

1. Let me start with my lesson title: "Why God desires to take away our options". What I mean by that is that God wants all the credit for how we live. He doesn't want us to trust in anything else for our salvation. I say that because in these chapters, we read of the Israelites considering going to Egypt for help against a coming invasion in their land. If you recall, we're in the middle of an eight chapter lecture by Isaiah that focuses on life in Jerusalem around 700BC. The short version is the Israelites living there were facing a serious threat of extinction as alliances of adjacent lands and nearby empires were threatening to destroy Jerusalem and the surrounding area.
  - a) With that understood what the Israelites living there were seriously considering was to go back to Egypt, the land where they were once enslaved and ask for their protection. When Isaiah wrote this, the leaders of the Southern Israelite kingdom where Isaiah was, had sent an envoy to Egypt to bring them gifts in exchange for their protection. The issue isn't over whether or not others can help us. The issue is seeking God's will before asking for help.
  - b) The underlying point for you and me is that God wants us to trust in Him and Him alone for our salvation. What I see God do in the life of believers over and over again is remove our other "options" so we trust in Him alone. That way He alone gets the glory as we will triumph over whatever obstacles or barriers we face in life. Does that mean for example if I'm sick I shouldn't see a doctor? If I need help, I shouldn't seek it? Of course not. All I'm saying is God wants us to trust Him alone to be the center of our lives.
  - c) The way I was taught this principal is, "Live as if God's your only option and get help as if He's not there." What I mean is He'll will never do for us what we can do for ourselves. If we are trusting God, that means we're trusting that He's guiding our decisions as we pray for His guidance and make the best decisions possible without violating any biblical ideas that God desires we live by.
2. All of that leads me back to this text. In this section, the Israelites living around Isaiah wanted to return to Egypt and offered gifts in exchange for protection. In effect, those Israel was attempting to bribe their way out of their problems. As you read through the text in this section of Isaiah, all I want you to consider are there aspects of our life where we're effectively saying to God, "I don't need you to help me with "x" aspect of my life. I've got it covered all by myself." What most of us as Christians have had to learn the hard way is that we stumble the most in our "strong suit" and not our "weak suit". What I mean by that is areas of our life where we think we're fine and do not need God's help. It's often the areas of our life where we fall because we failed to seek His help in those areas of our lives. That failure to seek God to guide our lives is the underlying problem we read about in this lesson.
  - a) All I saying is as we read about these Israelites turning to Egypt for help millenniums ago, the issue isn't to think, "Too bad for them, now they're going to get it". The issue is to look at our lives and to examine if we too are "turning to Egypt (a biblical symbol of the world) for help" as opposed to trusting God to guide our lives.
  - b) Again to state the obvious again, God doesn't have a problem with us seeking help to deal with our issues as long as we're not violating any biblical principals to do so. The issue is always are we seeking Him first for guidance, and then making the best decisions possible under the rules laid out for us in the bible. That's the issue we as Christians face daily and that is the issue these Israelites are violating by sending an envoy to Egypt bearing gifts as they beg Egypt for help.
  - c) To also state the obvious, if that's all there is to these two chapters, we'd be done by now. We also get more lectures on the coming Messiah (Jesus at His second coming) as if to say this is not all there is to life, as we know it. We must use our lives to tell others that there is coming a day when God will not only judge all people, but literally rule over this world as we know it, so we might as well use our lives for His glory.

3. With that said, we've got a lot of ground to cover in this text, so let's get going as we continue to study Isaiah's lecture on how God wants us to live, as we make a difference for Him in the world around us. These chapters focus on us turning to the "world" for solutions as opposed to asking God to guide us through our issues. As I said, the issue is not asking others for help. The issue is are we asking Him to guide us how He wants us to live? Are we living by biblical principals that are taught in the bible? That's the underlying lesson of this text. Now let's specifically look at the details of what God wants to teach us about trusting in Him alone for our lives.
4. Chapter 30, Verse 1: "Woe to the obstinate children," declares the LORD, "to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin; <sup>2</sup> who go down to Egypt without consulting me; who look for help to Pharaoh's protection, to Egypt's shade for refuge.
  - a) Let's start with the phrase "obstinate children". Isaiah's addressing Israelites who God has called to be His witnesses. Obstinate refers to someone who stubbornly refuses to change his or her mind. The point is Isaiah's insulting his audience by telling them they refuse to do what God's called them to do. The accusation is made because they collectively refused to live, as God desired, which simply means to use biblical principals as a guide as how to live one's life. They "added sin to sin" by not only ignoring His guidance, but also turning to the "world" for help.
