

1. In last two verses of the last chapter, (Chapter 50 Verse 10) Isaiah effectively asked, "Why should we trust God anyway?" When Isaiah wrote this, idol worship was common in Israel. If we argue he was talking about the life in the Babylon Empire (one hundred years after he wrote it) he'd be talking about the same issue. Either way the Israelites were thinking, where's God when we need Him? The related issue for us is, when our life's falling apart or we're just dealing with a difficult situation, a logical question to ponder is where's God when I need Him?
 - a) Yes I've written many a lesson on this topic, but the text in this lesson specifically answers that question. Isaiah gives us a series of reasons why the Israelites should continue to trust God despite all they're dealing with, and hopefully helps us realize what is the big picture especially when we lack the answer to the classic question of where's God when we really need Him to interact in our situation?
 - b) The next thing one has to remember is the "target audience" of this book is Israelites. Yes, we have parts of Isaiah that are messages to other lands as well as all people. Most of the book as well as the next section primarily focuses on writing to Israelites. My point's that God wants to say to them, "Why are you ignoring Me? Yes I'm aware times are hard right now, but that doesn't mean I've abandoned any of you. I still desire to guide your lives so each of you can make a difference for Me." My point is even though this section of Isaiah is very "Jewish" in its flavor, there is a lot us Christians can learn from it. The key point is for us to realize that despite whatever situation we're facing, we can trust Him to guide us through this life and the rewards for that trust are eternal life in His presence.
2. OK, what if we already believe that? If we're willing to read an Old Testament bible study, that's usually a pretty good indication we care about our relationship with God. Why should we study this particular passage and keep reading? In the last lesson I talked about continuing to trust Him during times when "God's gone silent". This lesson continues that theme, but effectively asks the question, "OK, God's still there, so what?" Even if we I believe He rules over the world what does that have to do with the issues we're dealing with at this moment?
 - a) That leads to my lesson title, "Why should we still trust in God, when everything's falling apart and He's not responding the way I'd like Him to!"
 - b) In other words, I've got a full plate, I know He exists, and I'm too busy putting out fires to worry about my relationship with God right now. When we start thinking like that, that's when He wants to remind us that, He's still there, He desires to be involved in our lives as He still wants us to trust Him through our "full plate". If we're in a situation where we're thinking, "OK God I believe in You, but right now I've got to deal with "this or that" and I don't have time for You right now. That's when He wants to remind us, "Make the time to seek Me and I promise to lead you through whatever we're dealing with and also give us a sense of peace through that situation.
 - c) Think about life this way: What do we want more than peace? What could we want more than joy? Through all that we're going through, don't we want happiness? Yes, of course we have to deal with our "full plates", but the point is God wants to guide us through it so He gets the glory when we make it through whatever we're dealing with. That's the issue behind this little lecture to the Israelites that God's still there.
3. Let me also describe this section one more way: The next lesson will cover what bible scholars do consider one of the most important passages in the Old Testament. It's a description of the event of the cross, written seven centuries before it occurred. It's so accurate, for centuries some Jewish scholars wanted to deny it was really part of Isaiah. One of the great advantages of the Dead Sea scrolls was to find a complete copy of Isaiah complete with all of the text that we'll discuss in the next lesson. My question here is, why have this why should I still trust Him when I'm so buried in other stuff, right before that famous text?

- a) The most important answer is to remind us of the big picture. That is: Despite whatever it is we're dealing with, He's still in charge, He's still executing His plan for the world and He still paid the price for our sins, so why do we worry about the "small stuff"? Of course we have to deal with our issues, but this lesson reminds us to keep the big picture in mind as we deal with our stuff, because the reason Jesus died for our sins is so we don't have to worry about trying to earn our salvation, so we're free to have Him guide our lives for His glory. That's a great reminder of how we're to live our Christian life during tough times.
 - b) The point is since we don't have to earn His love, we're free to live our lives however we'd like to. What the issue really becomes why would we want to use our lives for any reason other than to use it for God's glory. When we face Him on judgment day, would you like to tell Him how we've used our lives to make lots of money or achieve some level of fame, or shall we tell Him how we've used our lives to make a difference for Him?
4. Let me put all of this another way, we're now one lesson away from the most detailed description of how Jesus died for our sins written prior to the events of the New Testament. Therefore, we're being effectively told that since this is what God's about to do for you, how will we live based on what He's done for us? Therefore, I ask you join me as we study why we should trust God before we get into a key discussion of what He's done from our perspective, or what He will do from the perspective of Isaiah, what God's going to do in the future.
- a) Shorter version: Since God paid the price of our sins lets use our lives in gratitude for the fact our sins have been paid for. With that said, I ask that you join me as I go through the verses of this chapter and a half of text as we read what God's done for us in preparation of the "main event" of the next chapter.
