

Isaiah Chapters 34-35 – John Karmelich

1. Before I say anything else, for those of you who've read through all my lessons on Isaiah to date, realize we're now in the second half of the book. I "raise my glass" to you for putting up with me to date and ask that you join me as we work our way through the second half of the book. Since I am discussing milestones, this lesson also finishes an eight-chapter speech by Isaiah in which he's explaining how God is and is not pleased with us and how He expects us to live out our lives.
2. You may recall that my last lesson was called "The Good and Bad News". This last lesson on this eight-chapter long sermon by Isaiah I call, "The Really Bad News and the Really Good News", or just "really" for short. My point's that Isaiah ends this section by reminding all of us what's really important and what'll be the final outcome of all people who either chose to accept or reject God's guidance for our lives. This lesson effectively says, "By now, you've made your mind up to either accept or reject God. Let me explain the final outcome of that choice!" It's a message to Christians to understand the ultimate outcome of our choice to trusting in Jesus as being God and our Lord.
3. So is that it, a "mini-Revelation" sermon? While parts of this lesson do resemble versus described in the book of Revelation, the purpose of this final section contains something more important for us Christians: An ability to explain to others why we make the choices we do. I assume most the people reading this already believe Jesus is God. My purpose of this writing ministry is summed up with the words, "now what"? In other words, now that we're saved, what do we do with that salvation? It's not about working harder to earn our salvation, it's about using the most valuable thing God gives us, our time to make a difference for Him.
4. That little speech leads me back to this final section (these two chapters) of Isaiah's speech. Yes it is given to warn the Israelites in Isaiah's time of the ultimate danger of rejecting God as well as a brief description of the ultimate "prize" of choosing to serve God. That's important as it helps us to keep "our eye on the prize" of choosing the lifestyle that we've chosen. It reminds that despite whatever suffering we may go through for that choice, it's well worth it as the prize is far greater than whatever suffering we may go through in this lifetime.
5. With that speech out of my system, let me discuss some details about these two chapters. They do begin with the fact they're addresses to "everybody". Isaiah is well aware his primary audience is the Israelites living around him. At that moment they're living in fear for their lives, as an empire called the Assyrians are working their way south through Israel killing and relocating captives as they go. The reason Isaiah addresses this part of his speech to all people, is he realizes that God's bigger than that and the world and the nation of Israel will continue, despite that empire's threat over Israel. It's about realizing God will win no matter what we're going through at any time.
 - a) Therefore, Isaiah mixes local politics to make his point that the Assyrian problem isn't the end of God's chosen people as we can tell from hindsight. It's also a reminder as Israel is in existence today that God's not through with them as a nation. The point for Christians is to realize that God has a separate beginning and destiny for both the Christian and the Jewish nation. Yes salvation comes today through trusting in Jesus, but I'll also argue that there is coming a future day when Israel themselves accepts that concept and will also be saved not because they deserve it, but only because God made an unconditional promise that the land of Israel "will always be their land" just because He said so.
 - b) These chapters also use a type of illustration of using the smaller to represent the greater. That just means Isaiah picks a neighboring nation to Israel as an example of what'll be the results of all people who choose to reject God. It's another example of how Isaiah speaks in "double fulfillment" predictions: That just means there is often a short term fulfillment of that prediction to validate Isaiah as a prophet as well as a long term prediction which is a more literal fulfillment of that prediction. If you've been with me through Isaiah to date you know by now that Isaiah's full of predictions like that. However as important as that is, that isn't all there is to these two chapters.

- c) I think of Chapter 34 as the really bad news and Chapter 35 as the really good news. One of the teachers I have on Isaiah says that, "there's nothing in Chapter 34 that any Christian would memorize as their life verse". Meaning that it's a tough chapter to read as we learn of the end of people and nations that learn to reject God. However Chapter 35 is the good news of how life will go on forever in a great way for us who're trusting in Jesus to guide us. Think of the final chapter as Isaiah describes "utopia" for us Christians.
 - d) So how do we know Isaiah isn't making up this "utopia" to help Israel deal with the crisis of the moment? The short version is Isaiah's full of predictions that have historically come true. The idea is if we can see in hindsight how Isaiah has been "on the mark" with all he's predicted that has come true, we should be able to trust him with what'll be the future of those of us willing to bet our eternity on Jesus being God and Him paying the price for all the sins we've ever committed or ever will commit.
 - e) In fact the next lesson is going to start a four-chapter section that focus on predictions we know have historically come true. After that (Chapter 40 to the end of the book), Isaiah is changing his focus to describe life under the Messiah's rule. Before we begin all of that we still need to go through these last two chapters of Isaiah's speech about what to expect by our choice to accept or reject God's rule over our lives. The point is if we really would like to understand our ultimate destiny for accepting or rejecting that choice, we need to study these last two chapters. Speaking of which, I'd say it's time to get started on the text itself.
6. Chapter 34, Verse 1: Come near, you nations, and listen; pay attention, you peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world, and all that comes out of it!
- a) As I stated in the introduction, this section (chapter 34) is addressed to all people. It's as if Isaiah was aware many non-Jewish people and eventually non-Christians would be aware of what he wrote. It's as if Isaiah understood his writings would be read as part of a series of books that we call the bible. We'll get more clues of that idea later in this lesson.
