

1. So where does one go after discussing the end of the world as we know it? For those of you who haven't read the last few lessons, let me back up to explain what Isaiah's been up to: The last few chapters were full of predictions that explained how the nations and empires around Israel were going to end. The last lesson, that covered the last four chapters, Isaiah took it one step further to discuss the end of the world, as we know it. So where does he go from here? If he's all done for the moment discussing the future, he has to come back to present as if to say, enough about what will happen to everybody else, enough about how the world will end, we should talk about what we have to do in the meantime before all of this occurs!
  - a) With that said, Isaiah's next speech runs from this chapter all the way through Chapter 35. The good news is I'm not going to cover all of that in one lesson. I'm going to focus on the text of Chapters 28 and 29 here to start this next series.
  - b) The text of these chapters focus on Israel's failure to heed Isaiah's message. There's a little "woe is me, nobody cares what I say" here. However, most of this text is focusing on the people living around Isaiah as if to say, "Now that you know what will happen to nations around you and how things will end, what are you going to do about God in your life?"
  - c) In Chapter 28, Isaiah spends time comparing the Northern Israelite Kingdom leaders to a bunch of drunks. I'm sure I can give a wonderful lecture to all of us on what happens to a person who gets drunk all the time. Such people hurt those around them when they waste away their lives trying to ease their pain through alcohol. I'm reminded of a recent event, as a famous football coach in my area had to resign, as his life is literally falling apart, and he can't stay sober long enough to do his job. Just as lives get ruined when people choose to go down that path in life, so the leaders in Israel are going down that same path as they try to numb their problems away with alcohol.
  - d) If that isn't bad enough, Isaiah's critics put him down for being too simple. A verse stated twice in Chapter 28 reads better in the original Hebrew as it's all monosyllabic words. The idea is to call Isaiah's preaching too simple to solve the complicated problems of life.
    - i) Isaiah's response is essentially, "I'm keeping it simple, so you the readers can know what it is I'm trying to communicate: That God wants to guide our lives so we can use them to make a difference for Him. That'll give us far more joy in life than any other way to seek happiness including something as obvious as turning to alcohol to enjoy life. I (Isaiah) want to make it obvious to all of you that the best thing one can do for one's life is give it back to God so He can use it for His glory. If you get that you get the "overly simple" message I'm trying to preach to all of you."
    - ii) That's chapter 28 in a paragraph.
  - e) Then in Chapter 29, Isaiah turns his attention back to Jerusalem. The idea is that Isaiah is using the soon to be destroyed Northern Israelite kingdom as an example of how all of the Israelites are "blowing it" for turning from God with their lives. Isaiah's trying to warn all of his fellow citizens of the Southern Israelite kingdom as they too are "blowing it" as they are not living as God desires. Isaiah's trying to warn the Southern Kingdom that they too will suffer a similar fate as they collectively are turning to idolatry and refusing to trust in the God who separated them as a nation to be a witness for Him.
2. So is that it? Is this another lecture on how we're not good enough for God? Isaiah's been telling us over the course of this book, how we need to get our act together, or God will wipe us out. In the historical context, most Israelites were turning to other ways to deal with their problems. That is why Isaiah brings up alcohol as a major issue in Chapter 28. Chapter 29 is warning those living in the "South" Kingdom that they're no better off and God's not going to spare them just because His temple is located there, in Jerusalem. In summary this lesson is a warning to all of us of what is the danger of living life not doing His will, when we're called to make a difference for Him.

- a) I'm the first to admit, this seems like it's getting repetitive. Isaiah's already spent a whole bunch of chapters telling them and us of the importance of trusting Him to guide our lives as opposed to living for other things to try to make us happy in life. I'm also well aware of the fact there is more to life than just our relationship with God. To quote a famous saying about our relationship with Him, "If God is all we need in life why did He create a woman for Adam to be with?" The point of that question is God didn't create us so we can spend all our lives thinking about our relationship with Him. He wants us to interact with other people so together we can make a difference for Him.
  - b) Therefore, Isaiah spends a lot of time in this book pounding the point of how those living around him are wasting their lives living for things other than God. What if you say, I am not like those people. I'm not a drunk and I am involved in things at my church. Realize I am not condemning us as if to say God's not pleased with how we're living. All I'm saying is if we're going to be a living witness for Jesus, then we like Isaiah need to care for others around us and warn them of what awaits them if they don't change their lifestyle.
3. The key point of this section is as we read Isaiah condemning drunkenness in Chapter 28, and as we read of the Israelites turning from obeying God in this section, the first thing we need to do is see "if the shoe fits" in any way to our life. We need to see if we are living, as God desires we live as taught in this section. Then and only then we can look at what is around us and see if we can help, make a difference for Jesus in the world around us.
- a) So what do I call this lesson, "The danger of ignoring God" is probably the best I can come up with. These chapters focus on those who are wasting their lives not living for God. As we read it, we can discuss the inevitable end of these lifestyle choices.
4. Chapter 28, Verse 1: Woe to that wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, to the fading flower, his glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley-- to that city, the pride of those laid low by wine!
- a) Let me start with a quick reminder of "who is Ephraim". Remember when the Israelites first came into that land, they were divided into 12 tribes. When Isaiah was alive, Israel was divided into two separate kingdoms. Ephraim is one of the 12 tribes. It happened to be the dominant tribe of the Northern Kingdom, and thus "Ephraim" became a nickname for that Northern Kingdom. As I've been saying over the course of this study to date, the Northern Kingdom is a few years away from being destroyed by the Assyrian Empire. To remind us again, that empire was based out of what is Iraq today, and lasted for about 700 years. At that time they were expanding south and conquering parts of the land of Israel.
