Babylon's fall.
5. Verse 5: They set the tables, they spread the rugs, they eat, they drink! Get up, you officers, oil the shields! ⁶ This is what the Lord says to me: "Go, post a lookout and have him report what he sees. ⁷When he sees chariots with teams of horses, riders on donkeys or riders on camels, let him be alert, fully alert." ⁸ And the lookout shouted, "Day after day, my lord, I stand on the watchtower; every night I stay at my post. ⁹ Look, here comes a man in a chariot with a team of horses. And he gives back the answer: `Babylon has fallen, has fallen! All the images of its gods lie shattered on the ground!'"
- a) Remember how I said Babylon fell without a battle? Daniel Chapter 5 says the king at that time was having a big party while the Persian army was outside the gate. That is why we read of "set tables, spread rugs, eating and drinking". It's amazing to realize that Isaiah is writing this centuries before it occurred. There's an old Jewish saying that prophets wrote what they heard and then wondered what it meant. I'm guessing Isaiah may have thought that as he wrote down this section.
 - b) If my memory is right, the walls of Babylon were reported to be 300 feet high and up to 80 feet thick. I state that because the English translation of the last set of verses is debated. I believe it's trying to imply that the guards on the walls saw only a few people at the gate of the city, they didn't think it was a serious threat. When the guards announce the fall of the city of Babylon, the locals must have been shocked as there was no battle.

- c) Isaiah is trying to describe what the city guards saw. Those guards should realize when a team of horses, or donkeys or camel riders approached the city gate. The idea is that the guards should have warned the king of the invaders getting into that city but they didn't.
 - d) Again, realize that in Daniel Chapter 5 we read of the Babylonian king being drunk when all of this happened. Therefore, when the gate guards tried to announce that the Persians are in the city, the words fell on deaf ears.
 - e) Finally, notice the phrase "Babylon is fallen, is fallen". It's repeated twice for a reason. The exact same expression is repeated in Revelation 14:8 and 18:2. OK, while I'm here, why is it said twice? I believe it's not just for emphasis, but to show that in the "end" when Jesus returns, literal Babylon is fallen and what it represents, "The desire to live for things other than God". That line represents the end of Babylon as a way of living and probably as the end of a civilization. If you read my lesson about Babylon a few lessons back, I said that a nickname for the bible is a "tale of two cities", with one being Babylon and the other being Jerusalem. My point is simply that the "fallen, fallen" reference refers to the destruction of Babylon both as a city and as a way of life, which is an end time event. In fact, if you look at the end of Verse 9 above, it makes references to the statues of the gods in Babylon being thrown on the ground.
 - i) I mention that last fact, as when Babylon was taken over, the "gods" were made a part of the Persian system, then the Greeks and then the Romans. That's why the multitude of god system kept moving from place to place with different names. I mentioned earlier about these records kept in a British museum about this event? Part of the records show that when the Persians conquered a city, they'd honor the gods of that city as a way of showing respect to those who were conquered. Keep that in mind as when Isaiah says the gods being thrown to the ground were not a part of that ancient historical event, but is a future "end times" event.
 - f) The good news is we're done with Babylon for a good while. The relevant point for us to realize is there is going to be an end to all things worshipped besides God Himself. That includes desiring fame, fortune or power as an ultimate desire for our lives.
6. Verse 10: O my people, crushed on the threshing floor, I tell you what I have heard from the LORD Almighty, from the God of Israel.
- a) Isaiah ends this section by stating one line about what he saw. To paraphrase Isaiah, "all I am writing is not based on some weird dream I had or is fiction. This is what God Himself showed me and the future will occur exactly like He told me it would happen."
 - b) Remember that this future empire will destroy Jerusalem and will mark the end of what we call the "Southern Kingdom". That's why Isaiah is telling us the "end" of Babylon who did crush Israel like grain on a threshing floor.
 - c) With that said, time to move on to the "end" of another group:
7. Verse 11: An oracle concerning Dumah: Someone calls to me from Seir, "Watchman, what is left of the night? Watchman, what is left of the night?" ¹² The watchman replies, "Morning is coming, but also the night. If you would ask, then ask; and come back yet again."