  - b) I have to admit that on the surface, this seemed like a logical thing to do. Those Israelites were facing a real threat of extinction by the Assyrian Empire. Egypt is a powerful nation located just to the south of them. It is logical that they would send an envoy bearing gifts to ask for help. If we were sick, it would be logical to seek medical help. The issue isn't to seek help, but to ignore God to seek out help. The point is trying to live out our lives like everyone else around us means we're not a witness for God. It's like the age old question of how would anyone even know we are a Christian unless we live differently enough so the people around us know we're believers? That's the sin Isaiah's preaching against here in this text.
  - c) Let me put it this way, if the Israelites were seeking God and living as He desired I'm sure that they wouldn't have been destroyed as a nation around that time era. There's a saying among bible scholars that it took the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions to rid Israelites of idol worship (worship of false gods). The scary lesson for you and me is that He can take you and me "out of the ballgame" as easily as He wiped out those Israelites so long ago.
    - i) What I mean by that is God could end our lives or simply end our effectiveness as a witness for Him by ignoring what He's called us to do: be a witness for Him. If you get that, you get the underlying problem being discussed in this text.
5. Verse 3: But Pharaoh's protection will be to your shame, Egypt's shade will bring you disgrace. <sup>4</sup> Though they have officials in Zoan and their envoys have arrived in Hanes, <sup>5</sup> everyone will be put to shame because of a people useless to them, who bring neither help nor advantage, but only shame and disgrace."
  - a) Let me get the technical note out of the way first. "Zoan" and "Hanes" were simply places in Egypt in those days. Think of Zoan as where Israel's top officials were going to deliver their present to Egypt. Hanes is an "outpost" that keeps guard over that area.
  - b) If you don't know your ancient history, Egypt around this time in history stopped being a great power. They lost to the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Egypt was a very powerful force in that region for millenniums, but their dominance came to an end with the rise of these empires, let alone Greece and Rome later.
  - c) That leads me back to this text. Isaiah's saying that Israel will be "put to shame" as Egypt won't be able to help Israel as again both the Assyrians and the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians in famous ancient battles. It's said that the Babylonian defeat of Egypt changed the course of human history forever in that region. My point is God's telling Isaiah well in advance of this, that Egypt will lose, so trusting in their help won't help Israel.

- d) That's why these verses describe Egypt's help as bringing "shame and disgrace" to Israel at their time of crisis at this moment in history. God was saying to them through Isaiah to trust in God for protection and not the world around them. The same holds true for us as we trust in God to guide our lives. Like I said, I believe in seeing a doctor if I need help. I believe in helping others and others helping me when I need it. What I don't want to do is violate any biblical principals to do so: The principal being ignored by the Israelites is the abandoning of God in order to seek the help of a nation that is famous for enslaving them many centuries earlier. The issue is the danger of trying to return to our old way of living before we became saved and that's what the Israelites did as they sent envoys to Egypt to ask for help.
6. Verse 6: An oracle concerning the animals of the Negev: Through a land of hardship and distress, of lions and lionesses, of adders and darting snakes, the envoys carry their riches on donkeys' backs, their treasures on the humps of camels, to that unprofitable nation,<sup>7</sup> to Egypt, whose help is utterly useless. Therefore I call her Rahab the Do-Nothing.
- a) In this text, we have a couple of ancient nicknames for Egypt. The word "Negev" refers to a desert, which is most of Egypt. The word "Rahab" also is an ancient name for Egypt and has nothing to do with "Rahab the harlot" from the book of Joshua.
- b) What Isaiah's trying to do is paint a picture of Egypt as a dangerous place for the Israelites to go as it's full of danger of being attacked by lions or poisonous snakes. Here we get the direct reference to representatives of the Southern Kingdom of Israel (where Isaiah lived) bringing gifts down to Egypt. By the way when we get to Chapter 36, we'll get additional references to the king of Israel at that time, Hezekiah as he sent envoys to Egypt.
- c) That leads me back to this text. God's nickname for Egypt at this time is "Do-Nothing". It is a reference to the fact that Egypt won't be able to help Israel in their time of trouble.
- d) If you're thinking, none of this ancient history is helping me with my life, realize that just as God allowed His people to be destroyed as a nation for failing to be a witness for Him, so He can "take us out of the ballgame" as I love to say, or worse take away our ability to be a witness for Him. Let me put it this way, I've seen some pastors lose their positions or place of prominence due to sins they've committed. I've seen Christians lose what they've built up for failing to live as God desired. All I'm saying is this warning to those living in Israel way back then applies just as much as us today as we too are called to be a witness for God in all that we do. OK, with that tough thought stated, back to Isaiah.
7. Verse 8: Go now, write it on a tablet for them, inscribe it on a scroll, that for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness.<sup>9</sup> These are rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the LORD's instruction.