  - b) However, that destruction wasn't happening because the Assyrians were "aggressive". It was occurring because for centuries the people God's called to be a witness for Him have collectively ignored Him. Think of this as punishment for failing to be a witness for God.
  - c) At that time, when the Northern Kingdom leaders should be praying to God for help, all they were doing in effect were getting drunk. I don't know if it was a case of wanting to drown their sorrows or just have the "let's party today, for tomorrow we die" attitude. In either case, their lives were about to be ruined because they've collectively turned to serve other gods or simply choose the "party life" over obedience. Like the football coach in my area who's life has just hit "rock bottom" by his lifestyle choice, so we don't always realize what's the ultimate price one can pay when one chooses to "numb themselves" instead of turning to God to deal with whatever issues we're facing in life at the moment.
  - d) While I'm discussing alcohol, let me bring up that issue for the moment. Those who know nothing about the bible will usually know Jesus turned water into wine. If you think Jesus drank fresh grape juice at the Last Supper, you need to know something about grapes: the harvest is in late summer. The Last Supper was in the spring. My simple point is just that Jesus must have had wine at that meal and not fresh grape juice. My point simply that the bible contains moments where Jesus did drink wine. At the same time, I can quote lots of bible passages that condemn being drunk.

- i) Let's remember what alcohol is, "a depressant". It takes away our ability to make good decisions and numbs our pain. If God put a big sign in front of me saying I can never drink again, I'd shrug my shoulders and never drink again. I will on a few occasions have a glass of wine, but it's never been a major deal for me. At the same time, I can share stories of those close to me who've struggled with that issue and have had their lives ruined due to it's affect. I suspect most of us reading this can share a few stories of others they know who've suffered in a similar way. That is why I thought of the famous football coach in my area who recently lost it all in a public way and hopefully he's now in a "rehab" somewhere.
  - ii) So why am I getting into all this here? Because Isaiah's using wine as an example of those who are wasting their lives away getting drunk when they could be using their lives to make a difference for God. If alcohol isn't your "thing", then we have to ask ourselves, what is it that keeps us from using our lives to make a difference for Him in the world around us? That's the underlying question of this section.
  - e) Speaking of condemnation, Isaiah's condemning that Northern Kingdom of Israel, as its capital city in particular, as if to say, "Instead of using your life to teach others about Me, you are wasting it away getting numb on wine." That's the essence of this verse.
5. Verse 2: See, the Lord has one who is powerful and strong. Like a hailstorm and a destructive wind, like a driving rain and a flooding downpour, he will throw it forcefully to the ground.
- a) How does one describe a God we can't see working in our lives? Sometimes in hindsight it is obvious based on what is occurring. Isaiah is writing at a time where he was living in a land that was being threatened with extinction from an attacking army. Isaiah wants us to see that threat in comparison to how God can and does work. Those in charge of Israel were ignoring what He called them to do, which is to teach others about Him, help people to grow in Him and make a difference in the world around us. The leaders got into a woe is me attitude and spent their time drinking. God's response is effectively, "You think that the army you face is strong? You think that drinking (or fill in the blank) is going to make you happy? Realize how powerful I am in comparison to what you're dealing with!"
  - b) We have to realize that no matter what we're dealing with, God's more powerful than the issues we face. Isaiah uses colorful language to describe what God can and will do in our lives if we fail to live as He desires.
6. Verse 3: That wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, will be trampled underfoot. <sup>4</sup> That fading flower, his glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley, will be like a fig ripe before harvest-- as soon as someone sees it and takes it in his hand, he swallows it.
- a) It may help to realize why Isaiah's spending time complaining about "Ephraim". This is a nickname for the Northern Kingdom. Yes the Northern Kingdom is about to be destroyed as the people living there have turned from God.
  - b) What Isaiah's essentially saying is that the Northern Kingdom people are wasting away at their lives getting drunk instead of using their lives to make a difference for God. Isaiah is describing the destruction of that kingdom as occurring so soon, it'd be as fast as someone eating fruit right after it's picked. Remember that Isaiah lived in the Southern Kingdom.
  - c) The point is just as being drunk all the time is a waste of life, so those who are called to be a witness for God who waste away their lives getting drunk are also wasting their life.
  - d) Suppose you say, drinking isn't my problem or I rarely or never drink. Then the question we have to ask ourselves is what is it my life that's preventing me from using my time to make a difference for God? That's the hard question underlying this text.
  - e) In the meantime, Isaiah himself reminds us of that point of what's really important in life:
7. Verse 5: In that day the LORD Almighty will be a glorious crown, a beautiful wreath for the remnant of his people. <sup>6</sup> He will be a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, a source of strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.
- a) Translation: Don't waste your life, as God will judge us based on how we've lived it out.

- b) Stop and consider these verses in context. Isaiah spent the first four verses condemning a person who wastes away their lives. Then we get two verses reminding us effectively that God will reward those who are faithful to Him and will judge all of us. That's why Isaiah pauses here to make that statement.
