

Isaiah Chapters 43-44- John Karmelich

1. To explain this lesson, I need to back up a little and explain where we left off. Chapter 41 focused on the topic of why God has to judge us to begin with. Chapter 42 focused on the topic of what is His standard for that judgment. In these two chapters we'll finish a trilogy, with Chapters 43 and 44 focus on who's doing the judging and why He's qualified to judge us to begin with. I consider the early 40's chapters of Isaiah as the judgment chapters. They teach us why it is that God has to judges us, and the reasons for that judgment.
  - a) OK John remember you're preaching to a bunch of born again Christians who for the most part already believe Jesus is God. We believe He's perfectly He's qualified to judge us. So why study these chapters if we already believe Jesus is God and He's going to judge each of us based on how we've been of service to Him and reward us based on that service?
    - i) Think of these two chapters as the "why" answer. That is why should we let God not only be in charge of our lives, but why it is He's in charge.
  - b) Let me try this one more way: Ever have moments of doubts of believing God's in charge of our lives? Having Isaiah recite from our perspective completed history is the reminder of just who's in charge of our lives anyway and why it's worth all the time and trouble to be a follower of Jesus despite the hardships one can face as one of His disciples.
2. With all that said, let me summarize these chapters from God's perspective. God's reminding all the Israelites, "Who made you in the first place? Who's the one that rescued you as a nation and took you out of Egypt? When you were taken as a nation into Babylonian captivity, (it's a future event from Isaiah's perspective, but past from ours) who's the one who was with you that whole time and made it possible for you to return back to the land?" That's the flavor of these chapters.
  - a) I'm reminded of a t-shirt I saw all over Israel. It lists all of Israel's enemies that have come and gone over the millenniums. All of those nations and empires are crossed off on that t-shirt except for Israel. Then the t-shirt had "Iran" with a question mark as to imply it'll be next if they continue to threaten God's chosen people.
  - b) That's sort of the point of both these chapters. Yes we'll go through tough times when we are called to live as a witness for God, but it's worth the trouble because despite whatever it is we have to go through, we'll win in the long run as God can't abandon who are His in the first place. Just as the Israelites are called to be God's people whether they want to be His people or not, those of us who've committed our lives to following Jesus will never be abandoned by God whether we feel that way or not.
  - c) Does that mean all Jewish people are saved? Of course not. Does that mean all those who call themselves Christians are saved? Again, of course not. There was a time in history in which to be saved meant to trust in the God of the Jewish nation. What one did with all of that knowledge was the basis of one's salvation. Even if one had no knowledge of Him, to be judged means to look at the world and see that it must have had a creator and what we did with that knowledge became God's standard for living forever based on that fact. For those of us who believe Jesus is not only God, but the one who's in charge of our lives, we are saved because we trust in those facts. Then the greatest use of our time given that fact is if we use it for God's glory. Then a day will come in the future where once again God is going to work primary through the Israelite nation again, which is what Romans Chapter Eleven is all about.
  - d) My point is, and the point of these two chapters is to realize that we can trust God to be in charge of our lives no matter what the future holds. It's the reminder that no matter what the future holds, God's still there, desiring to guide our lives for His glory. That means we should keep on trusting Him for that guidance no matter what it is we have to face in our lives. Yes life will be tough at times, as it was for the first generation of Israelites listening to Isaiah preach this. However, as God was with them, He'll be with us as well.

3. In summary, think of these two chapters as a "history written in advance" lesson about how God is going to collectively judge us both individually and collectively as those dedicated to following Him. It's like, let's deal with the bad news now as the eternal good news far outweighs whatever suffering we have to deal with in this lifetime. Most of us know that delayed gratitude is usually worth the wait, which I admit is a great title for this lesson and what'll I'll use as this lesson title.
  - a) At this point, I've got a lot of verses to cover, so we're going to get started on the verse by verse commentary and we'll see how God's "delayed gratitude" will pay off for our lives:
4. Isaiah 43, Verse 1: But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
  - a) To understand this verse, let's back up again, and recall the subject of the last few verses. As I said in my introduction, I think of the "early 40's chapters" of the book of Isaiah as the "judgment chapters" as they focus on why God has to judge us and understanding who it is who's doing the judging. We left off with the tough news that God will let the Israelites suffer at the Babylonian's hands. That's a "tough love" reminder that the Israelites have to suffer the consequences when they ignore the God who created them in the first place.
  - b) Chapter 43, Verse 1 continues that thought, but it changes tone from bad news to the good news. It's kind of telling a child, "Yes I have to punish you for what you did. In spite of that fact, I still have wonderful plans for your future". The message is God saying to those Israelites that despite their sins of turning from Him, He can't stop loving those who He's separated for His purposes in the first place. This gets into the question of is it possible to lose one's salvation? The way I view it is, from God's eternal perspective, since He knows all things, He knows who's saved no matter what. From our perspective, the safe answer is as long as we're believing Jesus died for every sin we've ever committed and trust He is in charge of our lives, we can't sin enough to lose that salvation.
    - i) Let me give an example of where I'm not sure one is saved. A long time ago, there was a great evangelist who as a young man truly believed Jesus was God. He gave a lot of his time preaching Jesus to others. Then he went developed doubts, and he spent much of his remaining life writing books on why Jesus wasn't God. He was a friend in his youth to Billy Graham. When Mr. Graham saw him soon before he died, he told Billy how he missed being a friend to Jesus. I don't know if he's saved or not. I just know if one has a heart for Jesus, it's painful to turn from it.
    - ii) With that said, the issue here isn't individual salvation, but corporate salvation. It's a reminder to us that God's not through with Israel as a group. Just as He allowed them to go as a nation into captivity, so He'll bring them back as a nation. He can't stop loving who He's committed to loving and that's the purpose of this verse.
    - iii) The point for you and I as Christians is we may mess up individually or as part of a group, but God can't stop loving who He's called to live for Him. When we mess up, and realize it, we should confess it, move on and realize that God still loves us and wants us to still continue to commit our lives to make a difference for Him.
    - iv) It's not possible to lose our salvation and we can know that for sure as long as we continue to commit our lives to making a difference for Him.
5. Verse 2: When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.
  - a) Think of Verse 2 as proof examples of the principals taught in Verse 1. Notice this verse is not past tense but future tense. It's not talking about the Red Sea crossing. It's focused on the future when the Israelites have to cross rivers to get from the land of Israel to territory in the Babylonian empire where they'll be relocated for what will turn out to be 70 years.
  - b) It's a little like saying, "I (God) was with your ancestors when you came into this land, and I'll be with you and your descendants as you go to Babylon and come back here again."