 - b) Even with the "who" established, notice Isaiah's is begging any person from other nations to pay attention. It's like saying to everyone, "what I'm about to say is going to affect your eternal life, so please pay attention to me because whether you want to think about this or not, the God who created you has an eternal plan for you, and I'm about to reveal what it is God wants you to know about your future.
 - c) Now if that doesn't scare you into reading further, I don't know what else to write. ☺
7. Verse 2: The LORD is angry with all nations; his wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, he will give them over to slaughter.
- a) Remember that when Isaiah wrote this, the Israelites living around him were very afraid as the Assyrian Empire was threatening to end the existence of the Jewish nation. That's why Isaiah is reassuring them how God is still angry with nations and how He'll make a total end of their armies that desire to destroy His temple in Jerusalem.
 - b) This is one of those "double fulfillment" predictions. As I've been teaching all through the book of Isaiah, there was a famous miracle that is about to occur, where the entire army of the Assyrians were destroyed in one night by God when they surrounded Jerusalem. My point is one can see the "short term" fulfillment as being about the Assyrians. For those of us who know our history, Jerusalem eventually was destroyed twice since then. Once by the Babylonians as judgment by God for Israel's failure to turn from idols. I'll also argue that the second destruction of that city by the Romans was God's punishment for failing to accept Jesus as their promised Messiah. As I stated in the introduction, God said He'd give the land of Israel to them permanently, which is why I believe they're back there as I write this lesson.
 - c) My point is simply that Isaiah's describing both the "short term" fulfillment of God's anger at nations that desire to harm His people with a "long term" fulfillment of describing what we call "Revelation" judgment in one sentence. Let me explain further:

- i) The most important point to grasp is that God rules over this world. If He created it in the first place, He has every right to do with it as He wills. If He wills a group of people to have a specific piece of real estate, who are we to argue?
- ii) I also admit it's tough to grasp the concept that God did "call" the Assyrian Empire to destroy much of Israel out of punishment for Israel's collective sins. At the same time we read of God desire to punish foreign armies for hurting His people. It' s to realize that God wants the world to realize Israelites are His people. By having an army attack His people and then destroying that same army, both of those acts do show us that God rules over His people and there is a horrible price to pay for the fact of messing with God's people.
- iii) If Isaiah's also talking about the ultimate end of the world as we know it, that'd fit the text as Isaiah says God's angry with all armies and will destroy them. Consider the battle that we call "Armageddon". It literally describes a large army that is set to destroy Israel once and for all. I picture it as a very large army of Muslims who don't want to accept the idea of Israel as "God's chosen people" and desire to wipe it out once and for all. It's described in Revelation Chapter xx. That book doesn't mention the "Muslim" part. That's just how and why I see it taking place.
- iv) It may help to remember when one reads the bible, to see it as being Israel focused. All I mean by that is to see it with Jerusalem being the "center of the world". When the text says God hates all the armies of the world, read that as being armies that'll desire to destroy God's chosen people.
- v) I'm sure during the days when Romans were persecuting Christians just for being a Christian, they saw these verses as being against the Romans. In a sense it is true as God has a "hatred" of those who attack those who trust in Him, be it Israelites in Isaiah's day or Christians today. My point is when you read of God being angry at the armies of the world, the focus is on those armies wanting to hurt His people.
- vi) So if God is so angry at those armies, why does He allow them to exist in the first place? Why did He allow Jerusalem to be destroyed after this prediction? For that matter, why did He allow the Romans to destroy Israel let alone kill multitudes of Christians in the first few centuries of the church's growth? The answer is that He allows such armies to exist, ultimately to fulfill His purpose. For example God did use the Assyrians to destroy much of Israel as to show to the world that God won't tolerate disobedience among His followers, and then wipe out that same army as it is a statement that God still rules over that land and it's not to be messed with.
- vii) The same can be said about why God allows armies and evil people for that matter to kill many people who trust in Jesus. God never promises a long life for those of us trusting in Him. God promises that if we do trust Him, He'll guide our lives for His glory and use our lives as a witness for Him. God exacts His revenge on those who turn against His people on His timing and His way. I believe an ultimate end will come in "Armageddon" one day as much as I believe the historical fact of how the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Romans did destroy Jerusalem as God did allow all those events to occur to show the world He is in control of all things.
- d) OK, I just gave a page long speech to explain how and why God gets angry, why He did allow Jerusalem to be destroyed several times in history and how God deals with armies who's job it is to destroy God's chosen people. Once we grasp the concept that God is on the side of believers working "His way" on "His timing" ultimately to prove to as many as possible that He rules over the world and it will end on His timing, we can accept why He allows so many believers to go through so much suffering and death as we are the pawns as well as the prizes in God's battle against those who choose to rebel against Him based on a free will decision.
- e) OK, I've made my point here. Time for Isaiah to give us some more details about this:

8. Verse 3: Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood.
- a) Again, we need to picture this from Israel's perspective. They'd know when all of this has come to pass when large armies of dead bodies are all over Israel. As I've stated in earlier lessons on Isaiah, the number of dead bodies from God destroying the Assyrian army was a total of 185,000 soldiers. I'm convinced the Israelites knew that number as they counted all the bodies they buried. My point is simply if we are talking about God's destruction of the Assyrian army, or if one is thinking of the ultimate fulfillment of this prediction when the battle of Armageddon will occur either way, it fits this prediction.