  - c) OK, enough of the positive aspect of being faithful to God. Back to the condemnation one can have if one waste's away one's life:
8. Verse 7: And these also stagger from wine and reel from beer: Priests and prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled with wine; they reel from beer, they stagger when seeing visions, they stumble when rendering decisions. <sup>8</sup> All the tables are covered with vomit and there is not a spot without filth.
- a) First notice who Isaiah is condemning: Those who were called to be priests and prophets. Before you say, "that's not me", realize that a priest is anyone who uses their lives to draw people closer to God. A prophet is anyone who teaches His word. Whether we like it or not, that's what God's called all of us to do as witnesses for Him. Yes this text aims at the "professionals" in that world, but it also applies to all of us who He has called today to be a living witness for Him.
  - b) Now that we've established the "who", let's focus on the "what". These people were using their lives to get drunk on wine and beer. They see visions when they're drunk and think it is something from God. They make decisions when they're drunk. Isaiah even says the tables they use are "covered with vomit" in order to describe their wasted lives.
  - c) In summary, think of this section as describing the "wasted life" when we use it for things other than to make a difference for God.
9. Verse 9: "Who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast? <sup>10</sup> For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there."
- a) At this point, we have a transition. Isaiah jumps from condemning those who are wasting away their lives to answering his critics. To paraphrase, Isaiah's critics are saying back to him, "You preach simple messages and claim those messages are from God."
  - b) It may help to realize if you read Verse 10 in the original Hebrew, it's monosyllabic words. It is the critics way of saying, "Isaiah you're talking to us as if we're children who can't tell by ourselves what's the right thing to do in life". We are adults and if we want to go drink, who are you to tell us otherwise?" It's sort of a "mind your own business" response to the criticism of Isaiah. He's also saying, "I may be talking in simple ideas, but that's what it is taking in order to reach you." It's God saying in effect, "I have to talk to you like a baby as you don't seem to care that you're wasting away your lives!"
  - c) Now that I've beaten that point to death, let's move on.
10. Verse 11: Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people, <sup>12</sup> to whom he said, "This is the resting place, let the weary rest"; and, "This is the place of repose"-- but they would not listen. <sup>13</sup> So then, the word of the LORD to them will become: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there-- so that they will go and fall backward, be injured and snared and captured.
- a) To paraphrase Isaiah some more, "OK you people, you don't want to listen to me give my simple message of repentance? Great then, a foreign army will be knocking on your door. If you won't listen to me, maybe you'll figure it out once you're captured and taken away to a foreign land. To put this in our vocabulary, "How much lower do you wish to sink in life before you get the idea that you're wasting away your life doing what you're doing?"
  - b) The football coach I was thinking of, has recently lost his family, his job, and his life at the moment is ruined as he refused to deal with his drinking problem. That in effect is a good example of what Isaiah is preaching here. The point for us non-alcoholics is that God will do whatever He has to get our attention focused on Him. If we won't listen to His simple preaching of His word, then He'll take more drastic measures to get our attention.

11. Verse 14: Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scoffers who rule this people in Jerusalem.
  - a) I want you to catch the transition here in Verse 14. The city of Jerusalem is the capital of the Southern Kingdom. In other words, Isaiah's lecture on being drunk and ignoring the word of God isn't just for the Northern Kingdom, that's about to be destroyed, but also for the "South", who is collectively thinking, "We're better than them. We have God's temple here and God will never destroy this place because this is where His temple is located."
  - b) This is a good reminder that no matter our background, no matter what we desire to get done in life, no matter if our parents are saved, it's about our own personal relationship with God that matters here. If we fail to use our lives as witness for Him after we have accepted Jesus as God and in charge of our lives, then whether we realize it or not, not only have we wasted our lives, but we've failed the "test" of Lordship, which is all about living as Jesus desires we live. With that tough thought stated, Verse 15.
12. Verse 15: You boast, "We have entered into a covenant with death, with the grave we have made an agreement. When an overwhelming scourge sweeps by, it cannot touch us, for we have made a lie our refuge and falsehood our hiding place."
  - a) You have to sense the sarcasm in Isaiah's tone here. To paraphrase, "You think you are so smart by ignoring my message, you don't realize that you've entered a covenant with hell. You are ruining your life by the way you're living. Even though you don't want to think about it that way, that's what you're doing when you choose to live a life differently from how God wants you to live." We'll get to the how God wants you to live later in his talk, but right now, it's about getting the attention of anyone who chooses to live their life not as God intended it to be.
13. Verse 16: So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed."
  - a) Every now and then Isaiah throws us a clue that he's talking about Jesus. Let me give us a few cross-references to explain Jesus being compared to a cornerstone. Psalm 118:22 says that "the cornerstone has become a stumbling block" to people. Jesus Himself in Matthew 21:42 tells us that nonbelievers do stumble over the fact that He is God. Acts 4:11 and 1st Peter 2:4 make it clear that Jesus is the cornerstone being referred to here in Isaiah.
  - b) Wouldn't a Jewish person argue that the cornerstone is the first stone laid for the temple? You could make that argument, but my counterargument is "Is a trust in the temple floor the basis of our salvation?" How does that apply today since the temple's been destroyed for roughly 1,900 years and counting? That's why the New Testament makes it clear that the cornerstone being referred to by Isaiah and in Psalm 118 refers to Jesus as He's the one who our salvation is based upon. The idea is that to believe Jesus is God and to trust Him as being Lord of our lives means we can't lose our salvation no matter how much we mess up. I believe as long as one believes that, we can't lose their salvation no matter how bad we mess up. That's why the Gospel is called the "good news" as we don't have to work to prove our worth to God. Yes we should work hard to make a difference for Him, but our works don't save us, they are proof to others around us that we are saved.
