

Isaiah Chapters 24-27 – John Karmelich

1. These four chapters are all one speech by Isaiah. I debated about whether to take it all as a single lesson or to separate it into two. I decided it was better to combine it as one big group. Yes we'll cover a lot of text, but it's a single message, so it's best to be aggressive and combine it that way.
2. It's time for one of my "why should we care speeches", so here goes: The last lesson as well as the last group of lessons all focused on the ultimate end of nations and empires all around Israel back when Isaiah lived around 700BC. I called my last lesson "the end" as it finished that section about what will be the end of nations around Israel. That leads to the natural question, "what about the big end of the world?" Obviously whenever the world ends will affects us, so that event becomes the why we should care part. Scholars refer to these 4 chapters as "the little apocalypse". Think of it as a mini-version of Revelation, or "the end times" in one big lesson. If you say, I've got enough issues on my plate to worry about how and when the world will end. Why should we spend our time focusing on when all of this will eventually happen?
 - a) Let me put it this way: Jesus wants us to live as if He could return at any moment. Yes it has been that way for 2,000 years and it could be another 2,000 years. The point is that we are not just to sit around and wait for our life to end or for Jesus to return. We're to work to make a difference for Him as if He can return at any moment. If we were working at a desk job, would we work harder if our boss were in the room? Of course. That's the type of motivation God wants us to have, as if He can return for judgment at any moment.
 - b) So, are you saying drop of all our issues because Jesus can return? Of course not. I'm just saying, we need to keep the eternal picture in perspective as we deal with whatever we've got to deal with at the moment. At the same time, it's worth the trouble every so often to understand the "end" so we can recognize the events when they start to occur and we can keep our lives and our problems in perspective of the big picture.
3. So if these four chapters are a "mini-Revelation" why study them? Why not just study Revelation if we're opening our bible? The answer is "perspective". Revelation explains the "end" from God's perspective. Chapter 24 describes the events from "Jerusalem's perspective". It's as if to say, how will these events unfold from the perspective of Jesus ruling over the world from Jerusalem some day in the future? Yes it covers the same time of history, but the perspective is different. Yes the destruction is worldwide in scope. We can sense in these verses that it is "centered" from the city that will be the center focus of the world for eternity. (You might recall a few lessons back I said that the bible can be nicknamed "A tale of two cities", with much of it focused on the rise and fall of Babylon and Jerusalem?) Well in this lesson, much of the focus is on Jerusalem.
 - a) Then Chapters 25 and 26 are effectively a praise to God for doing all of this despite all of the destruction. It's a way of saying, God will one day right all the wrongs of our world and set up His eternal kingdom. In other words the damage to the existing world has to occur before God can set up the world the way He meant it to be used.
 - b) So if it's been millenniums since Isaiah wrote this, why hasn't it occurred yet? For starters we wouldn't be alive or saved if it occurred even a generation ago. God's waiting as long as He can so that many people can be saved to enjoy this eternal relationship with Him.
 - c) Chapter 27 returns to focus on Israel again as well as the surrounding area as if to say that some people will be saved in order to enjoy this new life. Yes there are a lot more details than that, which is why there are four chapters. The short version is a brief description of the "apocalypse" mixed in with praises to God for doing all of this for the sake of the elect.
4. OK, want a lesson title for all of this? Of all things I call it a "Praise Fest" because most of this text is a praise to God for His ultimate victory over this world. I don't want you to see this section as a "downer describing destruction" which I admit, makes a great alternative negative title. We are to praise God for the "apocalypse" (as strange as that is) as Isaiah will do through this lesson.
 - a) With that said, we have a lot of text to cover and I want to get it done within 12 pages!