- a) Ever wonder why Isaiah wrote this book as opposed to just telling those Israelites living way back then what God was thinking? Part of the reason is stated here in Verse 8. It is so that future generations can learn from the mistakes those Israelites made. Let's face it, Isaiah didn't stop Israel from sending an envoy to Egypt to get help. God asked Isaiah to write this down so in we could learn from their mistakes.
- b) It's amazing to consider that for 2,700 years, the book of Isaiah has been studied by many a person (multitudes) to learn how God desires we live. That's an "everlasting witness" as described in Verse 8. Did Isaiah realize it would last that long? Doubt it. However, what he did by writing this down was make it possible for multitudes of Jewish and Christians to learn how God expects us to live.
- c) With that said, notice how harsh Isaiah is being on his fellow Israelites, calling them a big bunch of "deceitful children unwilling to learn God's instructions".
- d) Remember my key phrase about being a Christian: Now what? Once we realize Jesus is God and in charge of our lives, now what? The now what is using our lives as a witness for Him. The issue isn't salvation it's about being a witness for God. That's why Isaiah is condemning fellow Israelites here as they refused to live as God called them to live.

8. Verse 10: They say to the seers, "See no more visions!" and to the prophets, "Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions." <sup>11</sup> Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!"
- a) To paraphrase Isaiah, hey you bible preachers, get away from me! We don't want to hear anymore about how God wants us to live! Tell us lies about how life can be wonderful if we do whatever we feel like doing. Don't tell us how we're accountable to God with our lives, as we don't want to live that way. That's what these verses are effectively saying.
  - b) I've always been amazed how Jesus said that the road is "narrow and hard" that leads to eternal life and the road leading to destruction is wide. (See Matthew 7:13.) That principal that Jesus taught is easier to see when one realizes that most people only want to live their own way. Most people think they're going to heaven because they think their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds. They don't want to hear how God desires we live, which is as a completely forgiven witness for Him. Therefore, they're asking Isaiah for "pleasant things and illusions" that life will be wonderful as if they can do whatever they want, and ignore God's desires to use their (and our) lives for His glory.
9. Verse 12: Therefore, this is what the Holy One of Israel says: "Because you have rejected this message, relied on oppression and depended on deceit," <sup>13</sup> this sin will become for you like a high wall, cracked and bulging, that collapses suddenly, in an instant. <sup>14</sup> It will break in pieces like pottery, shattered so mercilessly that among its pieces not a fragment will be found for taking coals from a hearth or scooping water out of a cistern."
- a) Isaiah's saying to those Israelites who have rejected God's message of turning to Him as a guide to our lives, that their sin of ignoring Him will be like a wall that we see crack then it will collapse on then. Isaiah then uses a second illustration of pottery that shatters into so many tiny pieces it can't be gathered up. The idea here is people don't realize just how damaging it is to their eternal destiny when they refuse to live, as God desires they do.
  - b) OK John, too bad for them. I try to be a witness to others. Assume that those of us who're reading this are believers. What do we do about this? For starters we should never think, "I'm saved, too bad for you!" Jesus called us to be a witness for Him. He's called you and I to use our lives to make a difference for Him. To lead others to Him and help others to draw closer to God. As I like to say, "What do you enjoy doing? What'd make you happy to do all day? Then how can we use those gifts to make a difference for God? That is how we use our lives for God's glory. It isn't the size of our ministry that matters. It's when we do something to use our lives to make a difference for Him.
  - c) OK, enough of me lecturing all of us, time for Isaiah to take over!
10. Verse 15: This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it."
- a) Verse 15 is important if for no other reason than to prove it's never too late to change our lives and turn to God. We can't mess up our lives enough to lose our opportunity to be a witness for Him. There are Christians on "death row" in prison. There are Christians who have been addicted to drugs to years. There are also Christians who haven't had a tough background who realize the best way to live is to use their lives for His glory. I'm giving that message as Verse 15 in effect says the same thing: "Hey you Israelites, it's not too late for any of you to turn to Him". However despite all of Isaiah's preaching and despite all of the effort made by others seeking God at that time, most people didn't want anything to do with living as God desires. That's way Isaiah says, "You would have none of it".
  - b) Let's be honest, being a witness for Jesus is hard work. Most people will reject that call to change their lives. Most people won't listen no matter how obvious it is that God's way is the best way to live our lives. However some do get it and some do change, which is why we stick at it, knowing the reality of eternity. I'm well aware of the fact that many people will only read a little of what I write and reject this message. I know that my writing style isn't for everyone. I just do what God calls me to do and keep going.

11. Verse 16: You said, 'No, we will flee on horses.' Therefore you will flee! You said, 'We will ride off on swift horses.' Therefore your pursuers will be swift! <sup>17</sup> A thousand will flee at the threat of one; at the threat of five you will all flee away, till you are left like a flagstaff on a mountaintop, like a banner on a hill."