  - c) For most of us, that's the basics and most of us know that well. The point as it applies to this verse is the reminder that our salvation is based on that cornerstone. With that good thought stated, we can move on to the next verse.
14. Verse 17: I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line; hail will sweep away your refuge, the lie, and water will overflow your hiding place.
  - a) For those who don't know, I make a living as a real estate appraiser. Among the tools of my profession are measuring devices to calculate building sizes. Isaiah's describing such tools. The idea here is to say, God's going to separate those who do trust Him from those choose to turn from Him based on the way they live. Once God "measures" who will and who will not be saved, He'll separate them like trash, or water overflowing a hiding spot.

- b) The related idea is you can't hide from God. As one of my teachers taught me many years ago, "We can't win the game, we can't get out of the game and the game is rigged. So use your life for His glory since it's His game to begin with". When Isaiah makes a statement like, "Water will overflow your hiding place", think of that statement as one trying to "get out of the game" of living as God desires we live.
15. Verse 18: Your covenant with death will be annulled; your agreement with the grave will not stand. When the overwhelming scourge sweeps by, you will be beaten down by it. <sup>19</sup> As often as it comes it will carry you away; morning after morning, by day and by night, it will sweep through." The understanding of this message will bring sheer terror.
- a) Remember a few verses earlier how Isaiah was sarcastically saying how those Israelites living in Jerusalem made a "covenant (deal) with death"? Here Isaiah is saying, "Your deal with death will fail." I admit that's confusing. What does he mean by that?
- b) It's the idea of thinking something like, "I can live however I want. God knows the way I am and there is nothing He can do about it and there's nothing I want to do about it." It is that type of tragic thinking that not only leads one to death, but there will be suffering far greater than they could ever imagine. The terror of death's eternity is designed to scare us to realize how real it is. Remember that "hell" is giving people what they want, which is an eternal life away from His presence. Little do people realize how horrible that is based on the lifestyle most people have chosen to live out. That's the type of tough warning Isaiah is trying to give to those listening to him preach.
- c) The reminder to believers is to consider areas of our lives we know aren't pleasing to God and tell Him in effect, "You be in charge of that part of my life as I'm powerless to change on my own." That's the lifelong process of turning our sins over to Him to deal with.
16. Verse 20: The bed is too short to stretch out on, the blanket too narrow to wrap around you.
- a) Most of us at have slept in a bed that's too small or have had to use a blanket that's not big enough for us. I'm 6'4". Once I visited a friend, where I had to sleep in their child's single bed. Let's just say it wasn't my best night's sleep.
- b) With that picture in mind of an uncomfortable night's sleep, let's think about this verse in context of the previous few verses. God was saying how we can waste our life away and not realize the eternal price one pays for that lifestyle choice. Yes it's eternal suffering and Isaiah's trying to tell us with a colorful illustration how it never gets less comfortable. I'd think that say after being in hell for a few years, one gets "used to it". However, Isaiah is trying to tell us it never gets comfortable just like sleeping in a bed that's too small never gets comfortable no matter how hard we try. That's the idea here.
17. Verse 21: The LORD will rise up as he did at Mount Perazim, he will rouse himself as in the Valley of Gibeon-- to do his work, his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task.
- a) Sometimes I forget that Isaiah was trained to be a priest. Part of that training was to learn the history of the nation of Israel to date. I bring it up here as Isaiah gives two examples from their history where God lead the Israelite army to victories. One example has to do with a battle Joshua fought. The other example is from "Judges". Without going into any details about those battles, the point is God's going to win, His way on His timing, so we might as well get on the winning side now, before we meet that ultimate fate.
- b) Remember why Isaiah's getting so "hot and heavy" here. Most of the people living in the Southern Kingdom have also turned from God. Even those who were going to synagogue they were going just through the motions, but their hearts weren't into it. The warning is to not just giving God "lip service of seeing Him on Sundays and ignoring how He wants us to live the rest of the week." With that scary thought in mind that no matter how hard we try, we can't beat the "game", we cannot get out of the game and the game is fixed, that leads us back to realize the greatest thing we can do with our lives is use it for His glory.
- c) Now that I've beaten that point to death, we can get back to Isaiah lecturing us about how we are wasting our lives when we turn from Him.

18. Verse 22: Now stop your mocking, or your chains will become heavier; the Lord, the LORD Almighty, has told me of the destruction decreed against the whole land.
- a) In this verse it says that Isaiah's critics are mocking him. That referred to Isaiah's "here a little, there a little" refrain that Isaiah's critics were saying that his message was too simple and not reflective of the issue's they were dealing with.
  - b) What Isaiah's saying here is whether they realize it or not, they're making it worse when they imply things like, "Isaiah's talking empty words, or Isaiah's making predictions that won't happen for centuries. Why should we change our lifestyle based on what this man is preaching to us?" I believe we can relate to that type of statement. Let me put it in our terms: "Why should we worry about when the world will end or when Jesus will return? We have enough issues to deal with." The answer is we don't know how long we have to live. From the perspective of eternity, we only have a short time to live. If we say Jesus is not going to return for many years from now, why should we worry about this? Not that it is definitely going to happen tomorrow, but because the best use of our time is to use it to make a difference for Him as let's face it, eternity is a whole lot longer than the time we have to live here and now.