5. Chapter 24, Verse 1: See, the LORD is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; he will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants--
- a) I have to admit, that's not the most pleasant way to begin a lesson. This verse essentially says that the whole world one day will be ruined. Try to picture a catastrophe so bad that the earth becomes empty. Could it be a series of nuclear bombs or ecological disasters? I wouldn't put it past God. Should we do something to stop it? If we have a job to prevent "bad guys" from doing their worst, I'm sure we should do all we can to prevent those bad guys from doing damage. Still, our world will end one day on His timing.
 - b) The point here isn't about people failing to do their jobs. The point isn't about us failing to protect our environment or preventing a world war from starting. The point is simply that whether we like it or not just as life on earth had a beginning, it has to have an ending one day as well. Just as Isaiah was accurate of his historical predictions we've discussed in the last few lessons, so I trust him to be accurate in his predictions of the world ending as it is discussed here in these chapters.
 - c) OK, why can't life just go on as it does forever, with some being saved and some not? Is a horrible world ending like this necessary? Think of it as God not tolerating sin forever. A major reason it hasn't occurred yet is God's waiting for a specific number of believers, and then "that's it". None of us know when all this occurs, but a way we'll be able to recognize when it does occur is the earth will be devastated with a lot less people left upon it.
 - d) If you think Verse 1 is tough to picture, realize we're just getting warmed up.
6. Verse 2: it will be the same for priest as for people, for master as for servant, for mistress as for maid, for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender, for debtor as for creditor. ³ The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered. The LORD has spoken this word. ⁴ The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish. ⁵ The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. ⁶ Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left.
- a) It might help to realize we're reading poetry. Not fiction, but a poem about what'll occur one day whether we like it or not. It's not poetry that rhymes in English or Hebrew, but a poem nonetheless. The idea is that each thought connects with the next thought.
 - b) To paraphrase, everyone will suffer, whether they are rich or poor, a lender or a debtor. It is definite that it'll occur as Isaiah says the LORD (God's most holy name) has spoken.
 - c) Stop and catch Verse 5 for a moment. It begins with "The earth is defiled by its people". If you want a motivation to do all we can to stop sin and evil from spreading, it is because it will kill our planet. Personally, I don't worry about environmental movements to save the planet by stopping the spread of carbon emission as all humans exhale carbon. My view's a biblical one in that God will destroy this world one day and there's nothing we can do to stop it. A perfect God cannot tolerate any sin whatsoever. It is why the world as we know it has to end one day as it's incurably corrupt by sin.
 - d) Let me explain this concept another way: We all instinctively know murder and stealing is wrong. All people can look at the world and realize, this world couldn't have just existed all by itself or by a great coincidence of events. There has to be something greater than all of us that made the world in the first place. We call that thing "God" as it's greater than us.
 - i) Even if we had the false idea of multiple gods, there has to be a "greatest god" that made all things or else all of those false gods wouldn't exist in the first place. The logical question to ponder is if we believe God exists, what does He want from us? The best thing we can do is to honor Him by living as He desires. I'm positive the reason the world for the most part knows of the 10 Commandments is it's logical not only to avoid theft and murder, but to also honor God by living as He desires. With that thought in mind we have to accept the concept that a perfect God cannot tolerate sin to go on forever, and thus an ending to the world is needed.

7. Verse 7: The new wine dries up and the vine withers; all the merrymakers groan. ⁸ The gaiety of the tambourines is stilled, the noise of the revelers has stopped, the joyful harp is silent. ⁹ No longer do they drink wine with a song; the beer is bitter to its drinkers.
- a) After my little speech about why the world has an ending, and after Isaiah gives us a cute little poem in the last few verses to describe how this ending effects everyone, we now get a strange reference to a lack of wine and a lack of "partying". The bible tends to associate the drinking of wine with joy. I'm not saying we have to get drunk on wine to have joy. I am just saying that in a culture like Israel that grows a lot of grapes, they associate having a good time with drinking wine. (Consider the famous miracle of Jesus turning water into wine and you get the idea.) Anyway all these verses are saying is a way to tell when all of this horrid stuff begins is it will be so tough, that "partying" will come to an end. Imagine people in bars not getting drunk as the alcohol runs out and one gets the idea.
 - b) To keep it simple, life then will be so bad, all the fun stops. There will be no soldiers back on leave having fun at this time, let alone people going for a drink after work. In short it'll be a very tough time for all. If you think that's bad, realize Isaiah's getting warmed up.
8. Verse 10: The ruined city lies desolate; the entrance to every house is barred. ¹¹ In the streets they cry out for wine; all joy turns to gloom, all gaiety is banished from the earth. ¹² The city is left in ruins, its gate is battered to pieces. ¹³ So will it be on the earth and among the nations, as when an olive tree is beaten, or as when gleanings are left after the grape harvest.
- a) We have to admit Isaiah's giving us a pretty vivid "doom and gloom" scenario here. Yes it is depressing to consider a world like this where life is so horrible, there is no celebrating for any reason whatsoever. Remember I said in my introduction that the focus of all this destruction is on Jerusalem? Realize the "ruined city" is Jerusalem. Yes it is describing the time when Babylon conquered and emptied it. I also see it as apocalyptic of whenever the world ends as the scope of the predictions expand as described in Verse 13. Notice in that verse it says the whole world will suffer as if an olive tree is "beaten" to shake off all of the olives growing on that tree or after all the grapes are picked at harvest time.
 - b) Again, keep in mind that Isaiah's getting all "doom and gloom" here, as before God can set up an eternal kingdom with Jesus ruling over it, first the world has realize how corrupt it is due to the effects of sin and we're reading the ultimate end of that world as we know it.
 - c) It's like the idea of hitting us with the bad news, before we get the good news. That's why the bible often compares the end times to a woman suffering in labor. First the pain comes then the joy of childbirth. Speaking of the "good news", let's go to Verse 14.
9. Verse 14: They raise their voices, they shout for joy; from the west they acclaim the LORD's majesty. ¹⁵ Therefore in the east give glory to the LORD; exalt the name of the LORD, the God of Israel, in the islands of the sea. ¹⁶ From the ends of the earth we hear singing: "Glory to the Righteous One."
- a) As I just said, we had to get the really bad news, before we get the good news. Here Isaiah switches from describing the world's end to shouts of joy as the Lord God is now ruling in majesty over the world. God's most holy name, translated LORD here is used three times.
 - b) A "Jewish translation" of this verse would be about glory to God as His Messiah will now rule over the world. The Christian view is Jesus is that LORD who is ruling here. Later in the book, the idea of Jesus as the Messiah will become more blatant, but again that's much later in this book. Here we read of Isaiah giving praise to God for doing all of this.
 - c) Again think of a woman giving birth. Yes it is very painful and I'm not downplaying that part of the process. However, just as that pain comes to an end with the giving of birth, so does the pain of world destruction come to an end by God ruling over it from Jerusalem.
 - d) Notice Isaiah turns "on a dime" from doom and gloom to a description of great joy here in these verses. Isaiah's describing the world being full of joy as all the "bad stuff" has come to and end. It's describing the world giving praise to God for bringing peace to the world and all the destruction to an end.