5. Chapter 51, Verse 1: "Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn;
- a) To understand this verse, let's back up two verses to the previous chapter. Remember the chapter breaks we're not part of the original text. Chapter 50, Verse 10: "Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God." My point's that Verse 10 and this verse in Chapter 51 both encourage the Israelites who want do the right thing, as to have peace with the God who created them (and us) to seek Him.
 - b) To paraphrase, the best thing we can do for our lives is seek the one who created us in the first place. Verse 1 is a not so subtle reminder of who made us in the first place. If God is the one who's responsible for us being in the world, what should we do about it? Why is it we should seek Him? If for no other reason, than to give us a purpose greater than just living for ourselves (be it living to make a lot of money or achieve fame or a lot of power), the best thing we can do is look to the God who made us.
 - c) OK John, time for the big "now what" question. Let's be honest, most of us already believe that Jesus is God and believe He is in charge of our lives. The answer is to live by the laws laid out in the bible not to earn His love but because it's the best way to live out our lives.
 - d) That idea leads me back to the lesson theme. When Isaiah wrote this most Israelites didn't seek God. Even if he had the future Babylonian captivity in mind, that would be a time in which the Israelites were not living in the land and it was easy to give us hope. We all go through times where things seem hopeless and we ask God, "Where are You when I need You? Why aren't You there for me during this time of my life?" Of course He's still there but we can feel like He's not working our way on our timing. We can feel like He's left us because we don't see a solution in sight to our problems. It is during the low times of our life when I picture God almost screaming at us "Verse 1". It's like He's saying continue to trust Me. I'm the one who created you in the first place, what makes you think I will ever abandon you in your hour of need. It's sort of a "Hang in there, I'm (God) still working on My timing. Let's keep making the best decisions we can, because He still wants to use our lives to make a difference for Him despite the difficulty of the moment."

- e) If you've been with me through some of Isaiah, you'd know that he likes to use common illustrations that people can relate to. In this case, Isaiah thinks of a large rock, (think the Rock of Gibraltar). It's the idea that God created the world from "nothing" and we're part of that creation. That's the visual idea of this first argument Isaiah makes on God's behalf of why we should trust in Him. Realize that argument is the first of many we'll read of in the text of this lesson. The second argument is Verse 2, speaking of which:
6. Verse 2: look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was but one, and I blessed him and made him many.
- a) Here is a verse where one has to think Jewish. To be Jewish, the common ancestor was a man named Jacob. His grandfather was the first person God called to separate himself in effect to start the Jewish nation. My point is if one is Jewish, one thinks of Abraham and his wife Sarah as the "parents" of the Jewish nation. The miracle God did with that couple is they got to have a son when she was past the age of bearing children. Through that one son, he grew up to have twins, and one of those twins was Jacob. He was the father of the 12 tribes of Israel. The reason I give that brief history lesson is God is trying to remind the Israelites of who they are: Israelites.
- b) Let me explain this idea another way: Picture the Israelites not living in that land. It'd be easy for them to think that God's abandoned them. We could mess up our lives and think that God has abandoned us. You might recall in the last chapter that God effectively said, "When did I ever divorce you?" The point is whether we like it or not, we still are part of God's family and He still desires a relationship with us in spite of our lives to date.
- c) What if we think, we're not Jewish, so we're not a part of this Abraham and Sarah family? That's why the New Testament book of Acts makes a big deal about how God reached out to us non-Israelites to be a part of His family. When the Romans destroyed the temple in 70AD, one of the things the leading Jewish scholars who survived of that day discussed is why did God allow that temple to be destroyed? The answer they came up with is they'd failed to teach the bible to the Gentiles. I'm convinced they are partially correct. I'm sure that one reason God sent Jesus into the world is so that He could gather close to Him both Jewish and non-Jewish people willing to trust in Him for eternal life. Yes the Israelites do fail to see Jesus as the Promised Messiah, but they are also right in that because they failed to show non-Israelites how much God loves them is the main reason why Jesus had to die for our sins. The reason I'm stating the obvious here is even Verse 2 is primarily designed for the Jewish reader to return to God, I want us "Gentiles" to realize that we too are called to turn to Him as well. With that stated, I can move on to Verse 3.
7. Verse 3: The LORD will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.
- a) Remember how I said God likes to work in situations that seem impossible for us to fix? Imagine the land of Israel being a total wasteland as the Babylonians forced the Israelites to relocate out of that land. To modernize this verse, as the Israelites started to take over that land again in the last 100 years, they literally had to work with land that was wasted. Specific kinds of trees were planted there to help make the land good again. My point is God works in patterns. Just as that land was once again populated after the Babylonian captivity ended, just like the Israelites of the modern error worked to rebuild it today, so God can work to make a paradise out of a "wasteland" of our lives.
- b) The images that Isaiah uses to describe this transformation of land come from the first few chapters of Genesis. In the story of Adam and Eve, they lived in a garden created by God for them to live and enjoy. It's the image of God creating "something beautiful essentially out of nothing". The idea is just as God created a beautiful land for them to live, so God is capable of restoring the land of Israel despite the fact they were kicked out of that land. It is the reminder that God can still work in our lives no matter where we're at right now.