- a) These verses remind me of a principal that God warned the Israelites about centuries ago in Deuteronomy: "The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth." (Deuteronomy 28:25, NIV)
  - b) Here in Isaiah, the Israelites are telling him when the danger comes of the attacking army, we will flee from these on horses. Isaiah responds with, "Your pursuers will be swift" as if to say your enemies will catch you no matter how fast you can run away. The same idea's taught Verse 17 as I quoted in Deuteronomy. When we refuse to live, as He desires we do even if we outnumber an enemy, they will drive us away for turning from His will.
  - c) The final reference to a flagstaff or a banner is about abandonment. It's kind of like saying here is "home", but everyone is running away from home base! All that's left of home is a lonely flag on a hill. Isaiah is saying here as well as Moses back in Deuteronomy, if we do choose to abandon God in one's life, we'll be pursued to a point of death. It's like saying, "You want to live out a productive life, live as God desires us to live. Running away from God will just cause the world to collapse more and more on us."
12. Verse 18: Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! <sup>19</sup> O people of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you.
- a) Suppose you were an Israelite living back then and you knew you were guilty of ignoring how God wanted you to live. Would you feel ashamed of approaching God? I've known a few people who were convinced they'd be struck dead if they ever stepped in a church. They think they've ignored God for so long, they can't approach Him. I state all of this as part of the Christian message we're to preach to others is that it is never too late and He'll not strike you dead if you ever set foot in a church. The hardest thing for most people to do is to take that first step toward God, especially if they've ignored Him all of their lives.
  - b) I gave that little speech here, because these verses are great one's to show nonbelievers of how it's never too late to turn to God. Most of us veteran Christians know this, but even here in the Old Testament there are verses designed to call people to God who've ignored Him. It shows that He's anxious to have a relationship with all people. I also know well it's hard for people to share the Gospel message with others as we fear negative reactions to that message. The reason we need to preach it above that fear, is that some people will get it and turn to Him.
  - c) That's why here in these verses we read of God saying to those He's called, come to Him, God is willing to guide any and all people willing to trust in Him for guidance. I suspect most of us have seen many a life change for the better when people make that decision.
  - d) When we show people how God will "answer you" when we cry for help, He does listen. Does that mean all our problems will instantly disappear when we trust God? Of course not. It just means He's willing to guide us through life and help us as stated here. A lot of it is about changing our attitude about life. Accepting Jesus is about seeing our lives from His perspective and seeing the eternal plans He has for people. Living for Jesus will bring us far more joy than any other thing we can seek in this life.
  - e) That's why Isaiah is telling all of us that we are "blessed" if we wait for Him. That doesn't mean we sit there waiting to go to heaven. It means we are blessed if we use our lives for His glory. The secret is to develop a habit of thinking, "OK, Jesus can return any day now, therefore, I'll use my life for His glory in case that happens". We can be a witness for Him at any place or time, if we realize that God's always watching us and guiding us.

13. Verse 20: Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. <sup>21</sup> Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." <sup>22</sup> Then you will defile your idols overlaid with silver and your images covered with gold; you will throw them away like a menstrual cloth and say to them, "Away with you!"
- a) Remember how I said just because we accept Jesus as being both God and in charge of our life, that doesn't mean all our problems, will instantly go away? Consider Verse 20 as it is saying God gives us the "bread of adversity and water of affliction". There's a phrase that will scare away new believers! A relationship with God does not make our problems go away, it just gives us the perspective to see them as God sees them. Verse 20 says that our teachers will be "hidden no more". It's the idea that those who've God has called to be His disciples will pay attention to those who preach from His word. This is not saying you'll hear voices in your head saying, "Go this way, that's God's will". What Verse 21 means is if we make a habit of seeking God daily, by learning His will by studying His word, we'll be able to make good decisions that benefit our lives.
  - b) In Isaiah's day, to honor the false gods people believed in, they would make statues lined or covered in something valuable like silver or gold. A modern equivalent would be like saying, "I'm trusting in my bank account or my savings and I don't need God's guidance." Another false god is to trust in the fact I alone can work my way out of my problems or I can trust in someone famous to lead me." All of those are "false gods" that God wants us to turn from in our lives, as we trust Him.
  - c) I admit at times, I love Isaiah's colorfulness in his expressions. He says we should discard those false gods like a used "menstrual cloth" and say you are no longer any good to me.
  - d) So does that mean I should take all my savings and give it to a Christian charity? No. All I'm saying is we look to God for guidance, as in trust in what the bible teaches us how He desires we live our lives. It means we don't hold too tightly to whatever blessings we get in this life as if that is all we'll ever get. God loves a "cheerful" giver, not one who gives as if because we "have to". (See 2nd Corinthians 9:7, on the issue of giving.)