  - c) Let's not forget the literalness of these verses. In about 100 years after Isaiah said this, the entire Southern Kingdom was destroyed by the Babylonians who relocated the survivors out of that land. My point is even though we don't know the future, we don't mess with God as again, "we can't win and we can't get out of the game."
19. Verse 23: Listen and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I say. <sup>24</sup> When a farmer plows for planting, does he plow continually? Does he keep on breaking up and harrowing the soil? <sup>25</sup> When he has leveled the surface, does he not sow caraway and scatter cummin? Does he not plant wheat in its place, barley in its plot, and spelt in its field? <sup>26</sup> His God instructs him and teaches him the right way. <sup>27</sup> Caraway is not threshed with a sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over cummin; caraway is beaten out with a rod, and cummin with a stick. <sup>28</sup> Grain must be ground to make bread; so one does not go on threshing it forever. Though he drives the wheels of his threshing cart over it, his horses do not grind it.
- a) At this point, Isaiah gives us the examples of things a farmer does and doesn't do in order to produce good crop. Before I begin, remember that most Israelites were farmers and can relate well to these illustrations. He starts by saying, "when a farmer prepares a section of soil for planting, does the farmer keep turning the soil over and over again? Of course not. Once the soil is ready, one starts to plant the crops. Yes that is obvious, but the point here is the farmer is working on accomplishing a specific goal of getting crops to grow, not just to "perfect" the soil. Then Isaiah states the next step, which is planting different types of seed in different areas of the farm. Then Isaiah states in effect what a farmer won't do: To use the wrong tools for the wrong purpose. Without giving a big lecture here about what is cummin and caraway, lets just say they are plants. Just as we wouldn't drive over any a thing we value with a car, Isaiah says we wouldn't roll over a crop with a cartwheel.
  - b) Then Isaiah describes the proper way those items are harvested. OK, enough with all the farming lessons, how does this tie to Isaiah's lecture in the rest of the chapter? Thought you'd never ask. Here goes: The point is just as there is a proper way to farm, so there is a proper way God expects us to behave. Just as farmer learns how to properly use his or her tools so we should learn the proper way God wants us to live. Again we're coming back to the basic idea that God expects us to use our lives to a make a difference for Him with out lives. If you get that, you get the main purpose of this story and this chapter.
20. Verse 29: All this also comes from the LORD Almighty, wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom.
- a) Isaiah ends this section by saying in effect, God knows what's best for our lives. None of us know the future, but God knows all things. Again, "it's His game" and "His world" so we might as well accept it and use our lives for His glory.

- b) Remember that Isaiah's just getting warmed up. We're reading a speech that goes from Chapter 28 through 35. No I'm not going to cover all of it in this lesson, but I just like us to see the "context" of Chapter 28. In other words before Isaiah can tell us how we should be living, first he had to describe how we're "messing up" and that is Chapter 28.
  - c) With that stated, we're ready to take on Chapter 29.
21. Chapter 29, Verse 1: Woe to you, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David settled. Add year to year and let your cycle of festivals go on. <sup>2</sup> Yet I will besiege Ariel; she will mourn and lament, she will be to me like an altar hearth.
- a) The first question one should ask here is, "What is Ariel, and why should I care?" Realize that Ariel is a nickname Isaiah uses for Jerusalem. Well if that's the case, why doesn't he just say Jerusalem? To answer realize with "Ariel" means. There are two meanings of the Hebrew word transliterated Ariel here. One is "The lion's city" as recognize it as the place where God will rule from. The other translation is about the burning of sacrifices for all of us to recognize Jerusalem as the place where our sins are taken care of. Either way Isaiah is using a colorful way of saying of all the places that exist on our world, Jerusalem is the place where God rules from, will literally rule the world from one day and where our sins are "taken care of" then as well as today.
  - b) With that emphasized, Isaiah's related point is despite all of that, the Israelites living there at Isaiah's time were treating life as if it will go on forever with no changes ever coming.
    - i) It would be as if they were thinking, "God can't destroy this place, He rules over the world from here and all the sacrifices for sin are made here. We have nothing to worry about as far as any upcoming invasion."
    - ii) To put this in our vocabulary, we don't have to worry about how we live out our lives, we know we're saved, so why should be worry about what God thinks of how we're living our lives?"
    - iii) Yes, Isaiah's preaching about the upcoming destruction of Jerusalem, but just as God can wipe them out for failing to be a witness for Him, so He has the right to take us anytime He wants to if we fail to live as He desires we live. If you get that you get the main point of this message.
  - c) Most of us know that God destroyed Jerusalem at the Babylonian Invasion as they failed to be a witness for Him. Most Christians will argue that the reason the God allowed the Romans to destroy Jerusalem was their failure to recognize Jesus as God. Jesus Himself predicted the fall of that city in the "Olivet Discourse" in 3 of the 4 gospels. What I'd like you to consider is the official Jewish reason why God allowed the Romans to do destroy it once again: Because they failed to teach the bible to the "Gentiles". To put it another way they failed to be a witness to God to the nations around them. Personally, I'd argue both of those reasons are correct. They failed to recognize their Messiah when they came and they failed to be a witness to God to other nations around them. Either way, they suffered tremendously at both destructions.