 - b) I admit I've always been fascinated by the question of why does Satan want to stop God's plans for mankind? I'm positive he knows his bible intimately, and he's well aware that a great battle like Armageddon takes place that leads to his ultimate doom.
 - i) So why does Satan bother? He's well aware of the fact that Jesus' return means his rule over the world ends. I believe he's doing all he can to delay God's plans from occurring. By having a large army destroy Israel, it delays longer, the time before Jesus can rule from there. That's why history is full of times of attempts to destroy Israel as a nation, so Jesus can't rule from there one day.
 - c) That little speech leads me back to Isaiah. His point here is any and all attempts to prevent God's plans from occurring ultimately will end in failure. Isaiah's colorful description of a bunch of dead bodies piled up or a mountainside covered in blood is his way of making a point of how bad people will ultimately lose when we turn from God's plans for our lives.
9. Verse 4: All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.
- a) If you have any doubts that Isaiah's not talking about the ultimate end of the world as we know it, I present Verse 4. The way we can tell whenever all of this will occur is the stars in the sky will cease to exist and the sky will be "rolled up like a scroll".
 - b) I admit, it's hard with all of our knowledge of the heavens to describe them as the end of their existence as being rolled up like a scroll. I accept the idea that if God's greater than what we can comprehend, if He can create our world in the first place, then He can end it just as easily as He created it. The question of how long did God take to make the world has always bored me. I figure if God is God, He can make it in six milliseconds or over six billion years. God chose the six-day time frame to teach us about the concept of resting in Him once every seven days. That's why I prefer the literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and not any figurative one. When I'm in doubt about interpreting a bible passage I'd rather be too literal than too figurative. I figured God can't punish me if I take the text too seriously as opposed to not taking it seriously enough.
 - c) Let me put it this way, if we can accept the idea of a God creating our world, why can't we also accept the idea that God can end it anyway He wants to when He wants to? Who are we to argue with Him? The reason Isaiah put this verse here is so that mankind can know when this final battle occurs as the world as we know it will come to an end.
 - d) For those who can't comprehend the idea of looking up at the sky and realizing why they are used to seeing at night, no longer being there, Isaiah also uses the illustration of leaves that fall off a tree as they get old and unpicked fruit coming off a tree. In both cases this is a sign of things coming to an end as we know them.
 - e) Let me approach this tough topic from a different angle: How can people tell when life as we know it comes to an end? Will it be global warming? Will it be a nuclear disaster or a big comet hitting the world? If you accept the idea that the world we occupy was created by something greater than ourselves, then we should accept the idea that the same power we call God has the right to end it whenever it is His decision to do so. So we'll recognize this event when it occurs, Isaiah gives us lots of clues "how" so we'll know when it comes to an end. OK, enough of that, let's move on to the next verse.

10. Verse 5: My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; see, it descends in judgment on Edom, the people I have totally destroyed. ⁶ The sword of the LORD is bathed in blood, it is covered with fat-- the blood of lambs and goats, fat from the kidneys of rams. For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah and a great slaughter in Edom.
- a) To understand these verses, first we have to remember that Isaiah's describing how the world as we know it will end. Isaiah's uses a specific example to describe the big picture here. What I mean is sometimes we use an illustration of something specific to describe something bigger than that. I say that because I'm convinced that in these verses Isaiah is describing the end of a nation just east of Israel called Edom as an example of how God is planning to end the world, as we know it.
 - b) OK, that's confusing. Let me explain this better: Edom was a nation just across the Jordan River. Today it's part of Jordan. When one is in Israel and one looks across that river even today, the land across that river is still referred to the mountains (high hills) of the land of Edom. This nation has a history with Israel that's been more bad than good. It started back in Genesis when Abraham had a son named Isaac. When Isaac was married he went on to have twin sons. One of them named Jacob was the father of the 12 tribes of Israel. Jacob's twin brother was Esau. My point is Esau became the leader of the Edomites.
 - i) Jacob and Esau had battles as brothers, so their descendants had rivalry issues that go on to this day. Let's just say the Edomites traditionally have never gotten along with the Israelites and have been rivals ever since.
 - ii) The point of reciting all that history is that because God picked the descendants of Jacob to be the "chosen people" (that is, the Israelites) and not the Edomites there's been war between those nations for millenniums.
 - iii) Think of Edom as an example of those who've chosen to reject the God of the bible. Just as Esau sold his birthright in Genesis 25 as "he didn't care about that stuff", so the nation he founded (Edomites) also rejected God. In the Old Testament book of Malachi (last one chronologically in the Old Testament) he states that "Jacob I have loved and Esau I have hated". (Malachi 1:3). Once again emphasizing the fact that God has picked the Israelites to be His chosen people and not the Edomites.
 - iv) OK John, you've lost me again. Where are you going with this? The point is Isaiah is using Edom as an illustration of whom God will judge: Those who've chosen to reject God. Edom is singled out here as they've had a long history of hating Israel and being their enemy. When great empires conquered their way through Israel as well as the surrounding area, Edom always fought against Israel even though they are technically cousins. That's why Isaiah singles out Edom and Bozrah, its capital city, as an example of God's judgment on the world.
 - c) My point is this is a tough passage to understand unless one knows a little of the history between those two nations. The context of the passage is Isaiah's describing God's really bad judgment on those who choose to reject Him, and Isaiah picks the nation of Edom as an example of people who choose to reject God's will for their lives.
