

Isaiah Introduction and Chapter 1- John Karmelich

1. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. I state that as I believe God's called me to go eat an elephant. Let's be honest, the book of Isaiah is 66 chapters and a lot of text. After all my years of teaching the bible verse by verse and realizing God's led me for through every verse written by Moses, all the Psalms and a lot of other projects, I have faith that He'll get me through Isaiah too.
 - a) OK John, I'm glad God's called you to take on this project. Why should we follow along? Let me give you a couple of interesting facts about the book of Isaiah:
 - i) First, it's well accepted by both Jewish and Christian scholars as part of the bible.
 - ii) It's quoted about 50 times in the New Testament.
 - iii) Isaiah is mentioned by name around 20 times in the New Testament.
 - iv) The scope of the book effectively covers all of human history, from what was and is about to occur in Israel's history at the time of the writing all the way to events that will occur at the time of Jesus Second Coming.
 - v) It contains one of the most famous passages in the Old Testament that Christians argue is the greatest proof of the coming and purpose of Jesus in our world.
 - vi) Even though Isaiah was written about 700 BC, and there's lots of internal proof of the time of that writing, Isaiah was given visions by God Himself that apply to our lives today as well as to all people who are trusting in Jesus for their salvation.
 - b) That may be all well and true, but why should we spend our time studying this book?
 - i) In life, one must constantly work to develop ourselves physically, mentally, and spiritually. While I can't help you eat right or exercise, I do believe God's called all believers to grow closer to Him by learning more about Him by studying His word on a regular basis.
 - ii) OK, that covers the bible as a whole. Why study Isaiah? For starters, the reasons I already gave. Even if the big picture ideas of the history of humanity written in advance bores you, let me tell there are lots of things in this book that apply to us personally as we strive to grow closer in our relationship with Jesus.
 - iii) Believe it or not, that leads me to Chapter 1. As I've read it a bunch of times, it hit me that we as "believers" are on trial. In effect, Chapter 1 is like a courtroom trial. A great way to read Chapter 1 is to put yourself in the defendant chair and ask if "the shoe fits" having yourself on trial or even a church or small group you're in.
 - iv) My point is this lesson only covers an introduction to this book and Chapter 1. I'm already seeing how God wants us to live as believers in Him and this lesson is not even covering 2% of the entire book.
 - v) In summary, a good reason to study Isaiah with me is it's meant to help each of us draw closer to the God we claim we worship. My point is don't read this book and think of all those poor Israelites living thousands of years ago. Think about it as it affects each of our lives today as we Christians should always strive to grow in our relationship to God.
 - c) With that said, let me give my lesson title for Chapter 1: How we as both individual and collective believers in God are "on trial" before God and what that means.
 - i) But I thought Christians are saved by grace alone. That's true. However as I love to state, then what? What should we be doing and not doing based on that idea?
 - ii) In effect, Chapter 1 lays out for us what God does and doesn't expect to do as we use our lives to make a difference for Him. To repeat again a key point, don't read this chapter as applying to Jewish people who don't believe in Jesus. Put yourself in the "hot seat" as I'll do the same thing and look at areas of our lives where each of us need to change our attitude about how we do serve God in our lives.

2. Now for a little good news: Before I get all "hot and heavy" about how we as Christians are being seen and judged by God, let me spend a little time giving some background on Isaiah. If we'll be studying this man's writing for a good while, we should know a little more about the book before we begin. With that said, let me give a few statistics and points about this book.
- a) First for my newcomers, realize the chapter breaks were not added until about 2,000 years after the text was written. The chapter numbers were added roughly around the time that the printing press was invented. Still realize there are more words in the original Hebrew language of the book of Isaiah than in all the Psalms put together. My point is if you read in the original Hebrew or in modern English, it's still a big book.
 - b) Let me talk a little about time for a moment. Isaiah says in Chapter 1, that this book was written during the time of four different kings of the kingdom of Judah. Time for a quick review of Jewish history here. The Israelites first entered the land of Israel roughly about 1,500 BC. Then they went through over a 400-year period with no king over them. Their first king was Saul and their second king was David, who lived about 1,000 BC. After him Solomon ruled for 40 years. Then Israel was split into two kingdoms. By the time Isaiah came around in 700 BC, the two kingdoms have had a good history as separate kingdoms. When Isaiah was alive is when the northern kingdom called "Israel" went into captivity.