  - d) I bring all that up here as Isaiah's describing the fall of that city here in Verse 2. Realize it is not going to happen until about 100 years after Isaiah's time, which is just another proof that Isaiah is a spokesman for God. If you don't know, an "altar hearth" is a fireplace. It's describing how Jerusalem will burn like a huge fire pit.
  - e) Speaking of a fiery destruction, Isaiah is just getting "warmed up" here:
22. Verse 3: I will encamp against you all around; I will encircle you with towers and set up my siege works against you. <sup>4</sup> Brought low, you will speak from the ground; your speech will mumble out of the dust. Your voice will come ghostlike from the earth; out of the dust your speech will whisper.
- a) To paraphrase, he's saying that someone will build a siege wall around Jerusalem as they will starve out the residents. Whoever doesn't surrender, will be burnt as the city will be burnt to the ground.



- b) Even as the residents cry for help, God will here that cry as if it's just a "mumble". God's saying the time's coming when it's too late to cry out for help.
  - c) So when is it too late for us? We don't know. All we do know is that God gives each of us an unspecified time to live here and use that time to make a difference for Him. Just as He allowed His people back then to suffer greatly way back then, He's got every right to "pull the plug on us" anytime He wants to. So if we use our lives for God, does that mean we'll live longer? Of course not. It just means we're using our time as He desires we use it.
  - d) Remember that the purpose of this life is not to live forever or as long as possible, but only to use the time we have to make a difference for Him. What about our life? Of course we still have to earn a living and do things. The point is not to waste the most valuable thing God's given us just to "live" or just to entertain ourselves. That's the underlying point.
  - e) God is punishing His people for failing to be a witness for Him. He has every right to do that to us as well and that scary thought is the underlying point of this lesson.
23. Verse 5: But your many enemies will become like fine dust, the ruthless hordes like blown chaff. Suddenly, in an instant, <sup>6</sup> the LORD Almighty will come with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with windstorm and tempest and flames of a devouring fire. <sup>7</sup> Then the hordes of all the nations that fight against Ariel, that attack her and her fortress and besiege her, will be as it is - with a dream, with a vision in the night -
- a) To understand this, realize the locals there believed Jerusalem's destruction is impossible. I can just hear them saying, "God can't destroy this place. He's invested too much into it. He's called us to be a witness to Him. His temple is here! He will rule over the world one day from here. Who cares if we're just going through the motions? Who cares if we're not using our time as God desires we do. He's called us to be His people and He can't go back on His word." All of that is true. What's equally true is that God can destroy a place or a church or a place that fails to be a good witness for Him. The issue isn't so much what He will do, the issue is our accountability to God. Remember Jerusalem was in the Southern Kingdom. They were "just going through the motions" and failing to be a witness for Him. That's why Isaiah gets all "hot and heavy" here.
  - b) It may help to remember that Babylon is just a city. For them to have an empire they have to agree to let people from other lands be a part of their empire. It's like saying join us in our victory or be separated as we're in charge around here!" I say that because Isaiah tells us that a "horde of all the nations" fight against Jerusalem. To state the obvious that also applies to those who joined the Romans in their destruction of Jerusalem centuries later.
  - c) My point is Isaiah is being literal in his prediction of Jerusalem's destruction even if it did occur more than once in history. Even as the residents of Jerusalem were thinking God'll not allow that to happen, Isaiah's stating the future as if it's a "done deal".
  - d) Realize that Isaiah loves to work in word pictures that people can understand. He is not saying that Jerusalem's destruction will be permanent, but it will be so bad, that life will not go on forever as they knew it back then. Isaiah's describing the city's destruction as it did occur around 600 BC and again when the Romans destroyed it around 70AD.
  - e) All right, what's the application, besides learning ancient history? That life as we know it today does not go on forever. The reason I push so hard for us to use our lives to make a difference for Jesus is let's be honest, we don't live forever as we currently do. Since we'll live forever either serving God in heaven or away from Him forever in hell, we should get used to the idea of serving Him as that is the reality of eternity.
  - f) Let me try this another way: When we die, we don't sit on a cloud somewhere or in a big home somewhere watching television for eternity. I'm convinced the greatest way to have joy in this life as well as the next one is to be of service to others. That just means if we do use some of our lives to help others, that is a proof of our salvation. It doesn't earn us our place in heaven, it is just a proof that we're using the gifts God's given us in order to make a difference for Him. In the meantime, we left Isaiah describing Jerusalem's destruction:

24. Verse 8: as when a hungry man dreams that he is eating, but he awakens, and his hunger remains; as when a thirsty man dreams that he is drinking, but he awakens faint, with his thirst unquenched. So will it be with the hordes of all the nations that fight against Mount Zion.
- a) Some of us know the joke that a person dreamed he ate a big marshmallow and woke up in the morning to discover the pillow is missing. That's sort of the idea being described in these verses. It would be little like eating a big meal, but not feeling full.
  - b) Remember that Isaiah is using colorful illustrations to describe Jerusalem's destruction a long time (about 100 years) before it occurs.
  - c) So if this large army is not "satisfied" with destroying Jerusalem, what does it mean? Back in the literalness of history, both the Babylonians as well as the Romans hundreds of years later went on to destroy everything else in the area. It may help to remind us again what's God's purpose for doing this: They failed to be a witness for Him to others around them. The main thing I'm trying to get across is the danger each of us as Christians can face both in this life and for eternity if we fail to use our lives as a witness for Jesus. It's the classic, "carrot and stick" approach that God uses on us: That is a promise of destruction of life as we know it if we fail to be a witness for Him versus the promise of eternal joy in our lives if we do use it for His glory. That's what God's trying to communicate to us through His word and through the observation of history.