  - e) From here, Isaiah gives some examples of how God blesses us that we rarely think about.
14. Verse 23: He will also send you rain for the seed you sow in the ground, and the food that comes from the land will be rich and plentiful. In that day your cattle will graze in broad meadows. <sup>24</sup> The oxen and donkeys that work the soil will eat fodder and mash, spread out with fork and shovel.
- a) A logical question to ask for a nonbeliever or a new believer is "How has God blessed me as my life has been messed up to date?" One can point out that God designed weather so that rain comes on the earth to water it and food can be grown. However, that point isn't Isaiah's intention here: Remember that Isaiah is predicting Jerusalem's destruction. He's still saying that will take place. He's saying that despite all that bad news, there will still be a wonderful future for God's people (that's you and me) as He'll provide for us what we need to survive and thrive.
  - b) What would you say to someone dying of cancer about Jesus? What about someone with a horrible disease or who's wasted away their lives say on drinking or drugs? Is He going to bless their lives with all of this? Remember that Isaiah is speaking to a bunch of people who are on the verge of being conquered and wiped out as a nation. That tough situation back then is in effect no better than some of these other tough examples I just gave. What I pondered is how do you share the joy of a relationship with God with someone who's on the verge of facing death? While I'm positive that whatever heaven is like, it'll be a much more pleasant life than whatever we face here and now. However, what I suspect Isaiah's getting at is to think beyond ourselves and consider the future of our descendants. He's saying that despite whatever problems we're facing God has a wonderful future plan for those of us who are trusting in Him both in this life and in the next one.

- c) All of that "utopia" is put in terms that Isaiah's readers could relate to. That's why Isaiah uses terms that describe how our weather system works so people can have food to eat. He also says God provides us with domesticated animals so we can work the ground so we can have food to eat. Remember how I said God will never do for us what we can do for ourselves? Here are examples of what God can do for us and won't do for us: He can create an environment that provides rain for the ground. At the same time He expects us to work the ground so it will produce edible things. The point is despite whatever we're dealing with, God provides us with an environment where we can survive and thrive and then He expects us to take the footsteps necessary so we can provide for ourselves. That's the essence of these verses.
15. Verse 25: In the day of great slaughter, when the towers fall, streams of water will flow on every high mountain and every lofty hill. <sup>26</sup> The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days, when the LORD binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted.
- a) While Isaiah is thinking of ways God is blessing our lives, he jumps back to the ultimate future "utopia" when Jesus rules over the world. Notice that whenever Isaiah brings up life in that utopia, he gives us clues as to how to recognize it when it happens. Here he is saying when the Messiah has slaughtered all His enemies, and after all of their towers are fallen, water will still flow from melted snow on high places. At the same time the moon will be as bright as the sun and the sun will be seven times brighter. My point is we'll be able to tell if Isaiah is correct because strange things like this will occur. The reason he is stating this millenniums before it will occur is to give hope to those of us trusting in God that He will win one day and create a world different than we have it today.
- b) Yes we need to know about this stuff even if it happens long after our lifetime because if we do rule over the world with Jesus as the bible says, then we help enforce His rule over this world and we'll be a part of it. Meanwhile, Isaiah's getting on a role and I interrupted his "role" to give my comments.
16. Verse 27: See, the Name of the LORD comes from afar, with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke; his lips are full of wrath, and his tongue is a consuming fire. <sup>28</sup> His breath is like a rushing torrent, rising up to the neck. He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction; he places in the jaws of the peoples a bit that leads them astray.
- a) Ok, what is the "Name of the LORD"? The first clue is that "LORD" is in all capitals. That means it refers to the most holy name of God. It sort of means God is who He is, deal with it or more literally, "I am that I am". The idea is that when the Messiah comes, who again we Christians argue is Jesus, will come in the most holy name of God the father.
- b) Now notice that when He comes, He will be angry. It reminds me of the classic bumper sticker that reads, "Jesus is coming back and this time He's really angry!" We get that idea from this text. Why's He so angry? It's about God's judgment on the world He created, as if to say, "I built this world so that those I created can honor Me as God and live as I desire they lived. Since people refuse to honor Me as God, I need to come back there one day to enforce My rules over this world." That's a way to describe Jesus Second Coming. Again the reason Isaiah gives us so many clues as to how life will be different, is so we recognize this event whenever it occurs. Again, even with the advantage of hindsight of history, we can count on these events occurring one day as Jesus promised us He'd return one day to rule over the world.