 - i) Isaiah himself lived in the southern kingdom, called Judah that existed for roughly another 100 years after the end of the northern kingdom.
 - ii) I won't bore you with the names of the kings that existed at the time of Isaiah. All I want you to understand here is that Isaiah lived during the time when Israel was split into those two kingdoms. Isaiah lived in Jerusalem, which was the capital of the Israel before the split and the capital of the Southern kingdom after the split.
 - iii) The book states that he lived during the reign of four kings. Those four ruled from 739 to 686 BC. We know that Isaiah lived until at least 681 BC as he tells about the death of a foreign king in 681BC in Chapters 38-39. Personally, I hate memorizing dates, so let's just say Isaiah lived around 700BC.
 - c) Let me talk about the "who": Isaiah's name means "The Lord is salvation". It's similar to the names Joshua, Elisha and even Jesus. Realize Isaiah focused his ministry on teaching about God's salvation and what that means. His name's meaning covers well his calling and roll in life. We'll discover that Isaiah lived in Jerusalem and was a respected priest as he had access to the king. We will also read that Isaiah had a wife and at least two sons.
 - i) Isaiah was not a high priest, but he was among the tribe within Israel called to be a priest to his fellow Israelites. Why did God pick Isaiah to write this book? He had enough wealth to have access to writing material. As a priest, he was well trained in a study of God's word to date and what God required of the Israelites. God also wanted someone who had access to the kings of that day to give them his message as well as have that message recorded for all of history.
 - d) Now I come to my favorite part of my introduction: A proof that Isaiah was a real person and he and he alone wrote this book. First, I need to state that Isaiah made some amazing predictions about the near and distant future. Bible critics can't stand the accuracy of these predictions. Around the 18th century, theories started to develop that there were really 2 or 3 "Isaiah's" as they couldn't accept the accuracy of Isaiah's understanding of the future.
 - i) To refute those predictions, first a little bit about how Old Testament scrolls were copied and preserved. In Hebrew, every letter is also a number. It would be like saying, A=1, B=2, etc. For each page on a scroll, a copier would add up the value of each letter on a page. For example if one page added up to 10,462 and that page was then copied to another page, that copy had to also add up to 10,462 or else it'd have to be burned. Remember that these were pages ON a scroll. The whole scroll wasn't burned, just a page, if it didn't add up correctly. Once the perfect copy was made, the Israelite tradition was to burn the old copy.

- ii) I state all of that, to realize that until fairly recently the oldest copy we have of any of the Old Testament books was about 1,000 AD, due to the burning tradition.
 - iii) The exception is the Dead Sea Scrolls. These are a bunch of Old Testament scrolls found in Israel preserved in clay pots and discovered around 1947. There were no New Testament writings as the group who wrote them were a "sect" in Israel kind of like monks. They lived separately from the rest of the Israelites. They were still around at the time of Jesus. What was found in those caves were parts of scrolls as well as complete copies of Old Testament scrolls and their own writings. I state all of this as among the findings, was a complete Isaiah scroll. That scroll is similar to our modern scroll with over a 99% accuracy. The scrolls date back to about 100BC. In short, among the scrolls found was a complete copy of Isaiah.
 - iv) Now the fun part (to me): If you read the Gospel of John, 12:38, Jesus quotes from the latter part of the book of Isaiah. That quote's from Isaiah Chapter 53, that the "so called" scholars who argue there's more than one Isaiah came from the "Second Isaiah." Coming back to John's Gospel two verses later, Jesus quotes from Isaiah 6, which according to those who argue there's more than one Isaiah is from the "First Isaiah". Now if you look at the verse between those two quotes, Jesus said (NKJV), "Therefore, they could not believe because Isaiah said again".
 - a) My point is Jesus effectively said there was only one Isaiah. Therefore, if you believe the so-called biblical scholars who argue that there was really more than one Isaiah, you have a much bigger problem, as you're arguing against what Jesus Himself said about Isaiah in the Gospels.
 - b) Let me make it simple: If you don't believe Jesus is God, you have a much bigger problem than whether or not there was more than one Isaiah.