  - d) Meanwhile Isaiah's still getting "colorful" in his description:
25. Verse 9: Be stunned and amazed, blind yourselves and be sightless; be drunk, but not from wine, stagger, but not from beer. <sup>10</sup> The LORD has brought over you a deep sleep: He has sealed your eyes (the prophets); he has covered your heads (the seers). <sup>11</sup> For you this whole vision is nothing but words sealed in a scroll. And if you give the scroll to someone who can read, and say to him, "Read this, please," he will answer, "I can't; it is sealed." <sup>12</sup> Or if you give the scroll to someone who cannot read, and say, "Read this, please," he will answer, "I don't know how to read."
- a) Remember in the earlier part of this lesson when I spent time discussing the danger of if one wastes their lives away being drunk all the time? The good news is I'm not repeating any of that here. The idea of Verse 9 is Isaiah's using an illustration of being so hung over, one doesn't remember what happened and comparing that to Jerusalem's destruction. It's like saying, "I'm so shocked at the completeness of this destruction, it's like I just woke up from being drunk and I can't believe all the horror that I'm looking at right now."
  - b) Also remember that this destruction doesn't occur until about 100 years in the future. It'd be easy for those Israelites to think, "That's our grandchildren's problems. I'll just live like I want to live and ignore this warning of whenever all of this is going to happen."
  - c) Remember that even though the actual destruction of Jerusalem won't occur for about 100 years, the threat of destruction will be real until then. You may recall from earlier lessons that the Northern Israel kingdom made an alliance with Syria directly to the north as both of them were threatening to attack the Southern Israelite kingdom where Isaiah lived.
    - i) If all of that wasn't bad enough, the Israelites Isaiah was preaching to were also all to aware of the expanding Assyrian Empire which at that time was working their way south to where Jerusalem was. Even though Babylon wasn't a major power at that time, the threat of destruction was very real at the time Isaiah wrote this.
  - d) With all of that in mind, Isaiah's painting a picture here of the destruction being so bad, it would be as if one is drunk, yet one didn't drink any alcohol. It would be as if no one had warned them and nobody did. What Isaiah is also trying to get across is that even though Jeremiah and Ezekiel would also describe this coming destruction, most people refused to listen to them and wanted life to "go on as normal" as if that destruction won't happen.
    - i) You have to remember the mindset of the Israelites back then: "God can't destroy this place, His temple is here and He promised to literally rule here one day. How can He destroy the Southern Kingdom without a descendant of King David ruling over this place permanently?" That's why people didn't take Isaiah seriously.

- ii) Was there also literal fulfillment of these verses? Did people really respond with a statement like, "I can't read Isaiah's scroll, it is sealed" or "I can't read this because I don't know how to read"? The answer is we don't know, but I suspect it did come true as Isaiah predicted if for no other reason than to validate Isaiah as a prophet.
  - iii) In the meantime, Isaiah goes on to explain why his people are being condemned.
26. Verse 13: The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men. <sup>14</sup> Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish."
- a) You might recall from my first few lessons on Isaiah, that he spent a lot of time lecturing us on "giving God lip service". That is the idea of for example, going through the motions of going to church, but our hearts are not in it. One of the pastors I listen to in preparation of these lessons described his former life as a policeman. He was describing a man he saw in church who he arrested the night before, for domestic abuse. The point being that God cares how we act "all the time", not just in church settings. I'm not saying we each have to be perfect. I'm saying that behavior matters and even as believing Christians, God expects us to live based on what the 10 Commandments teach to make it simple.
  - b) One also has to understand that for centuries, most Israelites ignored how God did expect them to live. Israelites ignored or deviated from God's rules to worship Him or other gods however they felt like it. That's what Isaiah meant by "rules taught by men"
  - c) Notice the "therefore" to start Verse 14: Isaiah's promising so much destruction is going to occur it will astonish the "wise" and the leaders as well as everyone else. Picture the "wise" people of Isaiah's day saying things like, "We've always done it this way, and the sun still rises and every day is just like the previous day. What makes you (Isaiah) think that life as we know it will change that dramatically?" Remember again that those living around him were convinced God would never destroy this place because the temple was there.
  - d) I've stated in previous lessons and it's worth repeating here that archeological evidence of life in Israel before versus after that Babylon destruction shows a great amount of idolatry existed there before that destruction. My point being is God went to that extreme measure of destroying Israel in order to end that idolatry. That's what it took to bring it to an end, and it worked. That thought should also scare us as believers if we examine areas of our own lives that could be considered "idolatry".
  - e) OK, we have a few more verses of bad news, and then some good news coming up:
27. Verse 15: Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the LORD, who do their work in darkness and think, "Who sees us? Who will know?" <sup>16</sup> You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, "He did not make me"? Can the pot say of the potter, "He knows nothing"?
- a) Imagine thinking, "Nobody sees what I do that I know God doesn't approve of. Nobody's aware of what I do at home in private. Even if I believe God knows all things and knows what I am doing, I don't care because nobody else sees what I am doing." With that tough thought in mind, Isaiah says, "Who sees us, who will know?" in Verse 15. To use another illustration, imagine a clay pot telling the pot maker how the pot should be made! What's being communicated is the age old idea of us telling God how we want to live out our life and we don't want Him to tell us otherwise.