- c) A little history might be helpful here. When the Babylonians completely conquered the Southern Kingdom of Israel, they relocated all the survivors all over their empire so that way they wouldn't reunite among their families against that Empire. This same group of people also conquered the Assyrian Empire. My point is that those Israelites who lived in the Northern Kingdom that were conquered by the Assyrians a century earlier, were now also part of this Babylonian Empire. Later when the Persians conquered the Babylonians, a decree was made by the Persian Emperor allowing the Israelites to return to their land.
    - i) That decree's mentioned in Ezra Chapter 1. My point is many Israelites remained content to live in the Babylonian Empire and didn't return. I recall one time as an appraiser I had to appraise a Jewish retirement community in Los Angeles made up of Persian Jewish people. I looked up how many such Persian Jews existed to this day and was surprised to learn it was in the millions.
  - d) All I want you to understand from this is that when the Israelites went into captivity, that affected their history to this day thousands of years later as only a small percentage of the Israelites choose to return to the homeland seventy years after the captivity began. I'll talk a lot more about the Persians in the next lesson. For now, the point as it relates to Verse 2 is simply that God was with the Israelites even as they were relocated a long ways away from their homeland.
  - e) That leads me to the second sentence of this verse. Like many bible predictions it is both literal and figurative. It's literal as it describes about two hundred years before it occurs, a famous miracle in the book of Daniel, where his three buddies don't get burned as they're thrown in a hot fire and come out unburned in any way. (That's from Daniel Chapter 3.)
  - f) This sentence as also "figurative" as it describes the Israelites going through great trials at the time of that captivity, as if they were walking through a horrid fire. The point for us is we should take comfort when we go through our own trials as God hasn't abandoned us, as He wants to guide us through whatever it is He's allowing us to deal with, so that trial can somehow be used for His glory.
6. Verse 3: For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. <sup>4</sup> Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life.
- a) These two verses move from future tense to past tense. To paraphrase, other nations exist around you that are not called to be a witness for Me. These other nations suffered based on how they've treated you. It's like God saying, "You want some proof that I'm still there to guide your life? Think of how you got to where you are in the first place!" God made it possible not only for Israel to physically leave the greatest power in the world at that time, but also to watch that army get destroyed for the sake of those Israelites. The references to Cush and Seba (probably Ethiopia and a group that's now part of Saudi Arabia) is simply to say, God didn't pick other nations that were under Egypt's thumb at that time, but did pick "you" to be separated to be a living witness for God.
  - b) Suppose you're thinking I'm not that special, or how do I know God picked me? If you've chosen to commit your life to Jesus, then you've been chosen whether or not you've accepted that fact. I remember from my childhood hearing a lecture on whether or not I am special. Think of the millions of sperm that try to fertilize a female egg. Only one makes it. Since each of us is that one sperm that made it, we are "special" for that reason. No matter what we've accomplished in our life, or no matter how much we've messed it up, realize we are special in God's eyes and we have been separated to make a difference for Him.
  - c) The point is since we can't change our past, all we can do is use the time we've got left in life to use it to make a difference for Him. God's saying whether we've accomplished any great things or not, whether we realize it or not, we are special in God's sight and if we've committed our lives to serving Jesus, God the Father can't stop loving what He committed to love in the first place. To accept that idea, is the point behind these verses.