 - e) OK, now that we know that Isaiah was a real person who lived around 700BC, lived in the city of Jerusalem and was a priest called by God to write this book, we're ready to start to study the text itself.
 - i) Oh, and before I begin Verse 1 of Chapter 1, I should also say that not everything in this book is in chronological order. That'll be obvious in the first verse, as we'll read of the time scope that Isaiah was called to preach to start this book.
 - ii) Enough of all of that, time for Chapter 1, Verse 1.
3. Isaiah Chapter 1, Verse 1: The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.
- a) The first verse tells us who wrote this (Isaiah) and the time scope of when Isaiah wrote. I could give you exact dates of the reigns of these four kings, but if you're like me, odds are good that in a short time, you're going to forget those dates, which is why I keep saying it is around 700 BC when Isaiah wrote all of this.
 - b) Since this first verse gives us a time scope, it seems likely it was added later when it was put together as a scroll. We're going to learn that God spoke these words to Isaiah over a number of visions and Isaiah wrote what he understood that God was telling him to write in a book. The reason we know Isaiah was accepted as a prophet is the 100% accuracy of his predictions coming true. The scope of this book includes predictions he wrote that did come true fairly soon after he wrote them, some that came true a few hundred years later, some that came true many hundreds of years later and some that have not happened yet.
 - c) My point is if you think it's easy or desirable to be a prophet of God, realize that you'd be required to have a 100% accuracy record as a prophet or else be killed. Now that's a good incentive clause to do your job right the first time! We'll also read in Chapter 20 that at a point, Isaiah was called to walk around naked and barefoot. My point is simply that to be a prophet in Israel was no "cake walk". To be called to be a servant of God means to live as He desires we live no matter what it is we're called to do as one of His servants.

4. Verse 2: Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.
- a) OK, enough of the easy part, time to get down to business. From this verse pretty much to the end of the chapter, we're going to read what appears to be like a courtroom drama. In this scene, the Israelites are on trial. Isaiah is speaking for God, giving the Israelites a report card on how God sees their behavior at that moment in time.
 - b) The important thing of course, is that we don't read this text and start thinking, oh those poor Israelites who lived thousands of years ago. The point is we're to put our name here and see if the "shoe fits". There's an old saying about the Gospel message that effectively says, "If they won't listen to you tell people about Jesus, give them Moses instead". What that means is people need to realize they're a sinner before they're willing to realize they need a savior from their sins.
 - c) OK you may say, as a Christian, I'm well aware I'm a sinner and I need Jesus to pay for all of my sins. Therefore, why should I make myself feel guilty and study Isaiah Chapter 1?
 - i) The issue isn't just conviction of sin, it's about living as God desires we live as we make a difference for Him. To quote my favorite expression I believe Jesus died for every sin I've ever committed or ever will commit, now what? If we can't earn our salvation, how are we supposed to live? Great question. In effect, that's what we're going to read as we go through Chapter 1 of this book.
 - d) Enough stalling, let's focus on Verse 2 itself. First, realize that Isaiah is speaking for God to anyone willing to listen. Notice the first phrase, effectively says, listen anyone willing to hear what I have to say. The next center of focus is on the "children" that God's raised up. In direct context, it's referring to the Israelites who lived in that land from the time of the Exodus until the time of Isaiah's writing. To paraphrase God, "I've separated a group of people to be a witness for Me to the world around them. Yet instead of being a witness for Me, they've rebelled against Me".
 - i) Let's personalize that for a moment. You may say, I'm a good Christian and I go to church every Sunday. I believe Jesus died for my sins. Why should I personalize this verse or this chapter for that matter? As we'll read coming up in this chapter, the Israelites in effect were doing the same, going through the motions of what He called them to do, but in effect their hearts weren't in it.
 - ii) We're going to see an underlying point in this chapter that effectively says for us to go through the motions isn't enough. God wants our hearts, not our rituals. He wants us to trust Him through the good and bad parts of our lives and trust that He's guiding us through them. To believe in Jesus in effect means we're to live as slaves to His desire. That means not just to go through the motions of living like God wants us to live (i.e., go to church and give God lip service), but living daily and moment by moment as He desires. That's what Isaiah is doing as he convicts the Israelites of their sins before God. Of course he's just getting warmed up, so let us read further to get a flavor of this text:
5. Verse 3: The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." ⁴ Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him.