- c) With that said, I'd like you to notice the references to joy and gladness in this verse. Also we have a reference to being grateful (thanksgiving) and singing. The point is God wants us to have joy in our lives. He doesn't want us sitting around feeling sorry for ourselves as we go through life. He wants us to have that joy and gladness in our life. To state what's the obvious, one can't be joyful, unless one is grateful for what one has in life.
 - d) Remember what Isaiah's trying to accomplish here, get people to look to the God who did make them and us in the first place. The point is we can sit around and feel sorry how our life has turned out or we can look to the God who created us so we can have to have joy in our lives in spite of whatever we're dealing with at the moment. So are you saying, "Don't worry, be happy?" No I'm saying that if we put our faith in the God who created us in the first place, we can have joy in life no matter what our circumstances are at this moment.
 - e) As I like to say, we can't always control our circumstances, but we can always control our attitude through those circumstances. That's what Isaiah's reminding us as we realize that God created us and wants to guide our lives for His glory.
8. Verse 4: "Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: The law will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations.
- a) Remember why God separated the Jewish nation to begin with: So He'd have a specific group of people to be His witnesses of His existence to the world. Do you want to know why the world is so "hell bent" against the existence of the nation of Israel? What it really comes down to is the idea that we have to be accountable to a God. That's why He called them to spread "His laws" to the world so that people would realize how much He loves us and desires we live by His rules not to earn His love but only because it's the best way to live out our lives. As I said in the last lesson, it doesn't mean we have to wear a beanie and eat kosher. It does mean for example, we don't steal or murder because at the least, it makes us a bad witness for Jesus when we hurt other people.
 - b) Compare this verse to what God calls all Christians to do: Go out into the world in order to tell others of Jesus existence and His love for all people. In effect, both principals apply here. Telling people of God's laws is not to state, "Live by these rules or you'll go to hell." Let's be honest, none of us are perfect and none of us can perfectly keep those laws. That is what is emphasized in the New Testament. The idea of "law and justice" is the idea of God not only ruling over our world, but also the fact that He gets involved in it, so as to allow us to be a witness for Him by living according to His laws as a witness for Him.
 - c) As I've been taught, in God's world people are both the "pawns and the prizes". We're the pawns as God uses people to accomplish His will. We're the prizes as the rewards for our service is eternal salvation as well as a life full of joy here and now as we trust Him as we go through our lives here and now. Which leads us back to Verse 4. God wants us to be His "pawns" as go out in the world to share the good news of His love for us as well as to understand that He wants the world to know of His laws are the best way to live out our lives in the first place.
 - d) The shorter version is God wants us to trust Him as that's the best way to live out the time we have to live our lives. That's Verse 4 in one thought. OK then, time to move on.
9. Verse 5: My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm. ⁶ Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.
- a) Verses 5 and 6 go together. The key point is life as we know it will not go on forever. We will all get to a point where we will die. The same principal applies to life on this planet as well. The bible is very graphic in it's description of how life on this planet will end one day just as it began one day. I don't know when that day will come, but the archeological evidence supports the bible's predictions to date and I trust it's accurate of the future too.

- b) Let me put this in very modern terms: Do I fear global warming or a nuclear bomb falling on me? While I'm painfully aware of the damage done by war. While I'm painfully aware of what sickness and disease can do to people, I'm still convinced that God's in charge and the world will only end on His timing, not on ours. There is nothing we can do to change His timing other than when we pray for "His kingdom to come". I'm positive we can do a lot of damage to life on this earth if we don't act rationally, but I'm still positive the world will only end when He says so and not based on anything people can do this world.
 - c) I also want you to think about these verses another way: No matter how long we each live the statistics on death are pretty clear: One out of every one person dies someday. It may be soon or hopefully a long time from now. I hold the view one should live every day as if it's our last one. I don't mean spend every last dollar we have as if we die tomorrow. I'm talking about having an appreciation for the time we get to live and making the best of it, because we never know how long each of us have to live.
 - d) With that thought in mind, I'd like you to re-read these verses. Go ahead, I'll wait here.
 - i) The key point is that a day will come where the world as we know it will vanish. It can be from Jesus returning or it can be from our death. The point is we should all look to God to make the most of the time we have to live here and now as that is the best use of the time God's given us to live.
 - ii) Notice the final line. It says, "My salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail." Ever stop to think how do we know "heaven" lasts forever? If this life only lasts one lifetime, what's our guarantee that heaven is eternal? Won't heaven be boring after awhile? Won't we eventually run out of things to do there or things to learn? Personally, I never get tired of having joy in my life. It never gets old to help others and learn new things. I'm not positive what we do forever, but I have become pretty positive that eternity will never be boring even after we've lived in that environment for say a billion years.
 - iii) To answer that question another way, if we can trust the bible with history to date why do we fail to trust Him with His plans for us for all of eternity? The accuracy of the bible to date is what gives me hope for His eternal plans for my life.