  - b) Here is Isaiah reminding us that God's in charge, God knows how we live and God made us to be a witness for Him, and not to live however we please. We can think of the whole lesson as God's "carrot and the stick" approach to living as He desires, not only because it is the best way to live, but also because that's why He created us in the first place. That is why Isaiah's lecturing those Israelites way back then as well as believers in Jesus today of how we're called to live as a witness for Him. The issue isn't earning our salvation, it's the idea of "what are we doing with our salvation?" That's the lecture we're all getting here.

28. Verse 17: In a very short time, will not Lebanon be turned into a fertile field and the fertile field seem like a forest?
- a) Lebanon is an area just north of Israel along the coastline. Remember that the threat of an invasion generally came from the north. That's the direction both the Assyrians as well as the Babylon's used to attack Israel. If an invading army came from that direction it would mean that the cities and towns in Lebanon would be reduced to a field and the fields that are there would be like a forest. What Isaiah is describing is land that would be used for a productive use like a place to live or a place to have farms. Instead, Isaiah is describing it as being a "wasteland", using colorful metaphors. The idea is to get across of the danger coming from a north direction that's threatening their way of life.
  - b) OK, I promised some good news, and that begins in the next verse:
29. Verse 18: In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. <sup>19</sup> Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. <sup>20</sup> The ruthless will vanish, the mockers will disappear, and all who have an eye for evil will be cut down--<sup>21</sup> those who with a word make a man out to be guilty, who ensnare the defender in court and with false testimony deprive the innocent of justice.
- a) Whenever one sees the expression, "In that day" in Isaiah as well as most of the prophets, realize the focus is on "the day" when the Messiah (who we Christians call Jesus) will rule over the world as we know it. It's as if Isaiah's saying, "Yes things are bad now, and they will get worse, but this is not the end of God's plans of using Israel as a place where He'll be honored as God. Isaiah gets positive here among all this doom and gloom as to remind us that the problems we face are not "the" end. There is going to be more life in the world as we know it than all the suffering that exists. The only reason all of this hasn't occurred yet is God's waiting to gather in as many believers as possible before "it" begins. To state the obvious, just as the world began one day, it has to end. Isaiah's describing "the end" of the world as we know it when the Messiah rules one day.
  - b) As to the specific's, we'll know it happens when suddenly, "deaf can hear and blind see". Yes that's describing a few of the miracles Jesus did, but that was to prove He is God. In these verses, it's describing a future day where all suffering will end. Those that humbly choose to follow Jesus will enjoy that day of the Messiah ruling over the world. All those who oppose that concept will vanish as implied in Verse 20. Even those who practice bad judgment in court will end. The picture being painted here is that of God bring in a world of justice as well as a world where suffering comes to an end.
  - c) It may help at this point to remember that Isaiah's giving a "seven chapter" speech and we are only at the end of the second chapter. (The chapter breaks were not put in until about the time of the printing press millenniums later.) My point is that Isaiah's taking a break from describing all the destruction around him to give us the good news that all of this is worth it. It's worth all the death and destruction in order for believers to realize how God expects us to live and what are the consequences of refusing to live as He desires. We get the good news of life during the reign of the Messiah, to remind us of the eternal benefits of living as God desires we do. That's why Isaiah "sneaks in" this positive message during his "big talk" about the coming destruction. Let me end by saying, that's not all there is to this talk, or else we'd be done by now.
  - d) With that said, I've got three more verses to go in this lesson.
30. Verse 22: Therefore this is what the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, says to the house of Jacob: "No longer will Jacob be ashamed; no longer will their faces grow pale. <sup>23</sup> When they see among them their children, the work of my hands, they will keep my name holy; they will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. <sup>24</sup> Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction."
- a) Isaiah continues to be positive here as to say despite all of this bad stuff, God still will do great things in the future for those who trust in Him and they'll bless God in that day.

- b) What Isaiah's saying here is despite all the mistakes Israel is making by turning from Him with their lives, despite the drunkenness, despite those who think Isaiah's message is just too simple for them, despite those who think we'll trust in our own survival instincts as we don't want God to be in charge of every aspect of our lives, God will literally rule over the world one day whether we like it or not, so we might as well accept the idea of Him being in charge of every aspect of our lives right here and now. That's the main point of Isaiah's lecture and the idea God's trying to communicate to you and me.
  - c) That's why Isaiah ends this section of an eight chapter speech by saying in effect, despite the best efforts of those called by God to turn by Him, He will still rule over the world one day in a literal sense, so we might as well trust in now for our lives. When that day occurs in the future, Israelites living there in that land will acknowledge Him as God. What this means for you and me is that because God will literally rule over the world one day from Israel, we might as well trust Him now as whether we like it or not, whether we accept it or not, He will win in the end. That is why the best thing we can do with our lives now is to use it for His glory. On that happy thought, let's close in prayer.
31. Father, we thank You that You've separated us to be a witness for You. Help us not to waste the most valuable thing you've given us, "our time" for only our own issues or pleasure. Just as You have called those Israelites so long ago to be a witness for You, we also realize that You've called us to live a life that glorifies You in all that we do. We ask that through Your power, we use our life as You desire and make it obvious to us how it is You want us to live so that we use our lives as You've called us to live. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.