 - d) Let's stand back for a moment and ask, "Why should we care about this stuff? After all, I am a good Christian and I believe Jesus died for all my sins. Why should I care that God is going to judge Edom?" The issue isn't just "them", it's all our neighbors. It's seeing the world from the perspective of all people either belong to God or belong to Satan as he is in charge of this world. It's about realizing what's really important in life: The fact that it will be destroyed one day, and the only hope people have for eternal life is to turn to God to trust Him for His salvation. The point is we should care about nonbelievers. Jesus said He wants us to go into all the world baptizing people in the name (singular) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. My point is the reason we should care about this "stuff" is it reminds us of what God calls us to do: Tell others about His destructive plans for this world. Our only hope is to turn to God to guide us despite all of this really bad news.

- e) Believe it or not, that leads me back to these verses. Remember in Verse 1 that Isaiah said he's talking to "all nations" not just Edom. Edom's just the example being used here. That is why as Isaiah is describing this great slaughter to take place in Edom, we have another example of a double prophecy. When the Assyrians conquered much of this area, Edom's destruction was as literal as this destruction we read here in Isaiah. However, the country of Jordan exists there today with the point being that the destruction wasn't permanent.
 - i) That's why I'll argue this is a double prediction: The future prediction is about the end of the world with Edom singled out as an example of those who refuse to trust in the God of the bible as the God. Again think of this as the specific (Edom) as an example of the general (the whole world who rejects God) being an example here.
 - ii) Now that I've now pounded that point to death, so we can move on!
11. Verse 7: And the wild oxen will fall with them, the bull calves and the great bulls. Their land will be drenched with blood, and the dust will be soaked with fat.
- a) There is a sad reality we rarely think about: When God destroys a place, not only will He destroy people who reject Him, but all the creatures that exist in that place will also die. I remember one time I was asked to think of a wonderful place to visit. For us Americans it can be Hawaii or the Grand Canyon or some great water spot. The point is the world will be destroyed, which includes the great places and the bad ones and we have to accept it.
 - b) That's one way to interpret the animals dying in Edom as that place is destroyed.
 - c) A second way to interpret this is God is comparing people to "wild oxen" who've refused to trust in a single God that has created the world. Before I move on, for those of you who like the King James Version of the bible, they actually use the word "unicorn" here. No it's not about mythical animals. Back in the 17th century when that bible was published, that word unicorn was used to describe a single horned animal. That's my entire point.
 - d) The way I see this verse is it's describing the complete destruction of Edom as they were a prime example of those who wanted to destroy Israel as they refused to accept the idea of the Israelites being God's chosen people.
 - e) The next time you go through doubts that the bible is God's word, I ask that you consider the nation of Israel: How do you explain their history and their existence unless the bible is the word of God? They were hated then for being God's chosen people as they're hated today for the same reason. As I love to say, Christians are chosen in that we're separated for God's use just as the nation of Israel is chosen as God made an unconditional promise to give that land to them. I'll argue that one is saved today by believing Jesus is God and He died for every sin we ever will commit. However, that fact does not negate what God has promised to the nation of Israel, which is why I refer to them as God's chosen people.
12. Verse 8: For the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of retribution, to uphold Zion's cause.
- a) To understand what's going on, put yourself in Jerusalem at this time. They were afraid as the possibility of their end as a nation was very real. Recall the Assyrians successfully conquered the Northern Israel Kingdom and were now moving south to Jerusalem. Edom encouraged the Assyrians by effectively saying, "Jerusalem is right over there, go destroy that place while you're in the neighborhood".
 - b) Therefore it'd be logical for God to cry out at that point, "This is My land and these are the people I've called to be a witness for Me. I allowed the Northern Israel Kingdom to end as they went into idolatry for so long, the most merciful thing I could do was let them die as they're beyond any hope of saving. However, despite the fact most Israelites had rejected Me as being God, I still want to prove to the world that I'm God so I'm going to show the world that I'm still in charge of it and I decide who'll rule over My city."
 - i) That little speech is my reminder that God planned a day of revenge to show first the Assyrians and eventually the whole world that He's in charge and He alone is going to decide when the world is going to end. That's why I don't fear the idea of global warming, because God alone decides when the world will end, period.

- c) To sum all this up, the threat of the Assyrians ended with the slaughter of 185,000 soldiers which didn't happen at this point and we'll cover in the next lesson. The real threat of the end of the world as we know it, obviously hasn't happened yet, as God's waiting for some specific number of people to be saved before He effectively says, "that's a wrap".
- d) Now that we've got the big picture down, it's time to get back to Edom as an example:
13. Verse 9: Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become blazing pitch! ¹⁰ It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever. From generation to generation it will lie desolate; no one will ever pass through it again. ¹¹ The desert owl and screech owl will possess it; the great owl and the raven will nest there. God will stretch out over Edom the measuring line of chaos and the plumb line of desolation. ¹² Her nobles will have nothing there to be called a kingdom, all her princes will vanish away. ¹³ Thorns will overrun her citadels, nettles and brambles her strongholds. She will become a haunt for jackals, a home for owls. ¹⁴ Desert creatures will meet with hyenas, and wild goats will bleat to each other; there the night creatures will also repose and find for themselves places of rest. ¹⁵ The owl will nest there and lay eggs, she will hatch them, and care for her young under the shadow of her wings; there also the falcons will gather, each with its mate.