 - iv) On that positive thought, we can move on to Verse 7:
10. Verse 7: "Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have my law in your hearts: Do not fear the reproach of men or be terrified by their insults.
- a) It may help at this point to remember why Isaiah's stating all of this in the first place. He's writing to Israelites who have lost their faith in God. Isaiah is laying out a case of why we should still trust God in spite of the circumstances of the moment. That leads us to Isaiah's latest argument here in Verse 7. To paraphrase, you know in you're heart what's the right thing to do. You were raised to know about Me, so why do you worry about what others say to you about your (our) worship of God?
 - b) One of the most common things a Christian would say on the topic of being a witness for Jesus is, "I'm afraid to say anything. I'm afraid of what people might think of me." Based on this verse, one can see that not much has changed over the millenniums. Some people do have a gift for walking up to strangers and sharing Jesus with others. Most of us look for "openings" or things in common when we meet people for the first time, or try to think of something nice to say. I've learned the hard way that forcing our Christianity on others rarely works. What's a better approach is simply to ask people about their lives and what they believe about a certain topic. That can often lead to a discussion about one's belief.
 - i) My point is not being too shy as to avoid the insults based on our beliefs, nor to be afraid when people criticize us for what we believe in. The key point of this verse is simply that God's bigger than people, so don't be afraid if we're insulted because of what we believe in about Jesus. The related point is it's worth putting up with a negative comment or two if it validates what we believe about our salvation.

- c) One more point on this and I'll move on. One of the small things that fascinates me in the bible near the end of the book is a description of the people who won't be in heaven. What I find fascinating is before a description of murderers, sexually immoral and liars, the first thing on the list is the "cowardly" (New King James Version). When we think of sins that would keep us out of heaven, "cowardly" would not be the first item on the list. (That list is from Revelation 21:8, again NKJV). One has to remember one is not sent to hell because one is a murderer or a liar. One is sent to hell for rejecting God's free gift of salvation. All of the items on that list are the "results" of a heart that refuses to let God rule over our life.
 - i) My point is we don't think of "cowardly" as being on that list. I believe what John meant by that idea is a sign that one is a believer is one is not afraid to talk about it or simply live differently enough that others would know we are Christians. To be a coward there is simply another sign that one is not saved if we're more afraid of what others are willing to say about us if we admit we're willing to stand for what we believe in. I'm not saying if we fail to stand up for Jesus we're going to hell. If one is in a life-threatening situation, one may have to hide their faith. My point is a question of "lifestyle". To refuse to live, as God wants us to live is an example of how one can be too cowardly to be a good witness for Jesus.
 - ii) In the meantime, time to leave Revelation and get back to Isaiah.
11. Verse 8: For the moth will eat them up like a garment; the worm will devour them like wool. But my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations.
- a) Since I'm paraphrasing a lot of verses lately, time to take a shot at this one: "Why are you trying to live like non-believers all around you? Why are you so worried about trying to make more money or accumulate more power or fame? Don't you realize all of them will die and that's all the pleasure they'll ever get out of life?" To be more literal, when Isaiah's using descriptions like a bug eating a clothing garment, he's trying to give us a vivid idea of how long "things" other than God will last.
 - b) Then Isaiah reminds us that God's salvation is immortal. That God works this way in all generations. When I think about it, it's amazing that so many people work so hard to try to achieve "immortality". They think by doing something famous, they'll live longer than say one generation. God's reminding us that by trusting in what He did for us, we've got that "immortality" as we'll live in His presence forever. What on earth can we possibly do that could compare to that? That's what this verse is reminding us. Yes, some people will have bigger or more famous ministries than others. We aren't rewarded based on say, the number of people we lead to Jesus. We're rewarded on our loyalty to what He's called us to do, be a witness for Him and use the gifts He's given us to make a difference for Him.
 - c) That is the idea behind this verse. Time for the next one.
12. Verse 9: Awake, awake! Clothe yourself with strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days gone by, as in generations of old. Was it not you who cut Rahab to pieces, who pierced that monster through?
- a) Time for another paraphrase: Hey God, we as bible-believers trust that you've done great miracles in the past. The word Rahab as used here is an ancient nickname for Egypt. All it is saying is we believe God put a stop to those Egyptians so long ago when they tried to stop the Israelites from leaving Egypt. The "monster" is another nickname for Egypt. All it is saying is Egypt was so powerful at that point in history that for any God to stop them would be like "piercing a monster".
 - b) Yes it's a strange analogy. One has to understand that for an Israelite the fact that they got to get away from the most powerful entity on the planet on that time should be enough of a proof to trust that God exists.
 - c) Remember my lesson theme. The issue isn't whether or not God exists, the issue is why is He failing to work in our life right now? Why does He allowing us to suffer now so much as He claims to love us so much? The answer is coming in two verses.

13. Verse 10: Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made a road in the depths of the sea so that the redeemed might cross over?