10. Verse 16 (cont.): But I said, "I waste away, I waste away! Woe to me! The treacherous betray! With treachery the treacherous betray!" ¹⁷ Terror and pit and snare await you, O people of the earth. ¹⁸ Whoever flees at the sound of terror will fall into a pit; whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in a snare. The floodgates of the heavens are opened, the foundations of the earth shake. ¹⁹ The earth is broken up, the earth is split asunder, the earth is thoroughly shaken. ²⁰ The earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind; so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion that it falls--never to rise again.
- a) OK, so much for Isaiah's praise report. He's back to "doom and gloom" in the middle of Verse 16. To understand this verse, we need to understand a little about how the world will see the Messiah (Jesus) ruling over this world. It's the idea of we don't want anyone to tell us how to live. The appeal of atheism is that one is not accountable to God for how we live out our life. To wipe out the Jewish population is effectively to tell God, we don't want to live by Your rules and we want to live however we want. My point is that's why we read Isaiah getting all "doom and gloom" again here in these verses. Not that he likes being negative. It's just that Isaiah sees the world rejecting the idea of God setting up the eternal kingdom with Him ruling over it.
 - b) To explain this another way, picture people rejecting the idea of God deciding how best to live out our lives. Think of these verses as the world reacting to God setting up His eternal kingdom and the failure of the world to stop that change from occurring. The horror that is being described in these verses is all about the suffering a world of nonbelievers will go through when this eternal kingdom is set up. What these verses are ultimately describing is people who don't want God to rule over them failing in their effort to rebel against Him as this eternal era begins. These verses describe destruction of the world, as we currently know it. It describes people trying to rebel against God's rule and failing. It describes the rebellion against God's rule coming to a horrid end.
 - c) That's why Isaiah's in so much pain here. It's not that he's angry about God finally ruling over the world He created. It's about seeing all the destruction of those who refuse to live with God being in charge of the world. When we consider the ultimate future of all those who refuse to let God rule over their lives, it should pain us as well to see their end.
11. Verse 21: In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. ²² They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days. ²³ The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously.
- a) The good news is this is the end of the "doom and gloom" section. Beginning in the next verse, Isaiah will break into praise for God doing all of this. Now that we get the idea of God destroying the world one day as we know it, so He can rule over a sinless world. A question to ponder is why is God waiting so long? It's now been almost three thousand years since Isaiah wrote this. If Isaiah's predicting God bring the world to end, why hasn't this event occurred yet? Yes I can say again how we wouldn't have lived to see all of this. Yes I can state how Peter stated that with God, "A thousand years is like one day and one day is like a thousand years". (Based on 2nd Peter 3:8.) We need to remember that God's waiting as long as He is to share this wonderful new way of living in this eternal kingdom with as many people as possible who desire to live with Him being in charge of our lives. Therefore God is waiting for a long period of time to begin all of this so we can enjoy this world whenever it happens.
 - b) To put all of this another way, Isaiah has been 100% accurate in his predictions about the outcome of nations and empires that existed around his time, therefore we can trust him in his predictions about "the" end, whenever they do occur. What if this happens a long time after we live? Then we should use our lives to warn others of this destruction so we can all enjoy this eternal world when it does occur and not just live for this lifetime.