- a) I know I put a lot of verses here in one group, but I wanted you to see the big picture how complete a destruction there will be of Edom. Like I've been saying all through this lesson about Edom, is that whatever did happen 2,700 years ago isn't as complete as these verses. My point is whatever way "Edom" was destroyed between the Assyrians conquering that area as well as the Babylonians a century later, know it wasn't a complete of a destruction as described in these verses.
- b) OK, so how do we know Isaiah's not just exaggerating here? How can we tell whether or not Isaiah's just exaggerating to make his point about the empires that conquered there so many millenniums ago? Because Isaiah didn't address this section to the Edomites, but to the whole world. It's as if God's saying, "Watch me make an example out of Edom what'll be the end of the world as we know it."
- c) Let me put it this way: our world as we know it must have had a beginning one day. That means it's also going to have an ending one-day. The bible gives us clues all over the place how it will end this chapter is one of those clues so we'll know when it starts. That's why I don't fear world destruction by a nuclear bomb or global warming as I'm positive God's in charge and He'll end it on His timing the way the bible describes it.
- d) In the meantime, Isaiah is singling out Edom here to say the destruction of that place will be so complete it will only be inhabited by wild scavenger animals like the type named in these verses. To state the obvious, if this is the end of the world as we know it, it can't be describing wild animals inhabiting the land of Edom. Therefore, we get a "double scope" in view here. Yes it was describing life for a long time after those Empires worked their way through that area. I also think it describes life during the tough "Revelation stuff" we read of in that book. The point is before the time Jesus comes to rule the world, there will be a time of horrid destruction and I believe the destruction of Edom is part of that future time era that we read about in much of Revelation.
- e) Let me put it all this way: I don't know when all of this horrid destruction will take place in what is traditionally called the land of Edom and is part of Jordan today. All I know is if I take my bible seriously, I wouldn't want to be around that place when all this bad stuff starts to occur. The point for you and me is God cares for all people and wants all people to turn to Him to guide our lives. Life as we know it can't go on like this forever, as there has to be a day where God "rights the wrongs" of the world. If we can look up in the sky to realize something greater than us has created the world, then we have to accept that the entity that created us must have some purpose for us to live here. That purpose is to give Him the glory for the world and share with others about Him to avoid all this destruction that has to occur one day in order for God to rule over the world as He intended it to be.

- f) As I also like to state, if God doesn't exist, this world is very unfair and always will be. If He does exist, then that God who must be perfect by definition, He must also be perfect in His judgment of the world. One of the reasons He gave us the bible is so we'll know when all of this "bad stuff" begins. As I also like to state, "If this is His world, He has every right to do with it what He pleases as He created it in the first place". That means as horrid it is as any suffering we may have in this life, that is the only suffering we'll ever get, if we do trust in a perfect God to avenge those of us who trust in Him and have used our lives as a witness for Him. My point of that overly long sentence is if we're willing to bet on Him to guide us for all of eternity, that means we trust Him not only for today, but through what we have to deal with in the future. That also means He's going to send to hell all of those who refuse to trust His guidance for our lives. It also means He's going to destroy places that have chosen to reject Him. That's why God allowed the Israelite kingdoms to die, as they collectively turned from Him "beyond repair". That's also why God will bring places like Edom to an end as an example of what'll happen to places that reject His plans for our lives and for the world.
- g) OK I admit, I got very "hot and heavy" in that last paragraph as I described why God will allow the world as we know it to end with Edom as an example. God uses the "carrot and the stick" principal to draw us closer to Him. All I mean by that is He rewards those who recognize His existence and adjust their lives accordingly and He punishes those who are refusing to change their lifestyle based on the reality of His existence. The reason He gave us commandments to obey in the first place is so we'll live differently enough from people who refuse to believe in Him so we can make a difference for Him in the world. I figured if God can get all "hot and heavy" describing Edom's destruction, that's my clue for me to get all "hot and heavy" to warn us of the dangers of turning from God in the first place.
- h) Suppose you're thinking, "I already believe Jesus died for all my sins. I believe He is God. Why should I worry about Edom if I believe all of this? Recall that the only reason we are saved is someone took the time and trouble to teach us about Jesus. God effectively says to us, "If someone led us to Me in the first place, what makes us think we can just sit here and not be a help to someone else?" In other words, it's not meant to be an exclusive club. God wants to use us to be part of His plan for leading others to Him and helping others to draw closer to Him. That's what living the Christian life is all about.
- i) OK, time for me to turn the "hot and heavy judgment" reigns over back to Isaiah here:
14. Verse 16: Look in the scroll of the LORD and read: None of these will be missing, not one will lack her mate. For it is his mouth that has given the order, and his Spirit will gather them together.
- a) Let's be honest, the fear of death is the fear of the unknown. We struggle to stay alive and use our lives to make a difference here, because we fear what may happen to us after all of this is over. I state that here because Isaiah effectively says, "Study your bible. Nobody is going to be sent to hell who rejects the God of the bible". That idea implies that there is an age of accountability to Him. I don't think Isaiah is referring to any specific passage in the bible as much as the general principal that it's there to remind us of the eternal reality that He exists, He has a purpose for our lives and He will gather us together to be with Him in heaven forever.