7. Verse 5: Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. <sup>6</sup> I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth-- <sup>7</sup> everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."
- a) Remember that when the Israelites were taken into captivity, they were then spread over the Babylonian Empire. Here God's saying that after a specific time period, He will bring them back from "all over the place" to the land of Israel again.
  - b) So is modern Israel another example of God gathering His people from all four directions on the compass point? Of course it is. I'll even argue that the exact time period from the time Israel stopped being an independent nation after the Babylonian captivity until when they became an independent country again in 1948 is a time period specified in Ezekiel 4.
    - i) The short version of that story is in Ezekiel Chapter 4, Verses 4-6, God tells Ezekiel to lie on his side for 430 days, with each day representing one year of captivity. If we deduct the 70 years for the Babylonian captivity, that leaves 360 years left. The Bible said back in Leviticus 26 that if the Israelites continued to disobey Him, He'd make His punishment seven times worse. If we multiply 360 years times 7 and we do some math because the Jewish calendar had 360 days and not 365, that frame of time comes out to the exact date in 1948 when Israel became a nation again. If we start that same time frame from when Jerusalem was captured, it comes out to the exact date in 1967 when the Israelites recaptured that city.
    - ii) All I'm saying here is that when God says he'll bring Israelites back to the land, He fulfills that promise. It happened after Babylon and it happened again in our time.
  - c) OK John that's a neat bit of history, what does it have to do with us Christians? Just as the Israelites were gathered close to Him so He could be with them united as a group, so we'll be united close to Him in heaven so we can all be close to Him for eternity. As I say every so often in these studies, heaven is not us sitting on a cloud or a couch somewhere for the rest of eternity, but being drawn close to God so we can spend eternity close to Him. That is why I love to preach how we'll exist in more than three dimensions in heaven. Which is also why Jesus could enter a locked room in His resurrected body as told in John 20:19.
8. Verse 8: Lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf.
- a) If you've read the last few lessons in Isaiah, every now and then we would have some sort of reference to the blind seeing and the deaf hearing. Yes it can be literal like the miracles we read Jesus doing in the Gospels. I also think it's figurative in that some people figure it out that God loves them just because He does and wants to guide our lives for His glory.
  - b) In that sense, we who figure this out are the "seeing blind and the hearing deaf". If you do think that this whole section is only about Israelites, consider the fact that God has opened your (and my) eyes and ears to His word and let the truth of the bible sink into us, so that we can use our lives for His glory. Again, the point is God has in the past and will also do in the future, gather together all who are "His" so we can draw close to Him for eternity.
9. Verse 9: All the nations gather together and the peoples assemble. Which of them foretold this and proclaimed to us the former things? Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right, so that others may hear and say, "It is true." <sup>10</sup> "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.
- a) Every now and then, the bible likes to challenge us on the topic of God's existence. It is as if God's saying, "Who else have I called to be a witness for Me? What other so-called god is there that has separated one group of people from another? There is no other "god" that comes either before Me or after Me, so I'm it, deal with it and use your life accordingly."
  - b) What about Muslim's who worship a single God? Realize that they deny that the God of the bible is the same god. They deny that Jesus is "LORD" just as religious Jews today do deny Jesus is God. My point is someone's right here and someone's wrong here.

- c) So if God's speaking directly to the Jewish people of Isaiah's day, who's right and wrong on this issue? First, neither religious Jewish people or Christians deny that God's talking to Israelites in this passage. Just as I'm convinced that modern Israel is also a part of His eternal plan for a future witness for Him, therefore I'm convinced God's not through with Israel as an entity. My point is today we can only be saved by trusting in Jesus, however there's a future day coming when He once again focuses on Israel as a nation as a witness for Him. That's the main topic of the book of Romans Chapter 11.
  - d) The point as it relates to this chapter is that despite the fact God has allowed the Israelites to be scattered all over the world, so He'll bring them back to that land because God can't stop loving who He's called to love. Does that mean one is automatically going to heaven if one is Jewish? Of course not. The same as one isn't automatically saved if one says that one is a Christian. The proof is the commitment. Just as Romans Chapter 10 teaches us of that the only way to God the Father is through Jesus today for the Jewish people, so there is coming a future day when God will once again focus on working through that nation as taught in Romans Chapter 11. The point for you and me is to accept the fact that God will save who saves and that if we're committed to serving Him, to use some of our time as to make that difference that'll last for all of eternity.
  - e) That's also the essential point of these verses: God will gather who He's called. We can't blow it if we tried, although we can waste our lives away if we fail to use our lives to be a witness for Him. There is no other god "pulling the strings" so accept who He is and use our time for Him. In other words, "God's in charge. Deal with it and use our time based on that reality." That's these verses in one thought.
10. Verse 11: I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior.
- a) A big issue most people struggle with is the concept that there is only one way to get into heaven. I've got family members who refuse to believe Jesus' words when He says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6, NKJV. The point is Jesus was either a lunatic, a liar or God. I'm convinced from my studies that Jesus is God and the proof of it is both the internal and external evidence that the bible is God's word.
  - b) I admit it's hard to accept the fact that all other religions of the world are wrong. I'll admit that other religions can lead one to have a happy life. The issue isn't whether or not those other religions make one a better person. The issue is whether or not they lead to the true God of the Universe or not. That's why Verse 11 is so important. It's another reminder of the fact there is no other way to heaven other than through the true God.
  - c) OK, what about the naïve? I'm positive a fair God will judge all people fairly based on the physical evidence that a single entity must have created the world we live in and ask what have we done based on that evidence? That's how most people will be judged.
  - d) For Christians, I hold the view God has two questions for us: First do you believe Jesus is God and is Lord of our life and died for every sin we've ever committed? If we say yes to that question, the second question is "What have we done about it?" That second question is what drives me to do this ministry and hopefully drives us to use our lives to make that difference for Him that He desires we do make.
  - e) Speaking of being in trouble, I interrupted God when He was on a roll:
11. Verse 12: I have revealed and saved and proclaimed-- I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "that I am God.
- a) To paraphrase, "For you Israelites, the fact that I exist was not hidden from you. You have been aware of My existence and realize that I've separated you from the world so that you can be a witness for Me." For us Christians, the point is the same: He has separated us in the sense we know who He is, and we've chosen to live differently enough from the way a nonbeliever live. Therefore, let us continue to use our lives as a witness for Him. To sum it up, since we know who God is, let's get on with how He's called us to live!