- a) We now get two short verses about a group that bordered Israel to the southeast. One has to realize that when Babylon grew in power, they had help. The Edomites helped Babylon grow in power. Dumah was another name for Edom and Seir was a main city there. What these verses are trying to communicate is the fall of Babylon had repercussions for nations that helped Babylon grow in power.
 - b) To paraphrase Isaiah here, imagine a city official saying, "It's a new day, but it's also a bad one as the city of Babylon has fallen. Yet you can "come back again" as the city is still here just under different leadership." It's relevant to the nation of Edom as they were aligned to help the Babylonians and the fall of Babylon means their fall too.
 - c) The point for you and me is simply that when the "gods" of other things fail, it will be the end of those who worship such things and make them the ultimate goals of their lives.

8. Verse 13: An oracle concerning Arabia: You caravans of Dedanites, who camp in the thickets of Arabia, ¹⁴ bring water for the thirsty; you who live in Tema, bring food for the fugitives. ¹⁵ They flee from the sword, from the drawn sword, from the bent bow and from the heat of battle. ¹⁶ This is what the Lord says to me: "Within one year, as a servant bound by contract would count it, all the pomp of Kedar will come to an end. ¹⁷ The survivors of the bowmen, the warriors of Kedar, will be few." The LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken.
- a) I warned you that this lesson covers a lot of nations near Israel. Now we've moved away from Edom to discuss Arabia. The idea here is about "traders". There were those people from the Arabia area (could be Saudi Arabia, but most experts think it's discussing what we call Kuwait today.) The underlying point is the nations that got rich off trading with the Babylonians "lose" because of the fall of that nation and that system.
 - b) A few lessons back I used the idea of a "work contract" to express a specific time period. It is like saying, "You will work for me for exactly three years, not a day more or less and I'll pay you for those three years". I say all of that because Verse 16 describes the fall of Kedar as happening. Bible encyclopedias describe Kedar as a nomadic (traveling) Arabic people that lived just east of Syria (north of Israel) at that time. This group made money by their trade with the Babylonians. It's about their end when Babylon fell as an empire.
 - c) Again, the point for you and me is not to learn ancient history. It's to realize that all these groups that primarily focused on getting rich by trade and they didn't care about the fact that the world they lived in was created by a single God or considering what He wanted from them. That became their downfall. Yes this group worshipped idols, but those idols did represent what they wanted, which is wealth via trade.
 - d) OK, enough of that. Time for the next vision as we start a new chapter.
9. Chapter 22, Verse 1: An oracle concerning the Valley of Vision: What troubles you now, that you have all gone up on the roofs, ² O town full of commotion, O city of tumult and revelry? Your slain were not killed by the sword, nor did they die in battle.
- a) In our travels around the Middle East in this lesson, as well as the last several lessons, we now get back to Israel. Before proving that, let me give the central point of this section:
 - i) Hey you Israelites, you're reading of the destruction of nations around you here in Isaiah, but you think you're better than them because you're God's chosen people. However, you don't realize how much danger you're in, not only due to the threat of the Assyrian Empire and the upcoming Babylon Empire, but I'm (God) about to wipe you out as you're failing to be a witness for Me.
 - ii) If you get that, you understand why Isaiah is turning his focus back on the Jewish people here in this chapter while he's describing lots of other nations dying.
 - b) With that understand time for a few details. First realize why Isaiah used the phrase "The Valley of Vision". It's the idea that Israel in general and Jerusalem in particular has had a history of prophets who've received visions from God Himself. Therefore, Isaiah is being colorful as he refers to his homeland as a "Valley of Vision".
 - i) Then Isaiah asks probably in a sarcastic tone, why are you going up on your roof? The second sarcastic question is, "Why are you full of tumult and revelry?" To say all of this in our vocabulary, "What's the big party all about?"
 - ii) Then Isaiah responds to their "tomorrow we die, let's party today" attitude to tell them that most of the Israelites won't die in battle. They'll die due to starvation as the Babylonians are going to surround Jerusalem and starve it out. The idea here is Isaiah's describing here how Jerusalem will be conquered, which again doesn't start for roughly another 100 years after this prediction was made.