- In the meantime Isaiah's still is giving us examples of how God's worked great miracles in the past. In other words, before we can get to the why we should be trusting God answer, Isaiah wants to build the case that God has worked great miracles in the past.
 - The reason Isaiah's going to all this trouble is for us to realize that God has worked greatly in the past, therefore we should trust that He can work in our lives today no matter what's the present situation we're dealing with. That's why the last two verses focus on the great miracle of getting the Israelites out of Egypt and across the Red Sea. The issue isn't about reciting history as much as it is to remind us that God's capable of working great things in our lives if we're willing to trust Him. Which leads me perfectly to Verse 11.
14. Verse 11: 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.
- One has to admit, Isaiah has a fascination with discussing the Israelites being kicked out of that land and the fact they'll return there one day. Yes you can say it applies to the time right after the Babylonian captivity. It can also apply to the last 100 years or so as they did also return to form that land again. I also think it's a prediction of life under Jesus Second Coming as He gathers us to draw close to Him for all of eternity.
 - The actual act isn't as fascinating here as the attitude: They go there, singing and with lots of joy. So does that mean for us to be happy, we have to go to Israel? While I recommend a visit I don't think that's the issue. Remember His desire is to develop relationships with those of us He's called. Despite whatever we're dealing with, God wants us to have joy in our lives. By praising Him we remind ourselves who's in charge and yes it will bring us a lot of joy to praise Him both individually and collectively. As I like to say, I might as well sing out in church to get used to it as I figure I'll be doing that a lot for eternity.
 - Remember the goal of this lesson, to help us learn how to have joy no matter what it is we are dealing with at the moment. Taking some time to seek Him despite whatever we have to deal with can bring us joy even through the toughest times of our lives.
15. Verse 12: "I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men, the sons of men, who are but grass,¹³ that you forget the LORD your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, that you live in constant terror every day because of the wrath of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction? For where is the wrath of the oppressor?"
- Another thing that Isaiah seems to be endlessly fascinated by is comparing seeking God to seeking people for help. We get the reminder here that life is short as Isaiah reminds us of how people's life are effectively like grass, in that it only exists for a short time.
 - These verses are effectively saying, "Why are you putting your trust in people whose life is short, when you can put your trust in Me, who created all things? You fear the people who are oppressing you, but what's their power compared to Mine?"
 - If there's one thing I have learned from living the Christian life is God will never do for us what we can do for ourselves. If you study the Gospels, none of the miracles involved an act where people could help themselves. For example, Jesus cured blindness, disease and provided food where there was none. Jesus never said, "You're blind, too bad for you but I have to go die for your sins, so deal with it." So if God can do what we can't, why is He not "curing blindness" all around us to use a simple example? Why does He allow all the suffering to exist if He claims He loves us as much as He does? The best answer I've come up with is to accept is God allows all things to occur to believers for His glory, not to give us a comfortable life. He allows us believers to suffer to test our faith, and in many cases to lead others to Him or closer to Him.
 - My point is we don't trust Jesus so He can make our life more comfortable. We trust Him as He guides us through what we're dealing with for His glory (not our comfort).

16. Verse 14: The cowering prisoners will soon be set free; they will not die in their dungeon, nor will they lack bread.
- OK, who are the "cowering prisoners"? I suspect it refers to the Israelites when they were in captivity in Babylon. Most of us know that throughout the millenniums, many people have died for being a witness for God, both from a Jewish and a Christian perspective. So what does "set free" mean? To state the obvious, it can refer to eternal salvation and those who are physically persecuted for the God's sake they won't always have to suffer for that situation. I know that in most American prisons there are people who've given their lives to Jesus and work to lead others to Him in prison despite their sentence.
 - This verse also reminds me of a line from a psalm. It reads, "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread." (Psalm 37:25, NIV). In both verses the point is that those who are suffering won't go on that way forever. As someone who runs my own business and occasionally deals with fears of not having enough money to pay for things, I admit, verses like this one in Isaiah and this one in the Psalms gives me comfort that God will see me through tough situations.
 - Again, remember my lesson theme: Where's God when we need Him? We may not be in a literal dungeon starving, but we all know life can be hard at times and we ponder where is God when we need Him? It's verses like these that remind us that just as the good times don't last forever, neither do the bad times. I try to remind myself of that when things are going well as and when life gets hard, that God's still in charge, He's still guiding my life, and He won't let whatever suffering exists to go on forever.
17. Verse 15: For I am the LORD your God, who churns up the sea so that its waves roar-- the LORD Almighty is his name. ¹⁶ I have put my words in your mouth and covered you with the shadow of my hand-- I who set the heavens in place, who laid the foundations of the earth, and who say to Zion, 'You are my people.' "
- My very loose translation: Whom do you think we're messing with? I've got power most of us can't even imagine." Isaiah uses a word picture that most of us could relate to, large waves in the sea. Verse 16 then reminds the Israelites, "Who do you think has guided and protected you this far in life? It's the same God who created the world in the first place, is the one who said to the Israelites, "You are my people so deal with it!"