12. Verse 13: Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?"
- a) This is another "God's in charge, so deal with it" statement. The reason Isaiah's getting so hot and heavy here is the Israelites living around him were trusting in other gods despite the fact they were separated as witnesses for God. It'd be like saying to us, "Why are you wasting your life doing "this and that" when you've been called to be a witness for Me, in all that you do?"
  - b) Remember the situation the Israelites were in back then. They were a small nation whose surrounded by larger entities that want them dead. As you can tell, that situation has not changed in several thousand millenniums. The Israelites were "hedging their bets" by also trusting in other gods around the neighborhood, in case God didn't come through as they wanted Him to. That's why Isaiah's essentially screaming at the Israelites back then, "Just who do you think you're dealing with anyway? Who else but God knows all things? Who else has the ability to deliver you out of your enemies' hands but Me?"
  - c) For those of us who are Christians, it's a reminder that God doesn't want to be "Number 1 on a list of 10, but Number 1 on a list of 1". To use a classic illustration, if we're going out shopping, "take God with us". If we're going to some form of entertainment, again "take God with us". The idea is God should be a part of all aspects of our life. If we're doing an activity that we believe God is ashamed we're doing, that's an indication that we are not taking God with us as part of that activity.
  - d) The reason I'm getting so hot and heavy here is that's what the Israelites were doing. It is the ancient problem of giving the true God "lip service" while hedging their bets with also trusting in other things in case God doesn't come through as I said a few paragraphs back. The point is if we're going to trust in God to come through with our life, then we've got to trust in Him as if there are no other options. Yes we are to make the best decisions we can based on the situation in front of us using biblical principals as a guideline, but we're also to trust that He's working in our lives through the decisions we make daily.
  - e) One also has to remember that a short time after Isaiah wrote this, the Israelites were soon to be taken into captivity. It's the reminder that despite the bad things that'll occur in our life, God's still there and still guiding us despite those tough situations. Speaking of their captivity, that leads me perfectly into Verse 14:
13. Verse 14: This is what the LORD says-- your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians, in the ships in which they took pride.
- a) John's very loose translation: You know those people who really hurt you and took who survived from Israel captive a "thousand miles away" there? Well, I'm going to harm all of them far more then they hurt you. You may suffer in this lifetime, but they'll suffer for what they did for eternity.
  - b) A little geography might be helpful here as well as some history. The city of Babylon was literally built over a river that flowed under the city gates through the city. That city was considered one of the eight wonders of the ancient world. From what I read, it had walls that were hundreds of feet in height and was wide enough for chariot races on top of the walls. There was enough grain stored up that city to last for years. The residents of that city thought of itself as impossible to defeat. The way the Persians defeated that city was by diverting the river way up stream, and then entering under the gates. History records that this city was defeated without a battle. The epilogue is the Babylonian leaders were taken away on ships down that same river after the city was taken over. That's what the verses are describing here. It's another example of how God is aware of history before it happens as implied in Verse 13.
  - c) Gee John, that's neat ancient history. Why should I care? Because the same God who will protect the Israelites will also protect us no matter what we go through in life.

14. Verse 15: I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel's Creator, your King."
- a) By this point, I believe Isaiah's getting on a role and wants to scream at whoever is willing to listen to Him that, "God's in charge, He's going to do all of this, so trust in Him despite what'll happen in the future, because just as He'll allow all of us to go into captivity, so He will also bring us back when He's ready.
  - b) The loose translation for us Christians, "God's going to allow us to go through tough trials in life. Life is not always easy, and can even be harder for the true believer because what I call evil forces do exist, that want to prevent us from being a good witness for Jesus." Stop and consider that if Satan can't take away our salvation, why does He bother us? Because He has a limited time to rule on earth. That time ends when a specific number of believers exist. Therefore, as we use our time to make a difference for our King, realize that we can expect resistance to that effort. The good news is the God we believe in is greater than all of those dark forces that resist our efforts and some people do get past that as to realize it is worth the effort to live for God despite the normal problems of life plus whatever dark "forces" we have to deal with as a witness for Him.
15. Verse 16: This is what the LORD says-- he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters,<sup>17</sup> who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick:
- a) The short version is do you want proof that God is real? Think about the history of the nation of Israel. How does one explain Israel's history as a nation without believing the bible is God's word? Here in these verses, we get the classic reminder of how God took them out of Egypt by making a path in the Red Sea. When the Egyptian army followed them, that army drowned in that same sea.
  - b) Whenever I hear the argument that the sea was only a few inches deep and that's how the Israelites were able to cross it, I like to say, "Well that's even a greater miracle, because the Egyptians then drowned in a few inches of water!"
  - c) Remember why these verses are here: We all go through periods of doubts about whether or not God exists. That's why Verse 15 practically screams at us, "God is real, deal with it and stop chasing after other things." Then these two verses say, "Hey, you want proof of whether or not God is real, stop and consider Israelite history for a moment! Then if all of that is not enough, consider the next two verses:
16. Verse 18: "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.<sup>19</sup> See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.
- a) Suppose the Israelites listening to Isaiah were thinking, "That's all true, but all of that did occur a long time ago. What about today? That's where these two verses again practically scream at those Israelites, "You don't have to dwell on ancient history, you will soon see a miracle in your time that will match the great Red Sea miracle!"
  - b) I said when I started this lesson that a lot of it is history written in advance and reading it from our perspective, it's "done history". What if you say, "Why doesn't God do miracles on that grand a scale today?" Well, less than a hundred years ago, Israel became a nation again for the first time in millenniums. Again, if you don't think your own life is a miracle until itself, consider the classic illustration of the millions of sperm trying to enter the one female egg, "You're the one who made it!" My point is each of us is a walking miracle, so let's appreciate the time God's given us and use some of it for His glory.
  - c) This leads us back to the Israelites of Isaiah's day. The fact that Israel has water springs in what is essentially a desert land, is proof that God cares about them. For the land of Israel water is a precious resource, and God provided that resource for them. All I'm saying is if those Israelites want proof that the God who created everything really exists, consider the fact that water exists there to begin with. Today Israel will also use facilities that convert seawater into fresh water plus the water that flows from the nearby mountains into there.