- a) At this time, my family and I have a 15-year old dog, that's getting old. He doesn't know a lot, nor does he run around like he used to, but he knows when it's time to eat and he'll hang around us as he knows it's feeding time. That's the type of idea being conveyed as it is describing an ox and a donkey. Most of us know the expressions, "Dumb as an ox" or if we are "stubborn as a mule". The point is neither of these animals are known to cooperate well, but they both like my dog, know when and where to get their food. Isaiah's simple point here is effectively, "dumb animals know who's in charge, but my people forget".

- b) Let me come back to the idea of going through the motions of going to church on Sunday. We may believe Jesus is God and honor Him once a week by doing church. God's telling us in effect, "So what? Yes, it's nice you go through the motions and think about me once a week, but that's not what I desire of each of us. I (God), have called you to live differently to be a witness for Me. I (God), have given each of you gifts and talents that you can use to be a good witness for Me. Yet you go about your lives as if I (God) don't matter except for say once a week, when you can get the guilt out of your system".
 - i) You may say, that's not me, I do a lot more than go to church once a week. What is the real question each of us, myself included must always face is are we doing what God calls us to do to make a difference for Him? Are we using our time for His glory, or just to benefit our own lives? That's what's at stake here.
 - c) You may think I've wandered away from the verses, but that's the essence of Isaiah's point here. God's saying the Israelites living at the time of Isaiah are going through the motions but their hearts are not in it. To state the obvious, if that's all there is to this chapter, we'd be done by now. When Isaiah says the Israelites have collectively turned from what God desires, realize they're still going through their religious rituals, but again the key point is their hearts are not in it.
 - i) Let me personalize this for a moment. If you ever catch yourself at say a church or a similar function, in automatic pilot mode, all I do is pause, realize that we're just going through the motions and then put our heart into it realizing that we're living in a moment with an opportunity to worship the God who created us. Remember we're not doing it for His sake as if He needs it, but for our sake, as God created us with a need to worship Him and it brings joy to our life to do so.
 - d) Let's realize something else here. It's really easy to look around at a church service and to realize there are people there whose hearts are not in it. They may do horrific things from "Monday to Saturday" and get the guilt out of their system by say going to church Sunday but we can't fix those around us. All we can do is consider our own lives and live as God called us to live and do our best to avoid "autopilot" mode when we're worshiping God or doing some sort of project for Him.
 - e) OK enough guilt there. Let's move on to Verse 5:
6. Verse 5: Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. ⁶ From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness-- only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil.
- a) Let's return to the Israelites of Isaiah's day for the moment. Here's God looking at those who are called to be a people as a whole group. This particular point in history was fairly prosperous for the two Israelite kingdoms. There's a pattern in the bible of honoring God, being blessed by Him, enjoying that blessing to the point of ignoring God, then He has to turn their back on His people because they're so busy enjoying their prosperity, that they are just going through the motions of honoring God.
 - i) With that thought in mind, Isaiah's warning them here, "God's tired of that pattern of going through the motions without caring about Him." He's comparing Israel as a whole nation to a person who's injured who has not dealt with it. Imagine some person covered in sores who hasn't done anything to treat those it and that's what we have here. It's a way of describing how bad Israel has become collectively.
 - b) OK John, too bad for them, why should I care about them? After all, all I can do is control my own behavior. That's what God's is lecturing all of us who are called to serve Him. In moments we catch ourselves going through the motions and say get distracted by looking all around us, remember that God wants all of us to focus on Him individually and when we gather as believers, to focus on Him collectively. The danger is if we too are just going through the motions, God can abandon us as He's abandoning them.

- c) Sometimes Christians wrongly think that because we're saved by grace, we're free to do whatever we want and free to ignore God all we want. We can't be punished like those Israelites were long ago who were kicked out that land for turning from Him. Remember the issue isn't salvation, it's being a good witness for Him. We live in God's world. He's free to do whatever He wants as He created it. Therefore, if we're not living as a witness for Him, He's got every right to "take us out of the ballgame" just as He did to those who lived all those millenniums ago. If we get that, we get the main point of this lesson. I wish I were through criticizing all of us (myself included) when we're just going through all of the motions without our heart being in it, but again, Isaiah is still on a roll here.