 - iii) The sad reality is Israel didn't take him seriously. Isaiah is describing both the fact of life going on as if the "barbarians at the gate" are no big deal. They had the false attitude that we're God's chosen people, so we don't have to worry about anyone "out there". Isaiah's trying to set them straight with this lecture here.

10. Verse 3: All your leaders have fled together; they have been captured without using the bow. All you who were caught were taken prisoner together, having fled while the enemy was still far away. ⁴ Therefore I said, "Turn away from me; let me weep bitterly. Do not try to console me over the destruction of my people." ⁵ The Lord, the LORD Almighty, has a day of tumult and trampling and terror in the Valley of Vision, a day of battering down walls and of crying out to the mountains.
- a) This is the rest of "here's what's the "end" of Israel as an independent nation (at least until 1948) as Isaiah's describing Jerusalem's fall again about a hundred years before it fell.
 - b) The reality as also told elsewhere in the bible is the leaders were captured trying to escape out of Jerusalem. One can imagine the Israelites living then crying out to God for help. In that day, notice that Isaiah responds, "Do not try to console me over the destruction of my people". Notice that Isaiah says he wept bitter in Verse 4. In the Old Testament, Jeremiah is known as the "weeping prophet" (over Jerusalem's destruction), but Isaiah, who wrote about a 100 years earlier, also wept for its destruction as the Babylonians "starved out" the residents of Jerusalem.
 - c) OK John, this is a sad part of ancient history. Why should I care? The hard reality we are called to face as God's chosen people is we too are called to be a witness for God. Let's be honest, armies don't starve out cities anymore. You're right, but most of us can name one or two famous pastors who lost their life's work when they were caught doing something that is sinful. Most of us have also known people who had their careers ruined when they choose a life of drinking or drug use when God's called them to be a witness for Him.
 - i) Suppose you say, OK, that's true, what about me? Even the most devout believers will tell you of the danger of turning from God that they face temptation no matter how long they've been in the ministry. If we've dedicated our live to serving Him remember that the danger of sin is always a temptation away and all of us have to fight it all our lives. If we continue to turn from God, He'll do what He has to do in order to draw us back to Him or have the church suffer the damage of not being a good witness for Him.
 - ii) That doesn't mean I walk around in fear. What it does mean is I know it's required daily to stay close to Him as the danger to turn is always there.
 - iii) With that said, it's time to return to our tour of the end of Middle East powers, and the groups that existed in the Middle East around the time of Isaiah.
11. Verse 6: Elam takes up the quiver, with her charioteers and horses; Kir uncovers the shield.
- a) This verse is a bit of bible trivia. Let me quickly explain: Elam and Kir were neighboring cities to Babylon and helped them rise to power. The reason this verse is here is to remind us of what happens to those who help those who are against God's people. God also used them to help destroy the Israelites, which is what's being painted here. That's why we are reading of these two groups of people preparing for war. The term "takes up the quiver" is a reference to bows and arrows. The text says Kir is preparing its shields.
 - b) Why experts think this verse is here is to remind us that God will use who who'll use if it helps His people draw closer to Him or punish His people for disobedience. Again we're back to the idea of "We may be bad, but they're worse". God may use a godless nation to accomplish His will and we're seeing examples of that here.
12. Verse 7: Your choicest valleys are full of chariots, and horsemen are posted at the city gates; ⁸ the defenses of Judah are stripped away. And you looked in that day to the weapons in the Palace of the Forest; ⁹ you saw that the City of David had many breaches in its defenses; you stored up water in the Lower Pool.
- a) At this point Isaiah is still discussing coming warfare in Jerusalem where he lived. In the previous verse Isaiah picked two relatively small groups as if to say judgment will come by a group of people that they would never expect to defeat them. We're reading Isaiah as he focuses back on Jerusalem preparing for war whether they like it or not.

- b) It may help to remember that we're describing Jerusalem as a siege is about to occur there. It's like Isaiah saying, "there is a large foreign army all around us and the efforts we make to stop them won't work. Verse 7 is describing a powerful army located in the valleys that surround Jerusalem. In preparations of the Assyrian threat, Jerusalem had a building full of weapons that goes way back to the day of King Solomon, probably 200 years earlier.