 - As I stated earlier in the lesson, one of the things the New Testament makes clear is God's also called us non-Jewish people close to Him to become "His people" as well. My point is just as God's called the Israelites to draw close to Him here, it applies to us Christians too.
 - Remember why Isaiah's writing all of this: God is well aware situations will occur in our life where we ponder, "where is God when I need Him"? That's when we need to remind ourselves that He's still powerful, He still created all things, He still calls each of us to be among His people, so stop worrying about the outcome. Make the best decisions we can given the situation in front of us and as we dedicate our lives to serving God, realize He's guiding us through whatever we're dealing with. That's how we can have joy despite our situation of the moment. That's the point of these verses.
18. Verse 17: Awake, awake! Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes men stagger.
- The bible occasionally uses an image that is hard for us to relate to: That is of God's wrath being like a drink in His hand that he pours out on the earth. Revelation Chapter 14 uses the same type of image of God's wrath being poured out like wine out of a glass. Again it is an image that most people can understand. Just like a drink can spill out of glass that'd do damage to what it spills upon, so God's "wrath" can do damage when it spills. It's just a way of saying, "Don't mess with God, the consequences are pretty bad." In fact, Isaiah is reminding us how Jerusalem itself will feel God's wrath as He allows that city to be taken over by non-Israelites for their failure to be obedient to God. It occurred several times in human history including the Babylonians and the Romans. Yet Israelites live there today.

- b) My point is God's wrath does occur, but it is not always permanent damage. Just as the Jewish people eventually return to that land after horrid destruction, so God still cares for you and me and desires to draw us close to Him even after we've gone through very hard things in our lives. God's "wrath" can be punishment for disobedience to and for those of us called to be His people. Sometimes it's on nonbelievers for how they've hurt those who are called to be His people. Either way, it's something to be avoided.
 - c) So if a disaster comes, how do we know it's the wrath of God? Sometimes it is obvious in hindsight such as the destruction and reoccupation of Israel. Often we won't know why it is we are going through a tough time, except we are. Usually we're too busy dealing with the problem of the moment to worry about what did cause it. It's usually not until after it is long over, when we start to think about what caused it and how we can prevent it in the future. All I am saying is we should control what we can and let go of what we can't. We have no idea if and when God's wrath occurs and we do our best to avoid it by living our lives based on how He desires we live.
 - d) Which leads me back to this verse. It's describing a situation where one can obviously see how God's working His wrath in "hindsight" and learning from it, which is about trusting in Him so to minimize His wrath in our lives for the future, by trusting in Him.
19. Verse 18: Of all the sons she bore there was none to guide her; of all the sons she reared there was none to take her by the hand.
- a) Since I'm having a field day with very loose translations in this lesson, here goes, "There is no Israelite to lead all of you out of your problems. No one is emerging among you that's standing up to the Babylonians (or the Romans) or leading the Israelites to want to return to that land in fear of those threats. It's interesting to think about the fact that God used a non-Jewish person to allow the Israelites to return there after the Babylonian captivity as a Persian ("Iranian") leader let them go home. It was the British who made the declaration in the early 20th century that allowed the Israelites to return to that land. My point is God used Gentiles in world history to help them return to where God wanted them to be.
 - b) Remember that we are now about 20 verses away from the most detailed Old Testament description of Jesus dying for our sins. My point is Isaiah's working His way to telling us of how God Himself will "take the Israelites by the hand" to do for them what they can't do for themselves, pay the penalty for all their sins. I see a hint of that here as it refers to the fact that "none of the Israelites to date, were able to guide her away from God's wrath that came in those captivities or from the suffering they've endured for His name's sake."
20. Verse 19: These double calamities have come upon you-- who can comfort you?-- ruin and destruction, famine and sword-- who can console you? ²⁰ Your sons have fainted; they lie at the head of every street, like antelope caught in a net. They are filled with the wrath of the LORD and the rebuke of your God.
- a) It's easy to forget the fact that Isaiah wrote all of this a century prior to the Babylonians as they existed as an empire. He writes in such detail as if it's a done deal, we forget that he wrote all of this before even a hint of it even began. Therefore, Isaiah's back to his present day as if to warn the Israelites that horrible tragedies are coming and do you think you're capable of stopping God's wrath when it strikes?
 - b) Let me put this another way: Do you think we have problems? When the Southern Israel kingdom was conquered, it meant death "everywhere" and those who survived it, had to be taken a great distance away into captivity. One of the great mistakes Christians make is we think we don't have to worry about God's wrath because we're saved by grace. All I'm saying is if God was this tough on the Israelites when they turned from Him, why do we think we'd be any less safe if we fail to use our lives as a witness for Him? As well as the positive motivation of having joy in our lives by seeking Him, we can also suffer when we decide to waste our lives by not using it as a witness for Him. These verses aren't just historical, they are a warning to us Christians when we turn from Him as well.