17. Verse 20: The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen,<sup>21</sup> the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.
- a) I'll be the first to admit, verses like Verse 20 are strange. They imply that wild animals do acknowledge God's existence. Every now and then in the Psalms you'll get a similar type of reference. No it doesn't mean wild animals sing praises to God. It just means animals can survive because God created a world in which they can survive. Those animals prove God exists, by the fact they exist. Despite that proof, the Israelites who should realize this because of the physical evidence of His existence, don't take the time to give thanks to the God who created them in the first place. With that said, Isaiah is still on a roll here:
18. Verse 22: "Yet you have not called upon me, O Jacob, you have not wearied yourselves for me, O Israel.<sup>23</sup> You have not brought me sheep for burnt offerings, nor honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with grain offerings nor wearied you with demands for incense.<sup>24</sup> You have not bought any fragrant calamus for me, or lavished on me the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses.
- a) The simple point of these verses is God saying, "OK, you claim that you honor Me as your God? Where's the proof? Where's the commitment? These verses are describing ways in which the Israelites were required to honor God. They are based on Levitical laws as if to say, "You want to trust Me as God, put your money and your time where your mouth is!"
  - b) I admit I love the last line here. It's God saying that He hears our prayers and knows well the fact that we pray for forgiveness of our sins. The condemnation of these verses is not over whether or not God forgives us of our sins. The condemnation is effectively, "If all of you believers claim you worship Me, then where is the commitment? Where's your proof that you honor Me as God?"
  - c) That leads to the important part, how do each of us prove our commitment? Do we make the time to do things to honor Him as God? Do we live in obedience to His commands? I am not saying we have to eat kosher and wear a beanie! I'm saying that if we should live as witnesses for Him and not just sit there or pray for forgiveness. Yes it's hard at times to be a witness for Jesus. Yes many will reject that message. Still, it's worth it because it will lead some closer to Jesus and that's why God created us as witnesses for Him.
  - d) I could give you more specifics about the types of offerings described here, but hopefully we get the point is that it's about our commitment to Him, not on how the Israelites back then were required to prove that commitment.
19. Verse 25: "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.<sup>26</sup> Review the past for me, let us argue the matter together; state the case for your innocence.<sup>27</sup> Your first father sinned; your spokesmen rebelled against me.<sup>28</sup> So I will disgrace the dignitaries of your temple, and I will consign Jacob to destruction and Israel to scorn
- a) These verses start with the important reminder that God does forgive us of all of our sins. Remember that the main topic of these chapters and the surrounding ones is the fact He'll judge each of us. With that said, consider Verse 25 another way. I love to say that God is perfect by definition and can't learn anything. If God is perfect, how can He "remember our sins no more"? The point is not that He actually forgets them, but He doesn't bring it up when we face Him. I take great comfort in the fact that all the sins I've ever committed and the sins I don't even know I commit, will never be brought up, not because I deserve to be there, but because God Himself has paid the price for those sins.
  - b) All that leads to the last three verses of this chapter. It's God saying, "Hey everyone, let's go over history together. Prove to Me that you're innocent of sin! Prove to Me that we're perfect and don't deserve to be judged by Me! Those Israelites were ignoring what God's commanding them to do, because they sort of figured, "He's already forgiven all of us, so why should we bother to go through the motions of doing things for Him if that is taken care of already?" That's another way of describing the danger of ignoring God in our life.