 - i) Jerusalem also stored up water so if an army cut off the water supply, they would be able to survive for a long time if such a siege occurred.
 - c) The text makes reference to the City of David. The best way to think of it, is it's a "suburb" of Jerusalem. It's part of Jerusalem. The walls around the city at that time go back several hundred years. There were "breaches" in these old walls that the enemies could exploit.
 - d) To keep it simple, just remember that Isaiah's saying war is coming and an attacking army is going to try to starve us out. We're going to do what we can to protect ourselves but we are fighting against God whether we realize it or not.
 - e) While we may say, "Too bad for those people living millenniums ago, I have my own stuff to worry about, so why should I care about all of this?" Again, the answer is God requires that those of us called to live for Him make an effort to be a witness for Him. If we fail to live any differently than anyone around us, we too can suffer the same fate. No it doesn't mean a literally army can surround us, but as I've beaten over our heads all of this lesson, God's just as willing to be as tough on us as He was on those Israelites so long ago. Is this designed to scare us? Yes, and it should keep us on our toes.
13. Verse 10: You counted the buildings in Jerusalem and tore down houses to strengthen the wall.
¹¹ You built a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the Old Pool, but you did not look to the One who made it, or have regard for the One who planned it long ago.
- a) Before I talk about these verses, I'm well aware this is "tough sledding". It's easy to read about all of this warfare effort millenniums ago and think "why should I care"? The text seems to go on and on about this. For starters, it's here to show us the accuracy of predictions that Isaiah wrote a long time before it occurs. It's here to remind us that when we start to think God's not aware of what I'm doing or He doesn't care what I'm doing, realize He is predicting detailed history before it occurred. Just as He cared for the lives of many who lived long ago, He also cares for us and wants us to use us to make a difference for Him.
 - b) With that said, there is some interesting history here. At the time of King Hezekiah, who is one of the kings that ruled in Isaiah's day, he knew that the city faced being surrounded by an attacking army. One of the great building projects he oversaw was to bring a water source from outside the city directly into the city. If one visits Jerusalem today one is able to walk through "Solomon's tunnel" which was a tunnel carved through rock as to divert water directly into the city. The water only comes up to one's ankles today. It shows the literalness of what we read here and is a great accomplishment with ancient tools.
 - c) However, Isaiah's not here to play "bible trivia" with us. He wants to get the point across of how the Israelites were making all the necessary efforts to prepare for war, but still did not look to God Himself for help. When life gets difficult, I'm a big believer that I get on my knees first to pray for God's wisdom with a problem, and then I go make whatever is the best decisions I can make to remedy the situation. The criticism here is that Jerusalem was doing all the right things to prepare for war, but were failing to seek God's guidance in this tough situation. That failure way back then can be our downfall as well if we also fail to seek Him for help in whatever is our situation of the moment.
14. Verse 12: The Lord, the LORD Almighty, called you on that day to weep and to wail, to tear out your hair and put on sackcloth.
- a) To be specific about how God wanted the Israelites to call on Him, we read here of what's a common method of showing sorrow way back then. The closest analogy we have today is the way we get dressed for a funeral and may even cry over the situation. The point is God wants us to make an effort to seek Him as if our life depends upon it.

- b) By the way, the text isn't implying we should use this exact method to seek Him when our life gets bad. The idea is to seek God "like we really mean it and we truly depend on Him for our guidance and protection" is to remind us of what's important. I recall many a time when life got tough and I spent a lot of time in prayer trying to see that situation from His perspective. That helped me to get through those times. I know of some incredible people who have had to brave through really bad situations and a lot of time in prayer for God to guide and protect them. In those past situations, all that prayer paid off in dividends. Of course we still have to do the footwork. He won't do for us what we can do for ourselves.
 - c) The reason this verse is here is to remind us that God wants to guide us through our lives no matter how tough the situation is. It's hard to imagine something more horrid than to be surrounded by an army that wants to starve us out. In our day we might say, there is nothing harder than having to face cancer or having to live with something or even some people that is making our lives miserable. What Isaiah is telling us is if we seek Him when those times come, He promises to guide us through those times and help us to see it from His perspective.