- c) Remember that I'm not saying we have to work hard to be saved. I'm saying we have to use our lives for His glory because that's why He created us in the first place. We are to live that way not to earn His love, but strictly out of gratitude for what He's done for us.
21. Verse 21: Therefore hear this, you afflicted one, made drunk, but not with wine. ²² This is what your Sovereign LORD says, your God, who defends his people: "See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again. ²³ I will put it into the hands of your tormentors, who said to you, 'Fall prostrate that we may walk over you.' And you made your back like the ground, like a street to be walked over."
- a) Ok, one more loose translation, "You know how I God allowed you (My people) to suffer because you collectively turned from Me? Well the good news is that suffering won't last forever. In fact those who hurt you will suffer far more than what you went through!"
- b) Translation #2: The most we'll ever suffer is one lifetime's worth. All those that refuse to trust in the God of the Israelites will suffer eternity because they refused to let Him guide their lives for His glory. In other words, "betting on the winning horse" can still make us suffer in this lifetime, but "one lifetime" is the worst we will ever suffer.
- c) Remember that all we (Christians) go through in this life is "God filtered". He allows it to occur somehow and ultimately for His glory. We may not understand why we have to go through what we do, but He does and allows it somehow for His purposes. Whatever we have to deal with, again, at the worst lasts one lifetime and hopefully a lot less. Those who turn from God suffer a whole lot longer.
22. OK, time to do something rare: A half chapter more. Remember that the chapter breaks were not added until millenniums after the text was written. I'm breaking the text this way as the final few verses of Chapter 52 go better with Chapter 53, which I'll leave for the next lesson. With that said let me tackle the first part of Chapter 52 here:
23. Chapter 52 Verse 1: Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor, O Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again.
- a) Let's remember where we are: A half chapter away from what Christian bible scholars do refer to as the "Holy of Holies" of the Old Testament as it describes the cross itself in detail from what I refer to as God's perspective. Before we get there, Isaiah wants to build a case why we should trust God, especially when we believe He's not acting on our timing or in a way that makes us happy. Chapter 51 and the first part of Chapter 52 builds a case why we should trust God even when we don't sense Him acting the way we want Him to act.
- b) That little speech leads me right to Verse 1 here. Remember that Isaiah already predicted the defeat of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Yet here in Verse 1 the text is saying that the "uncircumcised and defiled" will not enter you again. OK John you got us, what does any of this have to do with trusting God? To answer, first remember that whatever is Isaiah is describing we know it hasn't happened yet, because at the Romans did destroy Jerusalem again about seven centuries later. My point is God's saying here, "Don't worry despite all of your problems, a day will come when Jesus will rule the world from Jerusalem one day so therefore, whatever problems we're facing it won't last forever, as Jesus will rule over the world one day."
- c) To keep this simple, Isaiah's saying one reason we shouldn't fret about God not answering our prayers is because He's working on His plan for mankind, and that plan will go ahead in spite of whatever is happening in this world and despite our problems of the moment.
24. Verse 2: Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, O Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains on your neck, O captive Daughter of Zion.
- a) Short version: Isaiah's still using Jesus "Second Coming" as a reason why we should still trust God despite whatever it is we're dealing with. The more literal aspect of this verse is that a day will come where the nation of Israel won't have to worry about their enemies as a day will come where they'll no longer have to deal with nations wanting to kill them as whether people like it or not Jesus will rule over the world one day.

- b) My question of course, is what does any of that have to do with us? The answer is despite whatever problems we're dealing with God's plans for the world are still on schedule. On His timing, the world as we know it will end one day and a new era will begin one day, as Jesus will rule over this world from Israel. OK John, I believe the bible is the word of God and I believe all of that will happen. What about the meantime? What about all the issues we have to face right now? The bible does not tell us for example, should we quit our job to go do "x or y"? Our bible gives us principals to live by so we can make the best choices we can given whatever circumstances we face. For example of choices "x or y" violate our biblical principals, that's God telling us don't make that choice. If neither option violates a standard that God wants us to live by, then we're free to make whatever choice is best.
- i) The reason I'm preaching this is to remind us that whatever choice we make under the limitations God puts on us, He's still going through with His plans for us, so it is not necessary to sweat the "small stuff" since the "big stuff" will still occur.
- ii) In the meantime, back to Isaiah:
25. Verse 3: For this is what the LORD says: "You were sold for nothing, and without money you will be redeemed." ⁴ For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "At first my people went down to Egypt to live; lately, Assyria has oppressed them.
- a) I said when I started this lesson that the main focus is on the Israelites. Obviously many of the principals apply to Christians we well, but one has to think "Jewish" to appreciate the history being taught here. The specific history being described here is that the Jewish nation was "born" in Egypt and as of Isaiah's time, much of the land of Israel was part of the Assyrian Empire. The point is oppression has been a long part of Jewish history.