- b) Remember again the circumstances when Isaiah wrote this. The Israelites living by Isaiah were in fear for their lives due the large army destroying the world around them. We can see why those Israelites would be really scared for their own lives. None of us know how long we'll live. We may be alive here another 100 years or we may die today. That's why we get a reassurance here that this life is not all there is to life. That's why Isaiah is telling us to effectively read our bible as the Spirit of God will gather together all of us who trust in Him for the complete forgiveness of our sins and trust that God Himself paid the price for those sins. Therefore we don't have to fear whatever is coming our way.

- c) I should add that just because "The end" will come one day, that doesn't mean we should not plan for our future. Most likely we'll live a lot longer than just today, so therefore we should plan for our future here. All I'm saying is don't throw away everything we own as if tomorrow will never come. Of course we shouldn't hold too tightly to our "things", but that idea has to be balanced with not being foolish about our lives. Of course I am stating the obvious, but it's important to make that point when discussing a topic such as the end of the world as we know it.
 - d) This verse also mentions a reference to "none will lack her mate". Does that mean whoever we are married to will continue in the next life? Remember Jesus said that humans will be like angels in heaven in that we'll all focus on God and marriage as we know it will not be an issue we have to consider in heaven. (My paraphrase of Matthew 22:30 or Mark 12:35).
 - i) God ordained the concept of marriage as a means of bringing more people into the world. It won't be needed in heaven as the population there will be a set number.
 - ii) So if all of that is true why does Verse 16 say that, "None of them will lack a mate"? I'd argue that it refers to those of us we have loved but have also died will also be saved for eternity. It's like saying all of those who have trusted in God will also be in heaven not because they were our mate, but because they also trusted in Him in the first place.
15. Verse 17: He allots their portions; his hand distributes them by measure. They will possess it forever and dwell there from generation to generation.
- a) Remember that Isaiah just spent a bunch of verses describing how the land of Edom will ultimately be destroyed. Think about that concept in contrast to this verse that effectively says the Israelites will occupy this land from generation to generation. OK John, we know our history, and we know that the Israelites did not dwell there continually. That's why I see this chapter as "the end" of the world as we know it.
 - b) To explain all of this another way, if I can't trust in His unconditional promise that Israel's going to get that land forever, how I can I also trust in His unconditional promise that I'll be eternally saved only because I believe that He and He alone paid the price for every sin I have committed or ever will commit? I can't trust in one without also trusting in both, as both are unconditional promises.
 - c) That's why the focus of this verse isn't just for the Israelites living around Jerusalem when Isaiah made it, but also to remind us of God's eternal unconditional promises to the nation of Israel. This promise isn't that God can't kick them out of that land if they fail to be His witnesses to the world or reject His Messiah. The unconditional promise is He gave them this land forever. That implies a day has to occur when the Christian era will end, as God will once again focus His attention on the nation of Israel. Then the Israelites will possess that land forever and ever as stated in this verse.
 - d) So does that mean Old Testament saints will come back alive to live in that land? What I suspect as I state every so often, is we're resurrected in more than 3 dimensions. That way we can all get close to God when He rules the world from Jerusalem. That's why I'll argue Israel has to exist as a nation when Jesus returns so He can rule over the world from their as a Jewish homeland.
 - e) If all of that is true, why does the verse say that He'll distribute that land "by measure"? I suspect all that means is when Jesus returns, the land will once again be divided up by the tribal allotment. That's a tough concept to accept because only a very small percentage of Jewish people know what tribe they are from. Yet Revelation clearly states that when all of this "end stuff" occurs, there will be 12,000 separated from each of the 12 tribes to be a group witness for God. All I'm saying is there will be a future day when the land of Israel will once again be divided by tribe as once again somehow Israelites will know what tribe they are each from. That's one of those bible predictions where I can't explain it by what's known today. I trust that God will work that out on His timing when it does occur.

- f) If I'm wrong about the tribal aspect, then that simply means that God decides who'll live where when that future generation of Israelites lives there, as Jesus rules over the world from Israel.
 - g) With that said, we made it through Chapter 34. We only have a ten-verse chapter left in this long eight-chapter speech by Isaiah.
 - h) Remember how Chapter 34 was addressed to all nations? Well, in one sense Isaiah hasn't changed his focus, as he desires all people to be aware of God's plans for mankind.
 - i) Keep in mind that the purpose of this whole speech is for people to understand what God expects of us. The speech included aspects of what we're doing right and wrong as God's witness to the world, how Israel and other nations are acting. This final two-chapter text is about what is "the end" of those who accept versus reject God.
 - j) I'm giving this speech here before we start this final chapter on it, as I want you to notice how Isaiah ends this sermon on a high note. It's as if Chapter 34 focused on those who'll reject God and their final outcome. Chapter 35 will focus on the really good news of the final outcome of those who do use their lives as God desires.
 - k) With that overly long introduction completed, onto Chapter 35.
16. Chapter 35, Verse 1: The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, ² it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.
- a) Recall that earlier in this lesson it was describing all the destruction that'll occur in Edom, again it's just east of Israel. That land will be a future wasteland where only wild animals will dwell. Remember that there's no chapter breaks in the original text. That means this same "wasteland" being described less than a chapter ago is now celebrating. Can a land area actually celebrate? Of course not. It's a metaphor to show that a "wasteland" is now usable again.