- c) With that said, let's return to Isaiah's day for a moment. Why is Isaiah trying to scare the Israelites of his day with all of this stuff? Part of it is to get his fellow countrymen to turn to God as opposed to sending an envoy to Egypt for help. It's like saying, "God's going to judge us and right now He's not happy with how we're living our lives. Whether we like it or not, we're all in big trouble for turning from Him and we have to face His judgment." For you and me, it's about accepting His guidance, as He wants to rule over all our lives.

17. Verse 29: And you will sing as on the night you celebrate a holy festival; your hearts will rejoice as when people go up with flutes to the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel. <sup>30</sup> The LORD will cause men to hear his majestic voice and will make them see his arm coming down with raging anger and consuming fire, with cloudburst, thunderstorm and hail. <sup>31</sup> The voice of the LORD will shatter Assyria; with his scepter he will strike them down. <sup>32</sup> Every stroke the LORD lays on them with his punishing rod will be to the music of tambourines and harps, as he fights them in battle with the blows of his arm.
- a) While Isaiah is getting on a role describing life after the Messiah comes, Isaiah gives us a few more things that will happen in that day. While the time of Jesus return is "bad news" for those who refuse to believe in Him, it will also be a time of celebration for the nation of Israel. Just as it was and is common for Jewish people to sing songs to God as they gather together on holidays, so there'll be singing and rejoicing as they travel up to Jerusalem as they sing of His rule beginning on earth, whenever that does occur.
  - b) A little Christian theology might be helpful here. This is describing life after the complete number of believers is determined. It's like God saying there will only be a finite number of people who will be saved, not infinite. What that number is reached, that's when Jesus will return to rule from Israel. In order for Jesus to return, Israel has to exist as a nation so He has a place to rule the world from. Paul makes an interesting statement in Romans 11, where he says. "Then (after the full number of believers is determined) all of Israel will be saved." (Romans 11:25). The point is Israelites in that day will recognize and accept Jesus in that day and it will be a time of celebration as Israel will no longer have to face the real threat of extinction.
  - c) At the same time, there's also a "short term" fulfillment of these verses. Remember that the big threat at that time was the growing Assyrian Empire. The idea behind these verses, is that God will not only work when the Messiah comes to rule, but that also in their day He will work by stopping the Assyrian army from overthrowing Jerusalem. I stated in some previous lessons that Isaiah told of the slaughter of 185,000 Assyrian troupes, just as they were about to attack Jerusalem. That famous historical act, which I'll discuss more in later lessons of Isaiah, and is recorded in several places in the bible. It's God's way to say, "This is my holy city and I'll decide who'll rule here!" Yes Jerusalem will later be destroyed by the Babylonians but that is God saying to the next generation, you still won't listen to me even after all you've been through!" In the meantime Isaiah's predicting there'll be a great party when the Assyrians are destroyed before they conquer Jerusalem.
  - d) I suppose my point of all of this is God still works in this world, and not just say when the Messiah returns or when Jesus walked the earth. He still interferes in the world He made as if to remind us that God's still there guiding our lives and He'll do for us what we can't do for ourselves if we're willing to trust Him through this life. Therefore despite the fact that Israel went to Egypt for help, God will win and protect Jerusalem because He and He alone decides who will rule from that city.
  - e) With all that theology out of my system, I believe it's time to move on.
18. Verse 33: Topheth has long been prepared; it has been made ready for the king. Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of burning sulfur, sets it ablaze.
- a) Topheth refers to a place just outside of Jerusalem where trash was burned. I can describe other references to this place both good and bad in Jewish history, but let's just say it was known as a place for burning things. Here Isaiah's saying, you know that place where we burn stuff? Well, when the Assyrian army comes, that place will be ready to go as there'll be a big fire there to burn the casualties of God's judgment.
  - b) Is this verse describing the idea of "annihilationism"? (That's the false idea of there is no hell, and when you die, that's it.) No, it's describing what's done with the bodies and the supplies of those God's judged in a bad way at His coming. Judgment still comes!



- c) I suppose the point is life will be very different when the Messiah comes, but at the same time, one has to dispose of the damage done to try to conquer that city. Realize this verse was literally fulfilled when the 185,000 Assyrian soldiers were destroyed. So how do we know that is the exact number? My guess is they kept a running total of all the bodies the Israelites had to dispose of. I also see this verse as having both a short term and long term fulfillment as most prophecies do in the bible. The point is just as the Messiah will defeat Israel's enemies during the time of "Revelation" (to put it in simple terms) so I'll argue that this prediction will repeat again as there will be another burning of dead stuff when Jesus returns.
  - d) Let's back up a moment and realize the purpose of this chapter: The Israelites that lived in the Southern Kingdom of Judah were sending gifts to Egypt in hopes that they'd help the Israelites fight against the Assyrian Empire. God says in this chapter what a big waste of time it is for the Israelites to go there, as God Himself will protect Jerusalem as well as the Southern Kingdom if the Israelites did trust in Him. God's proving He's still guiding His people as the Assyrian army was destroyed before they entered that city.