- c) That little speech leads us back to these last two verses of Chapter 24. Isaiah's describing a future day where all the powers of the world will come to an end so that THE Messiah can come to rule over the world and we can live as God desires we live. This utopia is a life where we accept the idea of God being in charge and Him destroying all rebellion.
 - d) So how do we recognize when all of this occurring? It's more than say the end of another world war. Verse 23 gives us a big clue: At that future time, the sun and the moon will stop giving off light as God Himself will literally be the "light" of the world." It's hard for us to picture a world like that, but we'll know when it happens as God Himself will be the source of light as it was back in Genesis Chapter 1. A way to think of this "happy ending" to the world is life returns in effect to the way it was in the Garden of Eden. That's a world where we still have things to do, but we accept the fact that God's in charge and we live as He desires we live by His rules. To state the obvious some more, most of the world rejects the idea of living as God desires, which is why the last chapter was full of destruction as it described the world as we know it ending. With that tough thought fresh in our mind, it's time for Isaiah to break out in praise for whenever this future date does occur:
12. Chapter 25, Verse 1: O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago. ² You have made the city a heap of rubble, the fortified town a ruin, the foreigners' stronghold a city no more; it will never be rebuilt. ³ Therefore strong peoples will honor you; cities of ruthless nations will revere you.
- a) I've stated in previous bible lessons that it dawned on me a long time ago that I better get used to praising God, because I'm pretty positive we're going to be doing that for eternity. Therefore I sing in church whether I feel like it or not, because that's what God wants me to do. Even when I don't feel like it, once I start getting my focus on the good things He's done for me and the good things He'll do on the future, it gets me in a better mood and I do end up enjoying that praise I give to God.
 - b) I started with that little speech, as that's what I see Isaiah doing here. He just got finished describing the world as we know it coming to an end, with lots of people choosing death and eternal suffering rather than accepting God's rule over their lives. Yet despite all that, Isaiah breaks out in praise here, as to thank Him for doing all of this.
 - c) If one studies all the apocalypse sections of the bible carefully, including this text here, we get the impression some people survive through all of this. That's why we read in Verse 3 of "cities of ruthless nations" revering God. To paraphrase Isaiah here, "Despite all of this destruction all around me, despite the world as I know it being ruined, despite the pain I feel for the loss of people I know, I still praise You God as You planned this for Your glory so You can rule over the world You created."
 - d) In other words, when we are depressed about something, we can always find something to be grateful for. No matter how bad life can seem at any given moment, if we look hard enough, we can always find a reason to be grateful. God wants us to be full of joy. We do that by seeing the world from His perspective. We get that joy by honoring Him as God, which again is a reason to sing for joy in church. Having joy begins with perspective, not our circumstances. No matter what we have to deal with in life, God will win in the end, and if we're willing to join the winning side, we can experience that joy with Him. That's the underlying point of these verses.
 - e) One has to admit, it's strange to read Isaiah describing all of this destruction and changing his mood to one of praise. That's what God wants us to do as well. I'm not saying we run from our problems. The issue is perspective. A great illustration is one can be involved in an argument with someone, and if a guest knocks on our door, our mood can instantly be changed. The point is our problems are real. Our perspective can change at any moment if we're willing to change it. Isaiah's describing the horror of God destroying the world as we know it and praising Him as He's ruling over a new world with Him in charge of it.

13. Verse 4: You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall ⁵ and like the heat of the desert. You silence the uproar of foreigners; as heat is reduced by the shadow of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is stilled. ⁶ On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine-- the best of meats and the finest of wines. ⁷ On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; ⁸ he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.
- a) Speaking of having a positive outlook on life, one has to admire Isaiah as he is describing a future world with God being in charge of it. Remember how I said that the apocalypse is from the perspective of Jerusalem? Notice the references to "mountains" in these verses. It is a reference to the fact Jerusalem is up in the "mountains" (high hills actually). All I'm saying is that Jerusalem will be the city that God will rule the world from. As we read of God being a "shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat of the desert", it's a colorful way of describing God giving us comfort in life despite whatever we have to deal with at any given moment. It's giving thanks to God for a future utopia with Him being in charge of this future world. It's a praise for the destruction of all those who refuse to accept Him being in charge of their lives and a reward for those of us who desire God to rule over our lives and the eternal benefits of living that way.
 - b) Most of us are aware of the idea that Christians are collectively referred to as "The bride of Christ". It doesn't mean we're all female in heaven and Jesus is literally our husband. It is just a colorful way of describing how close we get to Jesus for all of eternity. I bring it up here because that banquet to begin our "marriage" to Him will be here on earth and not in heaven. That's why Verse 6 is describing a big banquet for all people to enjoy. That's why I hold the strange view that our new heavenly bodies will exist in more than 3 dimensions so all believers can get close to Jesus as the same time. Have you ever stopped to consider that after Jesus rose from the dead, He still ate meals with His disciples? My point is our new eternal bodies can still eat and digest food. I can't say for sure how all of that works, but I trust Isaiah as being a spokesmen for God as Isaiah has been accurate with all of his predictions to date.
 - c) Notice Verse 8 says that God "will swallow up death forever". We'll know when all of this utopia begins, because there will be no more death. Stop and consider Isaiah wrote in the last chapter about massive worldwide death as God sets up this kingdom. Then once it is set up, there is no more death. So what about all the man made efforts to reach utopia in all the empires that have existed throughout history? We know they are not God centered as they were all about setting up men and not God to be the center of those worlds. We'll know the real thing when it occurs if for no other reason that as we'll see death end.
 - d) The last part of Verse 8 says God will wipe away all tears from our eyes. That idea is also stated in Revelation 7:17, and 21:4. What I pondered is if life will be so glorious with God reigning what is the tears for? What I suspect is that it is for "missed opportunities". We'll have missing relatives and friends and we realize we messed up on opportunities to share the Gospel with others who won't join in that eternal blessing. It's as if God tells us in that day, "Don't be sad. Nobody will reject God who didn't willfully choose to reject Him." It may be a moment of tears due to our guilt over missed opportunity, but He will say to us, "Let it go, this was my plan all along and I knew who chose to be with Me forever as well as those who chose to reject Me." Yes we still need to make the effort to lead as many as possible to Jesus, because we as people never know who is saved and who isn't.
 - e) I believe that is the "removal of the disgrace" that we read about in the last part of Verse 8 at the end of this section. However, that's a "footnote" in this section about praising God for the good He's going to do. Therefore, let's return to Isaiah praising God for all of this.

14. Verse 9: In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation." ¹⁰ The hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain; but Moab will be trampled under him as straw is trampled down in the manure. ¹¹ They will spread out their hands in it, as a swimmer spreads out his hands to swim. God will bring down their pride despite the cleverness of their hands. ¹² He will bring down your high fortified walls and lay them low; he will bring them down to the ground, to the very dust.