- b) The reminder for you and me when we go through our own tough times, is why should we be spared of tough times and hard decisions when it's been a part of the history of all of God's chosen people for millenniums. All I'm saying is tough times isn't a unique thing for you and me. He's been watching over His people go through tough times all through history, so why do we think we're exempt from dealing with problems?
- c) Then we get the reminder that when the Israelites went to those places, it's not like a king paid for their release. No money was exchanged when the Israelites went into captivity. The same way God will redeem them "without money" just as they were taken without a dime being transferred from one bank account to the other. That of course is the reminder that we too will be redeemed to live with God for all of eternity without any cost to us for that privilege. As you can see, this is leading perfectly to the next lesson of how Jesus did pay the full price for all our sins so we can be redeemed.
26. Verse 5: "And now what do I have here?" declares the LORD. "For my people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule them mock, " declares the LORD. "And all day long my name is constantly blasphemed.
- a) Remember that when Isaiah wrote this, much of the land of Israel was under the control of the Assyrians. The Babylonians that Isaiah has written so much about hasn't risen to power as of Isaiah's time. In this verse Israel's enemies are essentially saying, "You think you're God is so powerful, why did He allow all of you to be taken into captivity? How do you expect us to trust in your god because He won't help you in your hour of need?"
- b) It's in moments like this where we have to remember God's still in charge, He's executing His plan on His timing and despite whatever we're dealing with that plan goes forward.
27. Verse 6: Therefore my people will know my name; therefore in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I."
- a) This is God saying, "Despite all of that suffering, despite whatever My people are dealing with at this time, there is coming a day when all people will realize that I (God) rule over this world and I'll win in the end no matter what!" It's our trust in that fact that keeps us focused upon Him despite whatever we're dealing with at the moment. All the things we read that Isaiah predicted that have come true give us hope that God's future will occur.

- b) Remember why we're getting all of this. So when we face our own hard times, we recall that God's still in charge, His plans are still going through and He still wants to guide us for His glory. If we get that, we get this lesson. Speaking of this lesson, there's only a few more verses left to cover, so let's get going.
28. Verse 7: How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" ⁸ Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. ⁹ Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.
- a) The really good news is we're done complaining about what "is", and now we are focused on what will be. These verses are essentially a praise to God for what He will accomplish in the future. In other words instead of complaining about how hard our life is right now, we should be praising Him for what He will do in the future. We will be a part of it, if we believe Jesus is God and paid for all our sins, so instead of feeling sorry for ourselves, let's be joyful and spread the good news that Jesus will literally return one day to Israel so He can rule over the world from there. Despite all that the land of Israel has suffered over the millenniums, God's people (Israelites) will win in the end, not because they deserve it, but only because God made an unconditional promise to them.
- b) So does that mean I have to be Jewish to be saved? Of course not. The same goes with all of the Jewish people who refuse to believe in God. Salvation today comes through a trust that Jesus is God and paid the complete price for our sins. That's going to be the key topic of the next lesson. The point is that the Jewish nation will never be completely destroyed despite the best efforts throughout history to wipe them out. There'll still be an Israelite nation for Jesus to rule from and rule over when this day comes. In the meantime instead of sitting around complaining about how hard life is, God wants us to be full of joy. God still wants us to praise Him for what He will do as a sign of trust that all of this will occur.
29. Verse 10: The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.
- a) Verse 10 is essentially saying, "This is not just a Jewish thing, the whole world will see it occur." In our world where news around the world is "instant", we can understand how all of this will occur. It must have been mind blowing to someone prior to an era before modern communication how all of this was possible. Yet of course, when Jesus returns it won't be a hidden message and it will occur exactly as the bible says it will on His timing.
- b) Again, one can see the point of why should we worry so much about our problems when all of this "utopia" will occur one day. The reason we can trust the bible, is because it has been so accurate with it's predictions to date, that we can trust it for what will occur as it is written in this book. That's why God doesn't want us to worry about our future.
30. Verse 11: Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the vessels of the LORD. ¹² But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the LORD will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.
- a) Verse 11 says, "Go out from there". Where is there? I'm sure in the literal sense it's a call to the Israelites to return to that land, after the Babylonian captivity, or even after the Roman destruction or today as it's a Jewish homeland again. I'm also positive it's future when it's a call for all Israelites to gather when the Messiah rules one day from there.
- b) More importantly, it's a call to us to go out from our worries about the future and trust in God despite whatever we're dealing with. It's the final reminder that He's still guiding us through our issues of the moment and wants us to have joy in our life despite our issues.
- c) The reason we get a lesson full of reminders that God's still there, is because it's so easy to get focused on problems of the moment and forget who's really in charge of our life as He still wants to guide it for our glory.
- d) With that said, let's close in prayer and show our gratitude for what He will do in our life!

31. Heavenly Father, Thank You for the joy You provide for us as we continue to trust in You despite whatever it is we're dealing with at the moment. Help us to remember that is by Your power that we can face whatever we're dealing with. Give us the wisdom to make the best decisions we can given the issues we face. Help us to be a witness for You in all that we do as we use our time for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.