7. Verse 7: Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers. ⁸ The Daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons, like a city under siege.
- a) I have to admit the easy thing to do is say the Israelites were in big trouble back then, but didn't realize it. They were enjoying their prosperity and were going through the motions of serving God and that was that. The reason that God called Isaiah to preach this tough message of repentance is that the Israelites had gotten to a collective point where they did not care about God.
- b) That gets to us today. We can see our country and realize collectively it's turned its back on God and we feel like a guard on a city wall, trying to warn people of the danger of us collectively turning from Him. Can God punish our nation like He did the Israelites back then? Of course. God won't be mocked and there's a horrible price to be paid collectively when we as a group, be it a church or a nation turn our backs on God. We may think that we can't control "them", and in one sense, that's correct. However, we should always live as a witness for God no matter how others act around us. While we can't control it if our country is collectively turning from God, all we can do is still be joyful, make every effort possible to do the right thing and honor Him as He desires to be honored.
- c) You may think that little speech has nothing to do with this text, but you're wrong. When Isaiah wrote this, the two kingdoms of Israel were living at a time of relative peace. They were facing any attacks from other countries. Yet Isaiah's describing their current lives as if they're cities and fields were on fire and their lives were laid waste. In Verse 8 when he is comparing their lives to a shelter in a vineyard or a hut in the middle of field. Isaiah is saying most of that country has turned their backs on God and there are only a relatively few people who truly seek God as He desired to be sought. That idea to an isolated place of shelter is like saying there are a few left "in the shade" of God's protection, while most of them are suffering out in the hot sun.
- d) In the final comparison, Isaiah compares Israel to a city under siege. For those of you who don't know what that term means, it's a horrible picture. Visualize a city with an army all around it that wants to destroy that city. That army literally camps around the city as it is starving out the residences living in that city. That's what a siege is. God's saying through Isaiah that there's no hope for all of them, even those who are still doing what He desires as the whole nation is beyond hope.
- e) As I watch the United States collectively turn from God's desires for our lives, I do pray for our country and realize that God can abandon us as He's abandoning the Israelites at that time. Do I think there's hope for this country? God's in the "miracle business" as He can do what we can't, but the issue isn't "them" but us. It's up to Christians collectively to seek Him and pray for our country as that's the only hope when the majority of people do turn from Him as He desires we live. I'm sorry to get all "hot and heavy" over this issue, but there's a reason for us to personalize this chapter. There's always the danger for any given country, town or church to fear God as He always has the right to turn from us if we stop being a living witness for Him, just as the nation of Israel was doing at this point in their history. Ok, we're half way through this tough lecture, let's plow through the rest.

8. Verse 9: Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.
- a) Here's the good news in the middle of the bad news. What Isaiah is saying here is that the only reason God hasn't destroyed Israel completely is that there's still some people living there who are seeking Him, and that's preventing God from destroying Israel completely.
 - b) Let me put it this way: Do you ever feel like you're the only one who still cares about God or maybe you and a handful of others around you? Do you see your church or your town or your country turning from God collectively and feel like you and a few of your friends are the only ones left? First, realize it's not just you. There are many in lots of places who feel the same way. God's saying in effect, the only reason He hasn't completely destroyed Israel "back then" or say our town or country today, is because there are a few people who are not just going through the motions.
 - i) Consider that Isaiah is saying that if it wasn't for those of us who are not just going through the motions of worshipping God without putting their hearts into it, God would destroy wherever it is we live. Realize God's saying to those of us who are faithful to Him that the only reason He hasn't completely destroyed wherever we live is because of our faithfulness to Him. In other words, do you want a motive to continue to worship God when you feel like everyone around you abandoned Him? This verse is that motive. This is God literally reminding us that the only reason we haven't been completely destroyed is due to our loyalty to Him. That idea alone should keep us on the "straight and narrow".
9. Verse 10: Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah! ¹¹ "The multitude of your sacrifices-- what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. ¹² When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? ¹³ Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations-- I cannot bear your evil assemblies. ¹⁴ Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.