- a) Verse 9 continues the "Praise fest" that runs through these final four verses of Chapter 25 and will continue into Chapter 26. Picture being told by God that the whole world as we know it will be destroyed one day. Despite that horror, those who've trusted in God can say in that time "they've bet on the winning horse" as not only have we survived through all of this, but that when God creates a new world for His people to live in, we get to rule with Him at that time. The point is whenever this occurs, we can be grateful today as we can live beyond our current life to be a part of this eternal life with God.
 - i) I can just here some of you thinking, "Yes I know I'm saved for eternity. I've been praising God for that fact for years." Earlier I mentioned the importance of singing in church as it helps to get our perspective right. My point is when we have to face something difficult in life or are just struggling with something, having the eternal perspective can give us the strength to deal with our present issues when we recall that we'll live forever. Isaiah is reminding us that this is not some "pie in the sky" fantasy, but a reality that we'll all witness as God's going to destroy what He made so a new world can be made where those of us who've trusted in Him can be close to Him for all of eternity. If you've "bet on that right horse", think of the joy we'll get by being close to God not just for a bit, but for all of eternity.
- b) Then of all things, we get an interruption of this "praise fest" to God saving us, to speak of all things about Moab. To explain this in context, most commentators think that Moab is a "metaphor" for those who don't trust in God. To explain, first I remind us of the history of that country. It borders Israel to the southeast. Today it's part of the country of Jordan. If you travel to Israel today and look across at the mountains across the Dead Sea, that area's called Moab to this day. Moab has had a mixed history with Israel. There have been wars at various times in history. As a metaphor, Moab's like a neighbor who doesn't believe in God, but is close enough that they realize who God is. There is a strange reference in two of the psalms that existed at the time of Isaiah. In both cases the psalm read, "Moab is my washpot." (NKJV). It's Gods' way of saying, He'll destroy Moab as He "washes them out" from His memory.
 - i) OK, I'm confused. What does all this mean and what does it have to do with what Isaiah says about them here? In Verse 10, Isaiah is describing how God will have a victory over Moab. I think the point is similar to the two Psalm references. What we have in both cases is God saying, "I'm going to win over those who oppose My rule over the world, with Moab being an example of those who oppose Me."
 - ii) Remember that we're reading a praise to God for His ultimate victory. Isaiah uses an example (Moab) of a real, long-term threat to Israel's existence during his time.
 - iii) Believe it or not, Moab (as a symbol of those who resist God's desire for us to live as He desires) leads perfectly into the rest of these verses. Isaiah uses an example that is rare in the bible: Using a swimmer as a metaphor. If nothing else it shows us that Isaiah is aware of how a good swimmer can swim. What that metaphor is telling us in the same way a good swimmer can accomplish the goal of getting to a place across the water, so God will end the "cleverness" of those who oppose Him.
 - iv) That's confusing, what does it mean? It's a strange comparison, but essentially it is saying, despite man's best efforts to oppose God, He'll win in the end. That's why we read Isaiah using a colorful illustration to show man's failure to stop His plans.

15. Chapter 26, Verse 1: In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; God makes salvation its walls and ramparts. ² Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith. ³ You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. ⁴ Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.
- a) The "praise fest" continues in Chapter 26. As my regulars know, the chapter breaks were not added until millenniums after this was written. I suspect the reason a chapter break is inserted here is Chapter 25 focused on praising Him from the standpoint of what is going to happen to those who oppose God's plans. Chapter 26 focuses on those of us who get to enjoy that victory. Reread these verses from the standpoint that we ourselves will be able to enjoy this victory whenever it occurs.
 - b) Stop and consider that it's been millenniums since Isaiah wrote this. I suspect Isaiah knew that this text is describing the end of the world as he knew it, and he knew this event will not occur until long after his own lifetime. Remember in earlier chapters, Isaiah predicted the rise and fall of the Babylonian Empire. That empire didn't exist in Isaiah's day, and he must have thought that whenever this ultimate destruction occurs as described here, will be after the events of that empire. My point is Isaiah must have realized he was writing of events that occur far into the future, but he didn't know how far in the future it will be.
 - c) All I'm saying is if Isaiah can praise God for this ultimate victory that occurs sometime in the distant future, so we too should praise God for it as well. Think about whatever issues we're dealing with at the moment and ask how does that compare with the fact we'll live forever with God in heaven? If we realize we're going to win in the ultimate end, despite whatever we're dealing with right now, how does that affect our perspective on life? My point is we like Isaiah should praise God for this ultimate victory, as it puts our lives into the perspective of "why it's worth it to bet on the right horse" of God ruling over our lives.
 - d) That's why Isaiah makes statements in these verses about God trampling down those who trust in their wealth or think of themselves as something special who don't care that God's ruling over our world. Recall that when Isaiah wrote this, he was facing the threat of his country being destroyed and everything he knew coming to an end. I have no idea what you are facing, but having to face the end of life as we know it would scare us as much as anything else we have to face. In spite of whatever hardship we're facing at the moment, we can and should give praise to God as He'll win in the end. If you get that you get the purpose of this "praise fest" in these chapters. Speaking of which:
16. Verse 5: He humbles those who dwell on high, he lays the lofty city low; he levels it to the ground and casts it down to the dust. ⁶ Feet trample it down-- the feet of the oppressed, the footsteps of the poor.
- a) Part of this praise is for God's victory over those who oppose His rule. One of the strange ideas taught in the bible is that we are to love what God loves and hate what He hates. So if God's perfect, how can He hate? It's the idea of hating actions, not people. What are the actions He hates? Pride, lifting of oneself up above the other. Murder, theft, ignoring the fact that He created us. We can go down the 10 Commandments, but hopefully you've got the idea by now. God will win in the end and the "losers" are highlighted here.
17. Verse 7: The path of the righteous is level; O upright One, you make the way of the righteous smooth. ⁸ Yes, LORD, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts. ⁹ My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you. When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness.
- a) The good news is we switch from the negative to the positive here. Verse 7 describes what the Messiah will do. Remember John the Baptist preached, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make His path's straight." While that is actually a quote of Isaiah 40:3, you can see how it "echoes" Verse 7 here. One can easily see these verses as desiring either God the Father or "God the Son" as He will rule over the world one day from Jerusalem.