 - d) Speaking of seeing God through Isaiah's writing, time to get back at it.
15. Verse 13: But see, there is joy and revelry, slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep, eating of meat and drinking of wine! "Let us eat and drink," you say, "for tomorrow we die!" ¹⁴ The LORD Almighty has revealed this in my hearing: "Till your dying day this sin will not be atoned for," says the Lord, the LORD Almighty.
- a) The question I pondered here is if King Hezekiah was preparing for this coming invasion by transferring the water source and pulling out the weapons as indicated in the last set of verses, why does Isaiah switch gears to say here effectively it's "party time" here in town? What I believe he's predicting is that those living in Jerusalem thought that since they did go through all the time and trouble of preparing for invaders, they can celebrate as if they were thinking, whether we win or lose, we'll die soon and that's all there is to life.
 - b) If Verse 13 seems familiar, it's because Paul quotes this verse in 1st Corinthians 15:32. It's the same point being made by both Isaiah and Paul. It's the false idea of all we have to life is what we get right here, so let's party and enjoy life while we can.
 - i) It's time for my standard disclaimers:. There are appropriate times to celebrate in life with weddings and holidays coming to mind. My point is I'm not against any type of celebration, just the idea of let's live it up while we can, because tomorrow we die and that's all there is to life.
 - ii) My favorite question to pose to atheists is "What do you say to a child who's dying of cancer? Better luck next time or too bad for you?" If this life is all there is, then I would agree that life is very unfair at times. However if there's a God who'll judge the world, then that would make life fair and would also mean there's more to our life than to just say, "Eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die."
 - c) All of that theology leads to Verse 14. The point here is God's response to their "party all the time" philosophy or "let's enjoy life while we can as this is all we get", is that their sin is not "covered". One of the ways we're to live out the Christian life is that we are to fear His judgment. That just means we're to live now realizing that when we die, God's going to judge us based on how we live. But aren't we Christians saved by grace? Yes, that is true, but the question is what have we done with that grace? That's the real issue. That's why I'm convinced there will be rewards in heaven based on how we've lived once we've accepted Jesus as paying the complete price for our sins.
 - d) To drive the point home, Isaiah's going to pick on two people living in Jerusalem while he was there. The first example will be a person who's heart isn't right with God and what's going to happen to him because of that failure. The second is the "exception". This other person will have a reward in heaven. The reason this is here is as if to say, despite all the destruction that's coming, there is still hope for those who repent here and now.

16. Verse 15: This is what the Lord, the LORD Almighty, says: "Go, say to this steward, to Shebna, who is in charge of the palace: ¹⁶ What are you doing here and who gave you permission to cut out a grave for yourself here, hewing your grave on the height and chiseling your resting place in the rock? ¹⁷ "Beware, the LORD is about to take firm hold of you and hurl you away, O you mighty man. ¹⁸ He will roll you up tightly like a ball and throw you into a large country. There you will die and there your splendid chariots will remain-- you disgrace to your master's house! ¹⁹ I will depose you from your office, and you will be ousted from your position.
- a) In these verses, we get the "bad news" of a person who's not right with God. Here in these verses, Isaiah tells a story of a man named Shebna, who builds a fancy tomb for himself in Jerusalem. To build a fancy grave site is a way of trying to live beyond one's years as if to say, "Come look at me, I must have been successful in life, look at the grave I can buy."
 - b) I suspect what Isaiah's doing here is speaking directly to those around him. They may be thinking, "Isaiah's making predictions, way into the future, why should we worry about the issue of what's going to occur long after we die." After all Isaiah just made the famous statement of "Eat, drink and be merry, because we die tomorrow". What Isaiah desires to accomplish here is to give an example of how people aren't taking serving God seriously.
 - c) In this case, this man Shebna is building a fancy grave for himself. What Shebna as well as most people living in Jerusalem didn't know is they're about to be conquered. If they are lucky they will "only" be dragged a long distance away into captivity. The other option is they will be killed where they are. That's why Isaiah made an example out of this guy as if to say, "You think you can build a monument to yourself here, but God's still in charge of our lives and He'll decide not only when you'll die but how you'll be remembered."