 - b) Keep in mind the people living around Isaiah were facing destruction by a large Assyrian army that was working its way toward Jerusalem. An army also destroys most of what is in its path. My point is simply that there is a short-term prophecy here about an invading army destroying a section of land and it'll thrive again once that army is gone. The closest I can describe it would be like seeing a large patch of ground after a forest fire. It appears to be a wasteland. If you come back to that same area a year later, it's amazing how it can grow back again to be usable.
 - c) Let me use a couple of events in fairly recent history to describe what could be happening here. When the Israelites started to come back to the land prior to it being an independent country again, much of that land was swampland from a lack of use. The Israelites bought it "dirt cheap" as it lacked value. They cleared it out and made that land usable again. All I'm saying is this is a recent example of a wasteland being made good again by hard work.
 - d) So is Isaiah talking about Israel here or Edom? What I suspect is the focus is on Israel, but also much of the surrounding area. A lot of that area was made into a wasteland after the invading armies worked their way through it. This is Isaiah's way of saying that Israel is not done as a nation. God will do great things in the future there, despite this destruction.
 - e) Realize that the Israelites living around Isaiah were scared not only for their own lives but also fearing the end of their nation. Remember that when the Assyrians defeated a place, they would separate and relocate the survivors in order to prevent rebellion. That's what they did when they conquered the Northern Israelite kingdom a short time prior to when Isaiah was writing this. We'll discuss that fact some more in the next lesson.
 - f) My point here is simple to say, "this is not the end". Life will be tough for awhile for those living there, but God's still going to take what'll seem like a "wasteland" and bring it back to life again. It happened after the Assyrian invasion, after the Babylonians emptied it out again a century later, and as a more modern example, when Israel started to reoccupy it in the last century or so. All I'm saying is this prediction has have literally come true several times in history. It's also a good reminder for us in our own "dark times" in our lives.

- g) That lecture leads me back to Verse 1 and the first part of Verse 2. It's describing the land in and near Israel as if that land could celebrate being useful again. I have to admit, I had to Google what is a crocus as it's used in Verse 2. It's a plant can grow and bloom flowers. The point is Isaiah's using more colorful metaphors here to describe how Israel will bloom again one day despite all the destruction that will occur.
- h) So if this occurred several times in Israel's history, what time is Isaiah referring to? A clue is in the next sentence:
17. Verse 2 (cont.): The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God.
- a) Lebanon is a country just north of Israel. Carmel and Sharon's are places where the land's farmed for crops. All I'm saying is Isaiah's describing areas in and near Israel that'll grow crops again despite the destruction of that land a bunch of times in history.
- b) That leads to the question, do we ever get to see God work on a large scale? The Israelites have as they saw their land rebuilt a handful of times in their history despite being wiped out by other nations. That's how they saw the glory of the LORD (when it's written out in all capitals, it's God's most holy name, which essentially means "I am that I am").
- c) OK, good for the Israelites I suppose. How does any of that affect you or me? The idea is that God cares for us and despite whatever trouble we face, His plans for mankind will go on beyond our lifetime. We may or may not see Him work on a grand scale in our lifetime but if we're trusting in Jesus as being both God and being in charge of our lives, we'll be a part of the time when He comes to rule the world from Israel. That promise is made to us Christians as well as the Jewish people who put their trust in God back then.
- d) In that day, the land of Israel as we know it, will expand and include parts of Lebanon as well as the areas associated with the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which if you recall were already conquered and destroyed by the time Isaiah wrote this section. All I am saying is we will see a grand scale miracle, as all that land will be united under Jesus rule when He does come to rule over that land. That's a big part of Christian theology. If you figure that Isaiah's been correct in his predictions to date, he'll also be right in what he predicts about our eternal future. On that positive thought, Verse 3.
18. Verse 3: Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; ⁴ say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you."
- a) Verse 3 is quoted or very similar to what is said in Hebrews 12:12. In both cases, the point is if the Messiah (Jesus) is returning to rule over the world, why aren't we doing what He calls us to do in preparation for that event? The idea of the phrase "Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way" is like telling someone about to run a race, pick up the pace, lift your knees higher to run, take your hands that are drooping by your side, go pick them up higher so you can run the race better. The Hebrew's reference is similar. All I am saying is we need to remind ourselves why God created us in the first place, to share the good news of Jesus returning to rule over the world. Of course we have other things in life we have to do, but it's truly a waste of life, if we're not using it to make a difference for the God who created us in the first place.
- b) Remember that Isaiah is preaching to people with a real fear of the end, as a large army is in the neighborhood. Isaiah's giving us the "really bad news and the really good news" as my lesson title stating that the bad stuff will happen, but also the really good stuff too. The question is what are we doing about it, knowing will all occur some day? That's why Isaiah's encouraging us to use our lives to make a difference for Him as that's the best use of the time that God's given us. As to specifics, I love to state, what is it you enjoy doing? What would you love to do if say, money wasn't an issue? A great way to have joy in life is to combine what we love to do with doing that for God, so we can use our lives for His glory. That's living the Christian life as God intended us to do so.

- c) These verses end with the reminder that God is returning to save us. If you start to think it's been thousands of years, will this ever happen? Remember how short life is: My point is from the perspective of how short our lives are, it's a short time until we see all this start to occur.