    - i) The point for you and me is that God wants us to trust in Him and Him alone for guidance as to how to live our lives. Even if we don't see the return of Jesus in our lifetime, we will be a part of this event when we return with Him. Therefore, it is important to learn a few of these details so we know what we're getting ourselves into when we do commit our lives to serving Him for all of eternity.
  - e) With that said, I'm going to take on one more shorter chapter in this lesson as Isaiah still has more to say to those Israelites who at that moment, still wanted Egypt's help to deal with the "crisis of the moment" as opposed to trusting God for His guidance.
19. Chapter 31, Verse 1: Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD. <sup>2</sup> Yet he too is wise and can bring disaster; he does not take back his words. He will rise up against the house of the wicked, against those who help evildoers. <sup>3</sup> But the Egyptians are men and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit. When the LORD stretches out his hand, he who helps will stumble, he who is helped will fall; both will perish together.
- a) Isaiah admits that Egypt is a powerful nation. They had "horses and chariots" which were the source of power of a strong army. The ancient version of a "tank" was a larger chariot that was used in battle. The point Isaiah makes here is in effect, "Yes Egypt has power but so does God, who can do far more damage than any army let alone the Egyptian army."
  - b) Remember when I started this lesson I talked about whether or not we should see a doctor if we are sick, or just pray about it? Of course I believe we should get the help we need in a tough situation. The issue is whether or not we're trusting God through our difficulties, or just relying on human resources. Like I said we should pray as if it's all up to God as to whether or not we make it through our predicament and then make the best decisions we can or get whatever help we can without violating any bible principal.
  - c) The problem with the Israelites back then, is they were ignoring "Part 1" (Seeking God) in order to go straight to "Part 2" of seeking outside help. For them to turn to Egypt for help would come with a big price. The Egyptians knew their history of how the Israelites had left them. They could say to the Israelites, "So where is your God now? You've left Him to seek us for help?!" The point is it would be a disaster for Israel to go back to Egypt for help as the Egyptians would view it as a sign that when the chips are down, God can't be counted upon for help." That's why we read Isaiah here making the case of how major a disaster it would be for the Israelites to seek help from the place they left in the first place in order to seek God.
  - d) The modern equivalent might be like thinking, "This Jesus stuff isn't working for me, and my life is falling apart, what else is out there?" That's what Isaiah's preaching against.

- e) That's why Isaiah's making the case of seeking God for help and not anyone or anything else. It'd be like saying, "Why turn to people for help, when you've got God's phone listed on your speed dial" to use an outdated phrase! Again, to use my medical illustration, it's not wrong to have others help us. The issue is to trust God first and see if we are violating any principals laid out for us in His word before we turn to other things for help.
  - f) Now that I've beaten that point to death, we can move on to the next verse.
20. Verse 4: This is what the LORD says to me: "As a lion growls, a great lion over his prey-- and though a whole band of shepherds is called together against him, he is not frightened by their shouts or disturbed by their clamor-- so the LORD Almighty will come down to do battle on Mount Zion and on its heights. <sup>5</sup> Like birds hovering overhead, the LORD Almighty will shield Jerusalem; he will shield it and deliver it, he will `pass over' it and will rescue it."
- a) Here Isaiah gives us more illustrations that people can relate to. The first is of a lion as he growls over what he caught. The reason lion's growl is as a notice to other predators near that lion is that "this is my catch, don't mess with it!" If a bunch of shepherds just lost one of their sheep to this lion, the lion is giving notice that it is not afraid of the shepherds and is growling to prove it. The point of that illustration is that God's not intimidated if an army is about to attack Jerusalem as God considers that place "His city" and effectively is giving out a growl to say, "You can't touch that place unless I say so".
  - b) Stop and consider that as Christians, God says to those who want to hurt us, "Don't touch them as they're one of mine!" Does that mean if we jump off a cliff, we won't die? That's not the point. The point is God is working to guiding those of us He calls "His people" to make a difference for Him and guide our lives for His glory. Yes God allows many to be martyrs for Him, but it's usually to lead others to Him or closer to Him. As the old saying goes, "The relatively easy thing to do is be a martyr for Jesus. The real challenge is to live for Him daily!"
  - c) That leads us to the second analogy in this text. Just like birds fly and hover in the sky, so God watches over us to protect and deliver us. Like I said, many a Christian has had to be a martyr for their faith, so the issue isn't to have every Christian live out a long life on this planet. The issue is if we're living to do His will, He promises to guide us, help us and as a bird can fly over our heads, so God is in effect flying over us, watching what we do and even help us by doing what we can't do for ourselves to make a difference for Him.