 - d) OK John, too bad for this guy living millenniums ago. Let's be honest we can see many of the rich and famous today building monuments to themselves who give lip-service to the idea of helping others but in fact they live in large mansions as an obvious example. Why isn't God "dragging them away? The answer is this life is all that they'll get. To those who have successfully lived "To eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die" they're in for a big awakening when they realize that "forever" is a lot longer than this life.
 - e) However, remember that the real issue is God's chosen people (you and me). If we ever become so financially successful that we ignore helping those in need in order to just live a glamorous lifestyle without caring about others, is a sign of a waste of a life. Even if we never have a lot of money, the issue still comes back to how to live as God desires we live as we make a difference for Him.
 - f) Enough bad news, time for a positive example:
17. Verse 20: "In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim son of Hilkiyah. ²¹ I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around him and hand your authority over to him. He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. ²² I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. ²³ I will drive him like a peg into a firm place; he will be a seat of honor for the house of his father. ²⁴ All the glory of his family will hang on him: its offspring and offshoots--all its lesser vessels, from the bowls to all the jars. ²⁵ "In that day," declares the LORD Almighty, "the peg driven into the firm place will give way; it will be sheared off and will fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut down." The LORD has spoken.
- a) Let's be honest, a few minutes from now, you're going to forget the name Eliakim, son of Hilkiyah". The good news is the name itself is not important. What is important is besides the fact that all of Israel will be destroyed by two empires (Assyrians and Babylonians), God will still have the Messiah rule one day over the world from Jerusalem.
 - b) So if the Messiah will rule there one day, how will Eliakim rule over those in Jerusalem at that time? First understand that Eliakim's name means "Resurrection of God". Yes, that's a big hint of God (think Jesus) being literally resurrected so He'll rule over Israel one day. Still I'll argue that Eliakim was a real man who'll be part of the resurrection one day.

- c) With that said, I can now focus on the literal aspect of these verses. The text says this man will be a father to those living in Jerusalem and to all of Judah. (One has to remember that the Southern Kingdom was called Judah). Even if this man named Eliakim is resurrected, I'm still convinced it ties to Jesus, especially with the big clue that this guy's name means "Resurrection of God".
 - i) Notice this verse says is this man holds the key to the door and "what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open". If you're familiar with the book of Revelation that line is very similar to Revelation 3:20 that is describing who will be invited to join Jesus in eternal life. My point is just like here in Isaiah, whoever this Eliakim is, he holds the key to a door no one can open but him, and no one can shut that door but him. Given what Eliakim's name means we can easily see how it ties to Jesus.
 - ii) Then we get more references to honor in God's house. Does it refer to a literal man named Eliakim who lived at Isaiah's time? Possibly, but given his name I'm pretty sure we're reading another clue about who Jesus is and what He represents.
 - iii) Finally, we get references to keys hanging on a peg that can't be removed. Pause a moment and recall the big picture. Isaiah is describing destruction all around the Middle East including Jerusalem itself. That had to be pretty depressing to hear if one was listening to Isaiah. Therefore, he throws in this good news that despite all of the destruction, God's still going to establish Israel as a nation one day and after that, a Messiah will rule over the world from Israel and nothing will change that.
 - d) OK, one more chapter to go. I know this is a lot of text to take in, but they all tie with the common theme of the "end" of groups around Israel and the Jewish people themselves. If you can make it a few more pages with me, we'll actually be finished on Isaiah's tour of all nations near Israel and what is their future.
18. Chapter 23, Verse 1: An oracle concerning Tyre: Wail, O ships of Tarshish! For Tyre is destroyed and left without house or harbor. From the land of Cyprus word has come to them.
- a) In our "tour" of the Middle East over the last half dozen chapters or so, we never talked of the other great power in that area for centuries. Today this area is part of Lebanon. You might know this group as the Phoenicians. The city of Tyre was the capital for that group of people, and was a great power in that region. It became rich through trade.