- c) The final part of this chapter essentially says the common ancestor of the Jewish nation sought God's forgiveness. So did Moses. Despite that, you as a collective group made a choice to rebel against Me. Therefore, the Temple is "going down" because You refuse to use your lives as a witness for Me! The point for you and me is there are consequences to be paid if we fail to choose to live our lives as a witness for Him. That's the point here.
  - d) With that said, I'm going to fairly quickly go through the next chapter here as it ties to this same topic of God's judgment and ends this section on why we're being judged anyway.
20. Chapter 44, Verse 1: "But now listen, O Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen. <sup>2</sup> This is what the LORD says-- he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you: Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.
- a) Translation, "Come on everyone, it's not too late. I'm still you're God. Don't be afraid of what will occur in your future, as I will still help each of you through it.!
  - b) By the way the word "Jeshurun" is an untranslated Hebrew word that essentially means that God is with us and still guiding us. It's God's way of saying despite how we've each messed up, He's still there, He still wants to forgive us and He still desires we use the time we have left to make a difference for Him. To say all of this another way, God has chosen us, so accept it and use our life accordingly. So how do I know God's chosen me? If we've accepted Jesus payment for our sins and believe He is God and in charge of our live, then we have chosen Him whether we realize it or not.
  - c) So why would God emphasize fear in Verse 2? To be honest, if a huge army surrounded our city and threatened to either kill us or march us a thousand miles away as prisoners, we too would be afraid and have our doubts about God's protection. To modernize all of this, if we are being criticized for being a witness for Jesus, or worse, living somewhere in a world where it's a death sentence to believe Jesus is God, then we have to remember the fact that God's still there, still guiding us and despite the difficulties of being a witness for Him, it's worth the trouble. That's the essential point here.
21. Verse 3: For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. <sup>4</sup> They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams.
- a) To understand these verses, again we have to put ourselves in the mindset of the Israelites living there at that time. Isaiah's preaching the death of that nation. He's saying in despite of all of that, God is still there guiding our lives and He'll pour out the Holy Spirit on their descendants. Yes it's literal about the Israelites returning to their land. Yes it's literal as it is describing them living in a land where water flows.
  - b) So when did Israel collectively as a nation ever get the Holy Spirit poured on them? One can argue it's Pentecost when Jewish people gathered on that holiday and the Holy Spirit came down to start the church. I also see this verse as future. It's another reminder of the fact that God will one day focus on Israel as a nation when the final number of Christians are collected as a group and then all the "bad stuff" of Revelation begins. That's discussed in Daniel Chapter 9, as the "seventh week" where God once again focuses on Israel as His witnesses to the world, which Christians argue is a future event. (If you don't know all of the details of Daniel Chapter 9, it's a good study all to itself.) The key point is a future day will occur when God's spirit will once again be upon Israel as a nation.
22. Verse 5: One will say, `I belong to the LORD'; another will call himself by the name of Jacob; still another will write on his hand, `The LORD's,' and will take the name Israel.
- a) Imagine all those Israelites living in captivity reading Isaiah and thinking, God's not done with us, because Isaiah's predicting we'll return to the land. From our perspective, we can realize how God's worked to preserve that nation all of these millenniums. Yet to this day most Israelites are secular. All I'm saying is Isaiah's still talking about the future when he describes a day where Israel's collective belief in God as their God will occur. For us, it's a matter of saying, "We belong to God no matter what as He'll win in the end!"

23. Verse 6: "This is what the LORD says-- Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.
- a) Back when I taught on Chapter 41, I mentioned that there were three verses in Isaiah that specifically state that God is "first and last" in that He alone made the world. Then I stated how in Revelation, there are three references to Jesus being the "first and last". The point's simply that Jesus is the one being referred to here, as Israel's Messiah.
  - b) OK John, you're preaching to the choir again. Tell us why we should care about this? It is the reminder that God's still in charge, He's still guiding our lives and to use our time for any purpose without having Him be a part of that life is a waste of it. Does that mean we can't enjoy time with our family or friends? Of course not. It's just a reminder that when we do get to enjoy our lives, we remember who gives us that life in the first place, and we do honor Him as God as we in a sense remember there's no other option for us believers.
24. Verse 7: Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come-- yes, let him foretell what will come.<sup>8</sup> Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one."
- a) To forewarn you, a lot of Chapter 25 is written as a challenge. It's saying in effect, "Come on, test Me. Tell Me who else or what else can you trust in besides Me? Come on, make a case for some other thing we can live for, and why we should bother!" Remember that the bible is effectively written to believers. It's effectively saying, "Trust Me, and stop wasting any more time going after other things in life that don't matter for all of eternity."
  - b) That's why these verses start a lecture that runs through most of this chapter on why it is we should trust in God and nothing else for joy in life as well as salvation.
  - c) Before I move on, realize the word "Rock" is occasionally used in the bible as a nickname for God. It's not a rock one can hold in one hands. It's more like the Rock of Gibraltar, as it is something unmovable that we can trust will always be there and doesn't change.
25. Verse 9: All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant, to their own shame. <sup>10</sup> Who shapes a god and casts an idol, which can profit him nothing? <sup>11</sup> He and his kind will be put to shame; craftsmen are nothing but men. Let them all come together and take their stand; they will be brought down to terror and infamy. <sup>12</sup> The blacksmith takes a tool and works with it in the coals; he shapes an idol with hammers, he forges it with the might of his arm. He gets hungry and loses his strength; he drinks no water and grows faint. <sup>13</sup> The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine. <sup>14</sup> He cut down cedars, or perhaps took a cypress or oak. He let it grow among the trees of the forest, or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow.
- a) From Verses 9-19, Isaiah lays out an argument against making idols. Before I explain the details of these verses, let me explain why this argument is necessary. In a good portion of the world today, even in countries that claim to be Christian, there are little statues that are placed everywhere for good luck or protection. I recently had to appraise a very high-end hotel, and I noticed statues all over the grounds at that hotel. The owner told me they are Indonesian statues designed to keep away evil spirits. For millenniums most cultures do have symbols to either represent gods or have symbols for protection or for success.
  - b) All I'm saying is if you think our country is idol-free we'd be sadly mistaken. If we think our culture is idol-free, again we'd be mistaken. The reason one of the 10 Commandments forbids idols is because it gets our focus off of God for protection, prosperity and success, as we think those idols have something to do with it. A reason God forbids us to make an idol is He wants us to live differently than the world around us, and having any type of a symbol around to protect us or guide us, is getting our spiritual help from things that are not tied to God. All I'm saying is it's more common than people realize.