  - d) As a literal example, God saved the city of Jerusalem from destruction way back then. It's the example Isaiah's trying to illustrate for us of how God protects us over ways we can't do things for ourselves. OK, I've beaten that point to death, so it's time to move on.
21. Verse 6: Return to him you have so greatly revolted against, O Israelites. <sup>7</sup> For in that day every one of you will reject the idols of silver and gold your sinful hands have made.
- a) Notice how Isaiah is begging the Israelites to return to the God that has called them to be "His people". It's the idea that it's never too late to turn to God, but if we've turned away from Him we suffer the consequences until we turn back.
  - b) I admit, it's hard for us to relate to the idea of making a literal idol out of silver and gold. The Israelites did not think those idols were literal gods, they just represented what it was they trusted in back then. The closest I can compare it to would be like someone saying, I trust in my wealth to get me out of this problem. Another comparison would be like if we say, I don't have to worry about this or that problem, as I've earned enough wealth to deal with it. Therefore having an idol in one's house made of valuable things is about trusting in one's wealth and not God for protection.
  - c) God's counterargument is, "Do you think your pile of silver and gold is going to help you if there is a big army surrounding you?" That's why we read of Isaiah preaching so heavy here against the idea of trusting in anything other than God Himself. What if we think we don't have that problem as we're not wealthy? The tough question for all of us is what are we trusting in other than God Himself in order to have joy in our lives?

22. Verse 8: "Assyria will fall by a sword that is not of man; a sword, not of mortals, will devour them. They will flee before the sword and their young men will be put to forced labor. <sup>9</sup> Their stronghold will fall because of terror; at sight of the battle standard their commanders will panic," declares the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, whose furnace is in Jerusalem.
- a) Isaiah is continuing to give his colorful way of describing how it'll be "God's sword" that brings that large army to destruction, not Israel's army or say help from Egypt. You and I are seeing this point driven home strongly, not to learn how God did intervene in Israel's history back then, but to remind us that He will do for us what we can't do for ourselves if we're willing to trust Him for guidance.
  - b) Of all things, that leads me back to my lesson title about God taking away our options. If you've been a Christian for awhile, you learn that God doesn't like to share His glory with anyone or anything. There are times where God "goes out of His way" to demonstrate to the world that He is God and He is in charge. This is one of those times here.
  - c) Coming back to the death of the 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, realize that the army they had that surrounded Jerusalem was even bigger than that! Those who weren't killed were put into forced labor. The leader of this invasion went home and was killed by his own son as stated in 2nd Kings 19:37.
  - d) Here Isaiah is describing this victory from Jerusalem's perspective. It describes the panic of the Assyrian leaders as their army died and the fire pits that were used in Jerusalem to destroy the bodies of the attacking army. This is God's way of saying "I know the history of the world before it occurs. I'm describing here what'll happen in Jerusalem before any of it occurs." The point for us is to realize is if God knows that history before it occurs, He also knows what we're going to face in our future and wants to guide us so we'll make a difference for Him as we intersect with our own future!
23. I admit I was tempted to squeeze in one more chapter, but I figured I ran long last time, so I'd be good to cut this one a little short. Besides the focuses changes from "Getting help from Egypt" to the topic of the coming Messiah in Chapter 32, so it's best if I cut it off here.
- a) If there is one main point I'd like you to remember from this lesson it is that God loves to take away our "other options" so that He and He alone gets the glory for whatever victory we do get by serving Him. That's why God often allows us to go through hardships so it can teach us to trust Him even more through whatever it is we have to deal with in life.
  - b) Does that mean God has a big ego and has a need to be worshipped? No, the issue is the best way to have joy in our life is to use it to make a difference for Him. It's about giving Him honor for our sakes, not His. It's about us taking the time to honor Him as God as it is the best way to live out our lives.
  - c) That is also why He loves to take away our other options as if to say, "Well, I guess we've got to pray as there is nothing else we can do about this!" I've lost count of the number of times in my life where God's "saved the day" when I've let go of other options. As I have stated throughout this lesson, yes I'd still see a doctor for medical help, but I'd pray as if it is up to God to see me through that issue and realize whatever happens I'm going to accept the ultimate result as His will for my life. Of course I'd fight to live life as long as possible but I also accept that whatever happens, is His will. That idea will give us a great sense of peace that we can't get any other way in life.
  - d) With that said, let me close in prayer as we discuss God and our options
24. Father, Help us to trust in You as if You are our only option. Help us to do whatever footwork is needed through whatever we're dealing with at the moment, but as we do the footwork to get the help we need, help us to remember You're in charge, You're guiding us and You desire we do use our lives for Your glory. Guide us as You work through our options as we use Your word as our guidance to make the best decisions possible. That way our lives glorify You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.