- a) Meanwhile, back to the bad news. Now that we get how God's trying to convict Israel as a whole to abandoning Him, I can pick up the pace a little. Let's start with Verse 10. That verse is comparing Israel to two cities destroyed by God in the book of Genesis. Back in Genesis 19, God destroyed two particular cities (probably located near the Dead Sea) as examples of what happens to a city (or a nation) when nobody living there, cares about living as God desires we live. The point as it relates to these verses, is most Israelites did know that story, so God through Isaiah is comparing Israel to those towns in that no one living in Israel at that time truly cares about God.
 - b) From here, we get examples of how the Israelites were just "going through the motions" of serving God as was the customs of that day without their hearts being in it. Verse 11 says, "God has no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs and goats". Now notice Verse 13 where it says, "Stop bringing me meaningless offerings". Realize all the things we read about in these verses were things God required the Israelites to do, based on what is taught in the first five books of the Old Testament. The issue isn't actually doing all of the things listed, it's that the people's hearts weren't in it.
 - c) The best analogy for us would be if we just went through the motions of going to church or even praying or reading our bibles without caring about how those events impact our lives. The key point is God doesn't want us to go through those "motions" for His sake or just because "we're supposed to" or its tradition, but because He wants a relationship with each of us individually and collectively. We don't do those things for His sake or because we're supposed to, but because it should be our desire to constantly want to draw closer to Him. God created us to have an intimate relationship with Him as much as possible.

- d) That little lecture leads me back to these verses. God's not against the Israelites doing all that He required of them as described by Moses in the first five Old Testament books. He is against them "going through the motions" without caring about those rituals. To state the obvious for us Christians, we don't go through those rituals because they're fulfilled in what Jesus did for us. Still, that doesn't excuse us from ignoring the God who created us in the first place. That's the key point of this chapter. We as Christians were called to use our lives for His glory. To just go through the motions, always leads to the danger where God can abandon us from being a witness for Him just as He abandoned the Israelites in a relatively short time period after this book was written.
- e) OK, enough of me lecturing you for the moment, I'll let Isaiah take over for me (kidding):
10. Verse 15: When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood;¹⁶ wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong,¹⁷ learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.
- a) Had enough guilt? Want specifics on what we should be doing as believers in God? Look no further than these verses. The first example is in Verse 15 where it reads, "Your hands are full of blood". You may think, I haven't killed anyone, but that's not the point. This is, if the country we live in is for example guilty of allowing abortion and we're not making an effort to speak out about it, we're just as guilty as we're allowing it to happen. No I'm not saying every Christian has to get involved the abortion fight, I'm just using that issue as an example of how God wants us to care about the world we live in. If a person around us is guilty of murder and we don't condemn it, we're just as guilty to give another idea of how God wants us to act.
- b) Need more examples, look at Verse 17: Seek justice, encourage those who are suffering, do something for children who don't have fathers, help widows in need. Realize that the issue isn't how we get saved. The issue is what are we doing with our salvation! Are we living as a witness for God? Isaiah gives us some examples of how we should act as His believers. I'm not saying we have to "drop our lives" and go help others full time. All I'm saying is if we don't make any effort to care about others, we're not living as Jesus desires we live as Christians, which is putting the needs of others as priority over our own needs.
- c) Remember that I lectured all of us, myself included of the dangers of just going through the motions of worshipping God, but our hearts are not in it? Well, Isaiah is giving us a few examples here in these verses of how we can get our "hearts into it". It's not enough to just say or think certain things are wrong. What God wants of us as witness for Him, is to actually do something about it. To explain all of this another way, God's not saying to us, "You accept Jesus as God and payment for all your sins? Great, no go away and I'll see you after you die!" Instead He wants us to use our lives as a witness for Him. We've got a few examples of how to do that in these verses.
- d) OK, enough guilt for these verses, time to move on.
11. Verse 18: "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.
- a) If this verse seems familiar to you, it's because it's quoted a lot from evangelists. It's the idea that once you've accepted Jesus as payment for your sins, you're completely forgiven for all sins you've ever committed or ever will commit. Even though we're each guilty of not living as God desires, if we trust in Him, our sins are completely forgiven. But what about that lecture you gave us about doing something as Christians? It's "two sides of the same coin". Yes we're saved by faith alone, but God expects us to do something about the faith we're given. My whole lecture about putting our hearts into it, and doing something about it, is not about getting saved or even getting "points" with God, it's about using our lives as a witness for Him. That's why Isaiah's been lecturing us the whole chapter about not just going through the motions of worshipping God, but caring about how we live.