- b) Stop and consider these verses another way: Do we truly desire Jesus to come and rule at this time? Isaiah's desiring for the Messiah to come now. That was 2,700 years ago. Does God want us to have that same sort of attitude? Let me put it this way, when we pray for His Kingdom to come, what do you think we're praying for? So if believers have prayed for His Kingdom for thousands of years, why hasn't He answered that prayer? What we fail to see is He answers it all the time. When we pray for His kingdom, we desire for His will be done. It's a desire to live as God desires we do. As for the literal fulfillment of the verse, that's God's timing and we should desire it as much as Isaiah ever did. Meanwhile, let's move on to Verse 10:
18. Verse 10: Though grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; even in a land of uprightness they go on doing evil and regard not the majesty of the LORD. ¹¹ O LORD, your hand is lifted high, but they do not see it. Let them see your zeal for your people and be put to shame; let the fire reserved for your enemies consume them.
- a) First question: how is grace shown to the wicked as stated in Verse 10? Consider that we don't see people struck dead when they steal or murder. We don't see people struck dead if they refuse to honor God as God. The point of these verses, is that people miss what is obvious to us: The world we live in is so finely tuned, there must be a God who made the whole thing and demand we live as He desires we live as a witness for Him.
- b) The last sentence of Verse 11 is Isaiah telling God effectively, "Make it obvious to all those who oppose You that You exist. God, "consume" your enemies!" Obviously, God doesn't strike dead nonbelievers every time they sin. God never does Himself what He calls us to do in the first place, be a witness to others.
- c) However, if people refuse to accept the good news of salvation, then they also need to be warned of what awaits. That leads us to back to Isaiah. H's begging God to act so people see who Him will be ashamed of their actions. Notice that Isaiah is not praising God for doing this already, but effectively thanking God for what He'll do as He will one day rule over this world forever.
19. Verse 12: LORD, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us. ¹³ O LORD, our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but your name alone do we honor. ¹⁴ They are now dead, they live no more; those departed spirits do not rise. You punished them and brought them to ruin; you wiped out all memory of them. ¹⁵ You have enlarged the nation, O LORD; you have enlarged the nation. You have gained glory for yourself; you have extended all the borders of the land.
- a) Short version, "God's going to win." It's as definite as anything that's already occurred in history to date. Notice Isaiah is asking God for peace knowing that He will win in the end. One has to remember we're reading future predictions. This will happen and Isaiah is thanking God that wickedness will come to an end one day. Yes of course it's now 2,700 years and counting. Still if we can count on Isaiah's predictions that we know have come true regarding past empires we can trust his predictions about God's ultimate victory. In the meantime, we can have peace no matter the situation knowing God's in control.
- b) Notice the last few verses describe the enlarging of Israel. Every time one reads of Israel in peace negotiations, it's always about giving up land for peace. God's saying that there will be a day when that nation has peace as well as enlarged borders. If you read about the land that is promised to them in the last few chapters of Ezekiel, let's just say that the borders will be a lot bigger then, than they are today.
- c) Also notice the destruction of Israel's enemies is complete. Again in modern times, all the nations surrounding Israel are at best neutral or usually hostile with them. Yet we read of God promising that He'll wipe out Israel's enemies one day. But doesn't the Koran argue the opposite? Yes, but again, the reason the bible is 30% predictions is to establish it as an accurate book of predictions, an accurate book of history to date and it is not just a bunch of made up stories. On that happy note, onto Verse 16.