 - b) Before I run through this chapter, a little history about the end of Tyre would be helpful here. Here's the short version: Tyre was a rich and powerful city for centuries. When the Babylonians wanted to control the Middle East, they made several attempts to do a siege on that city. While the Babylonians had a large army, they didn't have much of a navy. In a final major siege, the residents of Tyre managed to escape their oceanfront city over to a nearby island they also controlled. When the Babylonians finally entered that city, it was deserted along with its wealth. A few centuries later when Alexander the Great desired to control the known world, he too didn't have a navy. What he did was use the ruins of the old city of Tyre to build a bridge way to the island. There, Alexander made himself more famous by defeating Tyre that way. That became the end of the existence of Tyre.
 - c) With that history in mind, which is all future to Isaiah, re-read the verse above. It tells us exactly what happened again, centuries before it actually occurred. The second sentence of this verse simply tells us that word will reach the Israelites about all of this destruction from the "land of Cyprus" which is a large island nearby Tyre and became an important place of power for the Greek's as they ruled much of that area.
 - d) OK, enough ancient history, the point for us is that God knows all things and can tell us history in advance. If God can bring a powerful city-state like Tyre to ruins, it also tells us of the danger of only living to grow wealthy as Tyre did. Before I move on, realize in Ezekiel there is a good companion chapter to this one as it also describes Tyre's fall and the demonic power behind the rise and fall of Tyre. (See Ezekiel 26.)

19. Verse 2: Be silent, you people of the island and you merchants of Sidon, whom the seafarers have enriched. ³ On the great waters came the grain of the Shihor; the harvest of the Nile was the revenue of Tyre, and she became the marketplace of the nations. ⁴ Be ashamed, O Sidon, and you, O fortress of the sea, for the sea has spoken: "I have neither been in labor nor given birth; I have neither reared sons nor brought up daughters."
- a) It would help at this point to mention that Tyre had a "sister city" called Sidon. The point is those two cities worked together for centuries to grow rich through trade. Notice Verse 3 mentions how these two cities grew rich through trade with Egypt. For millenniums the Nile River overflows at a certain time of the year. That gives Egypt good farmland at the area where it reaches the sea. The point is Egypt, Tyre and Sidon used each other to grow rich as Tyre and Sidon had the ships used for trade and Egypt had the "goods".
 - b) Then we get a strange reference to the sea (ocean) as not having any children. It's as if we read of Isaiah telling Tyre and Sidon that the ocean doesn't produce any children nor does it care about where people come from. OK what does that mean? It's a little like saying, if we live by the sea, we die by the sea and it doesn't care about human life in the sense that it can't make any human life." Yes it's a little strange to us, but let me explain the point:
 - i) Sidon and Tyre got rich through trade over the sea. In effect, their god was based on riches through trade. That's what Ezekiel 26 makes clear. What Isaiah's saying is these cities will "fall in the sea" as they'll eventually be destroyed.
 - ii) Remember that this lesson is about the "end" of all things near Isaiah so here we're reading of the end of a great ancient empire just north of Israel.
 - iii) Let me take on a few more verses and then I'll discuss how this applies to us.
20. Verse 5: When word comes to Egypt, they will be in anguish at the report from Tyre. ⁶ Cross over to Tarshish; wail, you people of the island. ⁷ Is this your city of revelry, the old, old city, whose feet have taken her to settle in far-off lands? ⁸ Who planned this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants are princes, whose traders are renowned in the earth? ⁹ The LORD Almighty planned it, to bring low the pride of all glory and to humble all who are renowned on the earth.
- a) Tyre was one of those places where money was king. The leaders of Tyre were ones who got rich through trade. When Tyre fell, Egypt suffered as they were in business with Tyre and got rich off that trade.
 - b) The underlying issue is pride. Tyre was of prideful of what they had accomplished. Tyre didn't care for any god that wasn't interested in making them rich. Therefore they exalted themselves over what they'd accomplished. That's why we read here in these verses that God "brought them down" as their leaders thought of themselves as "little gods" because of the success they had in the business world.
 - c) I should add that God is not "anti-success" in life. Some people have a gift for making lots of money. The issue is are we honoring God as God over and above whatever success we do enjoy in this life. Tyre saw it's "end" because it exalted it's own accomplishments over and above the God that created them in the first place. The danger of having much wealth is the danger of losing it. That's why several empires were obsessed with conquering that city and seeing it's destruction.