- b) The reason Isaiah pauses in Verse 18 to give the "sins will be washed away" line is so them and us can both realize it's never too late to change our behavior. To quote an old line, we can't change our past, only learn from it to change our future. That's what Isaiah is trying to encourage us to do by stating this line here at this point.
12. Verse 19: If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; ²⁰ but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.
- a) At this point, Isaiah's using the "carrot and the stick" approach to encourage the Israelites to do the right thing. Isaiah is saying that despite all of your sins, if you learn to live a life that's obedient to my laws, you'll be blessed. If you continue and don't change your ways you'll be killed by the sword.
- b) Let me talk for a moment what was literally happening in Israel's history at the time this opening chapter was written. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was living in a prosperous time in their history. Yet at that time, they were turning to idols. Within Isaiah's lifetime, the Northern Kingdom was destroyed. The Assyrians conquered them and relocated most Israelites who lived there. The Assyrians were based out of the northern part Iraq (based on today's map). The point is both Israelite kingdoms feared the Assyrians as they were a growing power in that region that was conquering neighboring countries.
- i) With that in the background, here is this "doomsday" prophet Isaiah, warning the Israelites that despite their prosperity, they were still in big trouble as they were worshipping idols and not God. There's an old Jewish expression that the reason the Israelites were taken into captivity, first by the Assyrians and 100 years later as the Babylonians conquered the Southern Kingdom is "that's what it took" for Israel to finally abandon worshipping false gods and not the true God. God allowed His people to go into captivity is that's what it took in order for Israel to finally change their bad habits.
- c) That little lecture leads to you and me. The Israelites like many Christians today would go through the "motions" of what their religion required, but their hearts were not in it. What I'm saying is if God's willing to do horrible damage and even allow death of many of the Israelites back then, what makes us think that God won't do the same today with Christians? Remember the issue isn't salvation it's being a witness for Him. If we either as individuals or as a church or as a society abandon God, He can abandon us as He did to the Israelites living during Isaiah's time.
- d) My point is God uses the "carrot and the stick" approach with us as well as them. We too can be blessed if we are obedient to God. Think about it logically, if we don't steal or kill, and we use our resources to bless God and make a difference in the life of others, we will have more joy than anything this world has to offer. If we know about God's laws and we choose to turn our back on them, we can be taken out of the ballgame like these Israelites.
- e) By the way, if you think this is some kook named Isaiah preaching doomsday, notice that the last line says, "For the mouth of the LORD has spoken". There's a reason Isaiah has for millenniums been accepted as a prophet of God. As we'll learn, this book is an accurate portrayal of history centuries and millenniums before many events do occur. A great way to summarize this whole lesson is "Don't mess with God, the penalties really hurt."
13. Verse 21: See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her-- but now murderers!
- a) Meanwhile Isaiah gets on a roll condemning the Israelites. The "faithful city" is a reference to Jerusalem. This is Isaiah saying in effect, "It's not just the Northern Kingdom that has turned against God, it's "here" in Jerusalem where the "true religious" are supposed to be seeking Me! As Israel was being blessed financially at that time, so the crime rate went up as well, people got greedy.
- b) You might say, all of history can read like this. There is injustice in all places, including in places where the "truly religious" are located. Why should we care about this stuff?

- c) This leads to the topic of what can we do about "injustice"? The point is that God not only wants us as Christians to watch our own behavior, but also to do what we can to point out society's "ills", without say, resorting to violence to do so. Remember that God expects us to be His witnesses to the world, and that not only means doing good when we can, but if possible, to not allow the corruption of society to spread and affect our own trust in God.
- d) To state this another way when we see injustice around us, God does not expect us to turn a blind eye to it and say "We're Christians, why should we care if you do what's wrong?" God expects us to be a good witness for Him and do something to make an effort to stop whatever injustice we see around us. Keep in mind God is one of justice as well as one of love. That's why we're to do what we can to point out injustice around us.