20. Verse 16: LORD, they came to you in their distress; when you disciplined them, they could barely whisper a prayer. ¹⁷ As a woman with child and about to give birth writhes and cries out in her pain, so were we in your presence, O LORD. ¹⁸ We were with child, we writhed in pain, but we gave birth to wind. We have not brought salvation to the earth; we have not given birth to people of the world.
- a) We interrupt the "praise fest" one more time, to give a little "doom and gloom". The really good news about this "doom" here in these verses is they end with some really good news coming up in the next few verses. Let me explain the situation here: the "doom" here isn't about nonbelievers it's about believers. It's saying we're watching life as we know it come to an end. We (believers) are in so much pain, we can barely whisper a prayer. We read of Isaiah once again comparing this tough situation to a woman being in pain from giving birth to a child. Then the "kicker" is that Isaiah says the birth pains were only the "wind".
 - i) OK, we'll bite. What does all that mean? Stop and think what God called us to do as humans back when the world began: "Be fruitful and multiply" to use the King James Version. God wanted a world full of people who believes in Him and trusts Him to guide their lives. However, most of the world turns their back on the idea of God ruling over their lives. That's what Isaiah means as he says we as a people have only given birth to the "wind" and not salvation to the earth. The point here is that God one day is going to destroy our world because it's incurably affected by sin. That's the distress being described in these verses.
 - ii) With that said, the good news of reading this far is there is a neat surprise hidden in the next set of verses:
21. Verse 19: But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead. ²⁰ Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by. ²¹ See, the LORD is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will disclose the blood shed upon her; she will conceal her slain no longer.
- a) Have you ever wondered where in the bible does it blatantly say we will be resurrected to spend eternity with God? Although it's implied lots of places, these verses are among the ones that blatantly say, "We (believers) will rise from the dead to spend eternity with God the Father." You know by now how Isaiah loves to use the imagery of a woman about to give birth to a child. In effect, that's what Isaiah's doing through the last part of this text. In Verse 19 Isaiah says, "the earth will give birth to her dead" which is a metaphor for the fact that nonbelievers for the most part give birth to more nonbelievers who'll all die one day to not spend their eternity in the presence of God the Father. Obviously there will be exceptions and many of us come from "unbelieving" backgrounds. At the same time we read in these verses that those who trust in God will rise from the dead.
 - b) Then we get a discussion of what happens to us when we die. Verse 20 has a strange idea of "hiding ourselves" until God's wrath is completed. Obviously, God doesn't want us to go hide in a cave until His wrath on the earth occurs and is done, God wants us to live by using our lives to make a difference for Him. So what does this "hide ourselves" mean?
 - i) This text is a hint of what happens to us between our inevitable death and the time of God carrying out His wrath on earth. There is a controversial idea some people hold that I disagree with: It is that when we die, we "sleep" until God resurrects us one day. They use Verse 20 as one of their supports. My view along with most of the conservative Christians scholars is that, God created all things. Therefore He created time as well. When we enter His world, we enter a world outside of time as we know it. All I'm saying is when we die, we immediately enter God's world.
 - ii) We then "rest" in that world in God's presence until "from the earth's perspective" when all of destruction does occur one day in the future.

- c) OK John, that sounds like a wonderful fantasy. How can we trust all of this is true? That is why 30% of the bible is predictions, including a mass number of them that have already come true. If we can trust God with the accuracy of those predictions that have happened we can also trust Him with the ultimate end of this world and what happens to the end of our world as we know it. Think of the text this way: The world as we know it had to have a beginning one day and has to have an ending one day. These verses give us some idea of how that ending will occur and how we can recognize it when it does occur.
 - d) Back when I started this lesson, I warned that we're going to cover a lot of text in this one lesson. That's because all four chapters are a single speech by Isaiah. My point is to hang tough, as we're almost there. We've only got 13 more verses left to cover as we finish this section describing the end of the world as we know it.
22. Chapter 27, Verse 1: In that day, the LORD will punish with his sword, his fierce, great and powerful sword, Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent; he will slay the monster of the sea.
- a) Just when you thought this lesson was strange enough as it is, we get a reference to some sort of creature called "Leviathan". Whatever it is, it's some sort of sea monster. The book of Job makes reference to it as well as a few other bible places. Some say it's a great white shark or maybe some sort of ancient sea monster. Others say it's a metaphor for the devil, but I don't buy that latter theory. What I believe Isaiah's trying to communicate to us here is despite whatever powers exist in this world, God's more powerful than that. That's why Isaiah tries to think of the strongest creature he could think of that man might consider an impossibility to conquer. A great white shark is a possible answer, although I won't rule out other possibilities. All this verse is saying is "God's going to win this battle over who is control of the earth one day and the strongest creature we can imagine won't stop Him from accomplishing that mission."
 - b) The good news is "that's that" and we get back to the "Praise Fest" that if you recall is my lesson title.
23. Verse 2: In that day-- "Sing about a fruitful vineyard: ³ I, the LORD, watch over it; I water it continually. I guard it day and night so that no one may harm it. ⁴ I am not angry. If only there were briars and thorns confronting me! I would march against them in battle; I would set them all on fire.
- a) You might recall that I stated earlier in this lesson that "wine" is biblically associated with having joy. That's why it's common in the bible for God to compare His people to being a "fruitful vine". The national symbol for the territory of Judah to this day is a fruitful vine. When Jesus used illustrations comparing Israel to a vineyard, people listening to Him did understand that God uses a vineyard as a model of comparison to His people.
 - b) Which leads us back to our "Praise Fest". Verse 2 tells us to "Sing about the vineyard". To see this from God's perspective, it is the idea that God is the one who lead the Israelites to the Promised Land to begin with and guides His people so that they'll be fruitful for Him. That should be obvious to us Christians that although we don't live in one place God does guide our lives so we too may "bear fruit" for Him.
 - c) Then we get another strange metaphor. Isaiah's speaking for God saying, "If my vine had a bunch of thorns, I'd remove them, or if an army attacked them I'd defend them", which is my loose translation of Verses 2-4. The idea that God desires to guide our lives for His glory. God never promises that life will be easy. He only promises that if we're willing to use our lives to make a difference for Him, He'll guide us to make that difference. That is why we read of Isaiah telling us in a colorful metaphor that God's willing to protect us as we use our lives for His glory.
 - d) Notice the phrase "I am not angry". The focus here is on believers and those who will be believers one day. While God has a zero tolerance policy for sin, He still wants us to come to Him for guidance. That's why we read of God protecting those who trust in Him here.