 - d) Realize that God created all things. That means He created time as we know it. I hold the view that when we die we go to a world that's outside of time as we know it. When Jesus returns to rule and we return with Him, we once again return to a world with time. All I am saying is from Isaiah's perspective and from our perspective this time frame is short as we return to life "within time" whenever that is to rule with Jesus from Jerusalem. On that positive thought, we can move on.
19. Verse 5: Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
- a) Just to prove that Isaiah's not just talking about some historical event like when Israel did become an independent nation again, Isaiah tells us in this verse that when all of this does occur, blind eyes will see and deaf people will hear.
 - b) Didn't Jesus do a lot of that 2,000 years ago? Those signs were part of His First coming.
 - c) However, despite that sign, most Israelites did reject Him. Jesus promised He'd return to rule, and when the day comes of the Messiah's rule, I suspect this will occur again.
 - d) Some argue this verse is literal like the time of Jesus first coming. Others argue it refers to people who refuse to focus their thoughts on God, and will be forced to accept it. While I would argue that both ideas can and will happen, if the literal translation is feasible, I lean toward the literal as a way we can recognize when all of this will literally happen. While I am making that point, Isaiah is still on a role with the "really good news":
20. Verse 6: Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. ⁷ The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.
- a) In Verse 5 we have blind people seeing and deaf people hearing. In Verse 6 we have lame people walking and mute people shouting for joy. Again, the Gospels record these things occurring when Jesus came as a proof of who He was. That was one fulfillment of all these verses. The way we'll know when Jesus will set up this eternal kingdom is I'm positive the curse on this world that comes from sin will end, as well as those tough things some have to live with, will end by His return. We'll recognize when He returns by these events.
 - b) Remember a page back how I said the "wasteland" of Israel would be usable again? Here we read of water gushing in the wilderness and the desert. Both Ezekiel and Revelation refer to a major new water source that will be in Israel in that day. (See Revelation 22:1-2 or Ezekiel 47 as other references to this new source of water.
 - c) OK, so Israel will have a new water source that will be a major river when Jesus returns. Even if I accept all of that, how does any of that benefit my own life? It's the idea of if our life is "dark" like the Israelites experienced in Isaiah's day, we all have something great in our future. It's a reminder that life is bigger than whatever we're currently dealing with.
 - d) We also will be a part of Jesus rule over the world, and the land of Israel which is mostly a dry place, will have plenty of water in that day.
21. Verse 8: And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it.
- a) Remember there were no cars in Isaiah's day. A highway was a main road where caravans would travel. The secret to this verse is to think of it as a "High" (above the ground) Way. It's like traveling on a mighty road that goes through tunnels and above high hills, yet it is level despite all of that topography. The point is when Jesus returns, such a highway will exist only for believers to use. I visualize it as a place where angels will check people as if to say, "Are you a believer? Great, you can drive on this road!" The point is this road will exist as a place of "royalty" to travel and the royalty is those who trust in God.

22. Verse 9: No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there,¹⁰ and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.
- a) I can just hear some of you thinking, "OK John you've lost it here. You're describing some sort of future utopia with Jesus ruling over it, with a major river being where one does not exist at the moment and a super highway leading to it. Why should I believe this stuff?"
 - b) Again if we can trust Isaiah's accuracy with how history has unfolded over the last several millenniums, why can't we trust him to tell us of this future utopia? Despite whatever we have to deal with in our lifetimes, be it good or bad, the longest we'll get is one lifetime.
 - c) We must realize this future "utopia" will last forever. It's like if we read the whole bible as we realize God wins in the end, we'd naturally want to be on the winning side. We'd want to be part of this utopia, because we trust in the bible's accuracy to date and the future!
 - d) Verse 9 has a strange reference to lions. One has to remember that in Isaiah's day to go on a main highway meant no lights. A danger of travel at night was predator animals. In our day it's not a danger, but in Isaiah's time that was a concern for traveling. Anyway, what is being said here is to travel on such a highway will never be dangerous.
 - e) Notice Verse 10 the "ransomed of the LORD will return". That just means those of us who are separated for God's use will return in this day to rule and reign with Him. That's why it describes this day as a time of singing and everlasting joy with "crowns on our heads".
 - f) The book of Revelation describes the "24 elders" as having crowns on their heads. One of the reasons why I believe the "24 elders" refers symbolically to the church is I believe the church gets "crowned" as victorious when all this utopia begins. I bring all that up here as Verse 10 describes this return of God's ransomed (us) as having crowns on their heads.
 - g) All that I'm saying is these last few verses end on the really good news of what'll happen to believers who trust in Jesus and what are our eternal rewards. Let me end this lesson this way: Do you want to have joy in your life? Do you want to sing songs of joy? Would you like to be victorious over life and even wear a king's crown as a sign of that victory? All of this is a reminder of why God desires we use our lives to make a difference for Him in the world around us. So we can all be a part of this utopia. It'll be as real as any event in history that the bible did predict that came true.
 - h) On that thought, I am running long. However I am in a good mood after all of this good news so let's take that joy into the closing prayer for this lesson.
23. Father, thank You for the joy You give us. Thank You for the rewards You will give us as You've separated us to make a difference for You. Help us not to waste the life you've given us as we do use it for Your glory. Help us to rely upon Your power as we use the time and resources You've given us for Your glory. Help us to accept the truth as written in the pages of the bible and use it to make that difference for You. Make it obvious to us what it is You desire we do with our lives as we use it as You desire. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.