- c) This leads me back to these verses. Remember the big topic is God's judgment. When we get to judgment day, what will people say to God when He points out to them things that we have around the house or car for "Good luck or protection". Even if those things do tie to Christian theology such as Mary or Jesus statues, praying to those statues or to trust in those things for protection, gets our focus off the God who created us as we'll easily look to things for guidance and not God Himself. Even a ritual can become an idol. If we start to think in order for God to love me, I have to pray 10 times a day for something or I have to read 10 bible chapters a day, we are making an idol out of our goodness to please Him.
- d) Therefore, God lays out an argument against idolatry in these verses. Speaking of which:
- i) The first condemnation is against professional idol makers. The text describes any person who works hard to make them. They may not even take a break for water or food as they want to accomplish their mission. The construction materials that are not needed are then used for other purposes such as fires to keep warm. All I am saying is these idols are just "things" and are not the true and living God who wants to guide us, protect us and lead us through life as opposed to things.
  - ii) These verses describe two professionals in that business. One is a blacksmith who makes idol statues out of metal. The other is a carpenter who makes them out of wood. The point is both of them work hard, use available materials and discard what is not used after making their statues.
  - iii) The way to prevent idol worship is simply to focus on the real thing. In one of the cities where Paul preached, the locals were complaining about a lack of idol sales. Paul didn't preach against purchasing those idols, but he just preached on the true and living God and the conversion of people hurt those idol sales. Remember that we live in a world where idolatry exists and the way to lead people away from any idols is to focus on the true and living God. That takes away our desire to worship what is false as God satisfies our need to worship something.
- e) So what's our motivation to stop idolatry? Judgment. Remember that these two chapters finish a "trilogy" about what God's judgment is like and why we have to be judged. Many people who will be judged by God will have to explain why they kept statues around the things they own such as a home, car or business. If you have something around that you keep for good luck, all I ask is that you pray about what God thinks of that statue and if it prevents you from focusing on the true and living God, it's an issue.
- f) Let me explain this one more way, and then we can move on. Many Christians argue that we're saved no matter what, so why worry about idols? While that is correct, the point is God cares about our behavior and wants us to be a good witness for Him. The reason He preaches so hard against having idols around is it gets our focus off of Him and makes us start to look to "things" for guidance. That's why these verses make an example out of any professional idol maker as such people work to lead people away from God Himself.
26. Verse 15: It is man's fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. <sup>16</sup> Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm; I see the fire." <sup>17</sup> From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, "Save me; you are my god."
- a) One has to admit, this scene is so ridiculous that we want to laugh. A professional makes a statue to be worshipped. The leftover materials are burnt up a source of warmth. All it is saying is the same materials used to make idols is the same as that which is being burnt up. We live in a culture where people have statues there for protection. They have idols in cars supposedly for protection or for success. Yes I know that in ancient cultures, such gods represented what people worshipped. All I'm saying is idols are still around today as they represent efforts to please God or efforts to turn to other things instead of Him.

- b) Let me try the "flipside" for a moment. What if someone says to me, John you've made an idol out of bible study. You work so hard at studying and learning about God it's become an idol as you trust in those studies for your salvation. If I ever start to think that I'm more saved because of that effort, then I've made it into an idol. To do what we believe He calls us to do is not to earn points with God, it's to use our lives to make a difference for Him. It is to grow closer to Him by learning more about Him. However if we start to think of any effort we make as earning points with God, then it becomes an idol. That's when we need to examine any effort we make and honestly ask why we're making it in the first place.
  - c) Now that I've made all of us feel guilty about something, myself included, let's finish up what's left of the chapter. The good news is we're almost done with the judgment section.
27. Verse 18: They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand.
- a) Whenever I hear someone say they are an agnostic, that just means they don't know about His existence and have their doubts about whether or not a God exists. Can a nonbeliever study the bible and figure out what it means? Yes, but they won't believe it. I'm positive that in order for one to understand the truth's of God as taught in the bible, one has to (big emphasis on has to) be born again, or else it won't make sense. I remember hearing about a fairly famous pastor walk into a philosophy class and announce, "It's impossible for you to understand the truth's of how the world works" and sat down. Yes he was waiting for a response, but in effect he was making the same point as this verse. Unless one is willing to commit their lives to serve Jesus, the truth's the of scripture will not make sense, or else one will simply think it's a waste of one's life to study this stuff.
  - b) I have siblings who I pray for daily, never ask me about my relationship with God as they have no interest in spiritual things or no interest in discussing such issues with me. I'd be willing to bet that most of the people reading this study are considered the spiritual ones in gatherings with greater families as most people simply don't care about God's truth or don't want to take the time to learn it. That's what this verse is discussing.
  - c) So if most people are ignorant about God, why judge them so severely? Remember that it is "free choice". Many choose not to draw close to God and people willfully shut off any type of discussion about Him. There's an old expression that one never discusses religion or politics in mixed company. The problem is such people are wasting away their lives in their apathy about God. We as Christians have been called to share the good news about eternal salvation even when people have closed minds. What I've also learned practically is that witnessing is better one at a time, because peer pressure to conform will keep them away from openly discussing what's important for eternity.
28. Verse 19: No one stops to think, no one has the knowledge or understanding to say, "Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals, I roasted meat and I ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?" <sup>20</sup> He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, "Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?"
- a) The reason Isaiah is so obsessed about the topic of idolatry, is it was very common even in Israel before the Babylonian captivity. It is as if Isaiah was looking around at how people lived around him and said, "Why do you take the same materials that you use for cooking and use it to represent what you worship?" Let me use an example that is common in our culture today: Little "Mary" statues made of plastic or wood. Yes those statues may help us to focus on God, but trusting in having that statue around for protection or for success is a form of an idol, and that's what Isaiah's preaching against.
  - b) Now for the good news. We're done with the idolatry discussion. The rest of the chapter is the reminder that if we've committed that sin in the past, God's forgiven us of it, as He wants us to focus on Him for guidance and not any symbol or ritual we perform that we may think is "earning points" with Him. Therefore bear with me as I crank out the last of these verses as we discuss the benefits of God's forgiveness.