 - d) This leads me back to the topic of "the end". We're about to read of the end of Tyre and the cities and places near Tyre due to its' pride. The key point for you and me is if we just live to get rich, or powerful, or famous, we're putting ourselves above God. We read of Tyre falling from its greatness as it exalted itself above God. There's nothing wrong being rich or fame unto itself. The real issue is what are we doing with the special gifts that God has given us. If we use those gifts for God's glory when "the end" comes to our lives, we can look back and realize we used those things to make a difference for Him and not to bring glory to ourselves. If you get that, you've gotten the key lesson point.
 - e) With that in mind, let's get back to reading about the "end" of Tyre.

21. Verse 10: Till your land as along the Nile, O Daughter of Tarshish, for you no longer have a harbor. ¹¹ The LORD has stretched out his hand over the sea and made its kingdoms tremble. He has given an order concerning Phoenicia that her fortresses be destroyed. ¹² He said, "No more of your reveling, O Virgin Daughter of Sidon, now crushed! "Up, cross over to Cyprus; even there you will find no rest." ¹³ Look at the land of the Babylonians, this people that is now of no account! The Assyrians have made it a place for desert creatures; they raised up their siege towers, they stripped its fortresses bare and turned it into a ruin. ¹⁴ Wail, you ships of Tarshish; your fortress is destroyed!
- Verse 10 essentially says, "Hey you Egyptians, your work your land hard, but now you no longer got a great nearby harbor to sell your crops."
 - Verse 11 makes reference to the Phoenicians, which is what those of Tyre and Sidon were known as to the area. It then predicts the destruction of Sidon (Tyre is implied with it).
 - Then Isaiah predicts the survivors of that destruction sailing over to the nearby island of Cyprus, but even there, they are still in danger.
 - Remember at the time of Isaiah, Babylon was "nothing noteworthy" as the Assyrians were the big threat of the moment. The Assyrians dominated Babylon and made it a place that was nothing special until they eventually rose up against the Assyrians.
 - However this "nothing of a nation during Isaiah's time" (that is, Babylon) will rise up and lay a great siege against Tyre and make their city a place of ruin. Like I stated earlier, the residents of Tyre did escape, but their city was no more.
 - OK, we understand this lesson is about the "end" of nations around Israel and we can see how Isaiah accurately predicted all of this centuries before it occurred. The issue for us is why should we care about all of this ancient history? The issue isn't so much the specifics of what happened then and there, the issue for us is that God knows all things, including how long we have to life. If God can be trusted to tell the future of the Middle East many centuries before it occurred, He can be trusted to guide our lives as well. That's why we are reading of "the end" of that world way back then.
22. Verse 15: At that time Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, the span of a king's life. But at the end of these seventy years, it will happen to Tyre as in the song of the prostitute: ¹⁶ "Take up a harp, walk through the city, O prostitute forgotten; play the harp well, sing many a song, so that you will be remembered." ¹⁷ At the end of seventy years, the LORD will deal with Tyre. She will return to her hire as a prostitute and will ply her trade with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth. ¹⁸ Yet her profit and her earnings will be set apart for the LORD; they will not be stored up or hoarded. Her profits will go to those who live before the LORD, for abundant food and fine clothes.
- There is some debate among scholars about what that 70 years refers to. Most argue it is a specific time when the Assyrians threatened to wipe out Tyre but failed, until the time of the fall of Tyre as a city when the Babylonians did a siege against that city. The point here is that after 70 years, Tyre failed to be a great city of trade. Yes many of the residents did move to nearby islands to survive, but the Babylonian siege did end the centuries of them being a great power in the region. It marked the end of them being famous for trade.
 - I could go on from here talking of the dangers of only living for money, but if you've put up with me through all this lesson, I think you get the point by now. What we're to take away from this lesson is God knows the "end" of all things including your life and my life and the greatest thing we can do with our life is use it for His glory before the end comes.
23. Father, we thank you for this tour of the "end" of nations around Israel. Help us to apply it to our lives not by saying we've learned more about ancient history. Help us to remember You know all things and want to guide our lives for Your glory. Help us and guide us to use our time to make a difference for You with the limited unknown time we have to life. May our end be one of glory for You. Guide us to make a difference for You as You desire we live. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.