24. Verse 5: Or else let them come to me for refuge; let them make peace with me, yes, let them make peace with me." ⁶ In days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit.
- a) Remember why God created us in the first place. God desires "something" or "someone" to express His love upon. I've used the illustration in the past that if you love to paint or play a musical instrument, you do it, just because you enjoy doing it. God's so full of love that He desires someone to express that love upon. That's why God created us in the first place, to express His love upon. That bit of theology leads us back to these verses. Isaiah is saying let people (that's us) come to me (God) for refuge. It's the basic Gospel message of making peace with God by asking Him to forgive us of all our sins and then we trust in Him to guide our lives for His glory. That's how we make peace with God.
 - b) Then Verse 6 talks about Jacob (God's nickname for Israel before anyone trusts in Him) as well as the word Israel (a nickname for people who struggle with God as we try to please Him by living as He desires). The idea here is that all of us, Jewish and non-Jewish alike who do desire to live as God desires, make the effort to do so we produce "fruit" for Him by leading others to Him or help others draw closer to Him. Does that mean I have to go wear a yamaka all day and be Orthodox Jewish? That's a cultural concept. What it means is we should live, as God desires we live. What do you enjoy doing or what are you good at doing? The joy in life is to take that talent and find a way to use it to make a difference for God with our lives. That's the "fruit" that God wants us to bear.
25. Verse 7: Has the LORD struck her as he struck down those who struck her? Has she been killed as those were killed who killed her? ⁸ By warfare and exile you contend with her-- with his fierce blast he drives her out, as on a day the east wind blows. ⁹ By this, then, will Jacob's guilt be atoned for, and this will be the full fruitage of the removal of his sin: When he makes all the altar stones to be like chalk stones crushed to pieces, no Asherah poles or incense altars will be left standing. ¹⁰ The fortified city stands desolate, an abandoned settlement, forsaken like the desert; there the calves graze, there they lie down; they strip its branches bare.
- a) We're back to a "reality check" of life during Isaiah's time as compared to God's desire for the people of Israel to trust Him to guide their lives. Remember that most Israelites living during the time of Isaiah we're not trusting in God. The idea of these verses is that it still will be necessary for God to remove Israel from that land and God allows warfare against His people in order to do that. Verse 9 mentions "Asherah poles and incense altars". That is how Israelites would honor their false gods. Archeologists have confirmed that a major difference in Israel before and after the Babylon conquest was the idolatry was common in that land and how that conquest brought it to an end. All I'm saying is all the warfare that Israel had to suffer was necessary to rid that land of its idols. That's why we read here of God's efforts to destroy those Israelites as that's what it took to get their collective focus to return once again on Him. The scary thing for you and me is God can also wipe us out as easily as He did them if we fail to do what He's called us to do, be a witness for Him.
26. Verse 11: When its twigs are dry, they are broken off and women come and make fires with them. For this is a people without understanding; so their Maker has no compassion on them, and their Creator shows them no favor. ¹² In that day the LORD will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, O Israelites, will be gathered up one by one. ¹³ And in that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.
- a) The good news is we made it to the end of this "apocalypse" section of Isaiah. The tough bad news is it "ends" with Israel as a nation suffering for their failure to be God's witness to the world around them. Then when all this bad stuff is over, all those Israelites who've used their lives to glorify God along with non-Israelites who've used their lives to make a difference for God will be gathered to Him. When this was written, Israelites were taken captive to Assyria or were exiled in Egypt. God "gathers" them back to Him in that day.

- b) The point these verses is that God will gather His people from wherever they've been so we can spend eternity with Him. Isaiah uses the example of those scattered near Israel after it's been conquered to show how we're gathered to Him in that future ay.
 - c) OK, I promised to have this done in 12 pages. I "almost" made it. All I want to say to end this lesson is to trust in God has eternal rewards that will last far longer than anything we can earn only for this lifetime. Yes an apocalypse is coming to this world one day. It has to have an ending just as it had a beginning. These four chapters gave us some clues as to how we can recognize these events when they occur. Until then, God desires we use our lives to make a difference for Him and not go hide in a hole somewhere fearing whenever this event is going to occur. The point is all of this will occur one day. It is not a reason to panic, but to realize that we'll live forever in His presence and we're to use our time here to make a difference for Him. On that positive note, let's close in prayer:
27. Father, I have no idea what You have planned for Me today or what the future holds. All I know is You exist and You want to use our lives for Your glory. May we never waste the most valuable thing we own, our time as You created us with a purpose, to glorify You in all that we do. Guide us as to how You want us to use our time and may You be glorified by how we live. May we not fail to praise You and keep that eternal perspective in focus as we use our lives for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.