29. Verse 21: "Remember these things, O Jacob, for you are my servant, O Israel. I have made you, you are my servant; O Israel, I will not forget you.
- a) Whenever the bible uses both the original name of the common ancestor of all the Jewish people along with the new name, (Jacob and Israel, same person), it's God's way of saying I know what you were like before I called you and I know what you're like since then, so I am asking you to turn from idols because I as God can't stop loving whom I love.
  - b) It may help to remember here is the issue isn't salvation, but our witness to God. We have been separated from the world so we can be a good witness for Him. We are to turn away from idols not to earn points with God, but so that we can live as a good witness for Him.
  - c) As to salvation, our behavior is our "witness" to what we do believe in. We are to behave differently from nonbelievers because we are called by God to do so. We can then have an assurance of our salvation because our behavior as imperfect as it is, is committed to use our lives as a witness for Him not to earn salvation, but because we are forgiven. All that leads back to this verse. It's the reminder that it's all "worth it" despite whatever we have to go through in life because the God who made us, can't forget about us.
30. Verse 22: I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you."
- a) As I said earlier in the lesson a God who's perfect can't learn anything. At the same time, He can choose to not bring up an issue with us. That's what this verse is saying. We don't have to worry about our salvation because God Himself paid the price for our sins. As we trust in that fact, we then use our life accordingly to live as a witness for Him. That is the Gospel message in a few simple thoughts.
31. Verse 23: Sing for joy, O heavens, for the LORD has done this; shout aloud, O earth beneath. Burst into song, you mountains, you forests and all your trees, for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, he displays his glory in Israel.
- a) All of a sudden, Isaiah breaks out into praise. I think he realizes he can't earn his way into heaven based on what God will do in the future, so he starts praising Him as he considers all the problems Israel has as a nation, and realizes they can't blow it. Who God separates is permanently separated. No it doesn't mean all people from Jewish backgrounds will go to heaven. It means Israel "as a nation" can't blow it as an entity where God will rule from one day. That's why I'm so convinced with the concept that God still has plans for Israel as a nation "post Christian".
32. Verse 24: "This is what the LORD says-- your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the LORD, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, <sup>25</sup> who foils the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners, who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense, <sup>26</sup> who carries out the words of his servants and fulfills the predictions of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, 'It shall be inhabited,' of the towns of Judah, 'They shall be built,' and of their ruins, 'I will restore them,' <sup>27</sup> who says to the watery deep, 'Be dry, and I will dry up your streams,'
- a) My loose translation: Who do you think you're messing with anyway? Don't you realize it is I (God) who made everything! Who do you think ruins the plans of false prophets as well as make into nonsense those who think they're wise without Me? Who do you think made it possible for Jerusalem to be the most sought over city in world history despite the fact it has no natural resources anyone would want?
  - b) While I'm on a roll, who do you think is going to allow Jerusalem to be rebuilt after it'll be wiped out from existence? That's the flavor of these verses. They're here as a reminder to us that God's in charge, deal with it and we should live our life accordingly. It's written in response to the idol-worshipping world that effectively surrounds us believers.
33. Verse 28: who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."'
- a) This last verse is a preview of what's to come in the next lesson.

- b) I admit one of my favorite chapters in Isaiah, is next week, when we discuss Cyrus. The short version here is he's the emperor over the Persian Empire that destroyed Babylon. He was a non-believer, but was a great example of how God can use anyone in order to have His will done on earth. In other words, God told Isaiah that about 200 years before Israel is taken into captivity that a man named Cyrus will allow Jerusalem to be rebuilt.
34. With that said, thanks with bearing with me through a long lesson. I wanted to end the judgment section of Isaiah and get into one of my favorite parts of the bible, a prediction by name of a great leader that God used to help His people when they were at a very low point in history. However that's next week, for us it's time to pray.
35. Heavenly Father, there are aspects to eternal judgment that are confusing as we don't understand all the details of how that takes place. We just know You exist, You rule over this world and You get to decide who spends eternity with You. Thank You that You alone paid the full price for our sins so we don't have to try to earn our way into heaven. Help us through Your Spirit to use the time You've given us so we can make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.