- e) OK, speaking of getting all "hot and heavy", it's time to get back to Isaiah:
 - 14. Verse 22: Your silver has become dross, your choice wine is diluted with water. ²³ Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them.
 - a) Keep in mind that Isaiah is speaking in "metaphors". For example, if you've ever worked with silver, there is a corrosive substance called dross that has to be removed from silver. Isaiah uses that metaphor to describe Israelites living at that time. Remember that we're focusing on the fact that God is a God of justice as well as one of love. Verse 23 is pretty self-explanatory as it describes the corruption that existed at that time. You can easily say that Verse 23 can apply to "Washington DC" or fill in your favorite place that's associated with corruption. As I said in the introduction, the key to reading Isaiah is to personalize it and see if the "shoe fits" before we point the finger at others. Remember that God doesn't expect non-believers to follow His laws, but He does expect better behavior from those of us who do trust in Jesus as God. The point is God calls on us believers to do something about injustice in the world.
 - i) You might say, I'm only one person, what can I do? The answer is something. We have to pick our battles well, but standing back and doing nothing is never to be an excuse. Find a cause worth fighting for, and get involved to make some sort of difference that God's called you and me to make. It can be a project that your local church or community is already involved in taking on. It can be one that you feel called to or have a spiritual gift that can make a difference. My point is God's not saying to us, "That's their problem", God's in the salvation business, and He wants us to be a good witness to others for Him.
 - 15. Verse 24: Therefore the Lord, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: "Ah, I will get relief from my foes and avenge myself on my enemies. ²⁵ I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities. ²⁶ I will restore your judges as in days of old, your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City." ²⁷ Zion will be redeemed with justice, her penitent ones with righteousness. ²⁸ But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the LORD will perish.
 - a) Time for one of my very loose translations: "Attention Israelites (back then and those of us who are trusting in the God of the Universe today), you won't change your ways or do anything about the injustice going on around you? Well I'm going to stop you from being a witness for Me. You Israelites will go into captivity or be killed as you failed to do what is the right thing to do in this situation. However, I God, still will keep my promises that Jerusalem and Israel will be my witnesses to the world one day. Even though you'll all go into captivity, I'll bring you're descendants back here one day as I made an unconditional promise to your ancestors that this land will be yours."
 - b) The point here is that God's going to keep His promise that the land of Israel will be used as a witness for how He expects believers to live, despite the sins being committed by the people living at Israel at that time.

- c) Let me explain all of this another way: When people ask me, how do you know that the bible is true? I tell them to consider the Jewish nation. No other group in history has been scattered and came back together to form a nation except for Israel, which has now done it twice in their history. Do I believe Jesus is God? Of course I do. But if I can't trust God's promises to the nation of Israel, how can I ever trust His promises to me about Jesus?
 - i) The point is God called the nation of Israel to be His witnesses to fellow Israelites as well as those living in the greater area. God's called Christians to live to make a difference for Him wherever we live and to stand up to injustice. No we can't stop every bad thing in the world, but He does expect us to use our lives to do what we can to make a difference for Him. If you get that, you get the point of this lesson.
 - d) Consider the concept that God doesn't change. If God is perfect by definition, that means He can't learn anything and nothing is a surprise to Him. God worked through Isaiah as well as other prophets to warn His people to live as He desires we live. Did He know they would rebel? Of course. The point for the Israelites living back then is they don't have an excuse for not knowing the right thing to do as they had God's laws and they had people like Isaiah to warn them of the consequences of turning from God.
 - i) So what about us today? We have God's word in print and electronic form and we can get it for free if we're just willing to ask or download it. My point is there's no excuse for us living today as we have His word at our fingertips to tell us how it is God expects us to live as a witness for Him. God's warnings to the Israelites back then in effect are no different than His warnings to us today. Again, the issue isn't salvation it's being a good witness for Him. That's what's on the line for each of us that are called to be a witness for Jesus. That's what the last set of verses warn us about and that's the issue of this chapter.
 - e) The good news is we only have a few verses left in this chapter. The tough news of course is that we "can't get out of the ballgame" if we've dedicated our lives to trusting in Jesus as our savior and believe He's God. He expects us to be a witness for Him today as much as He desired the Israelites back then to be a witness for Him. With that said, let's finish the "hot and heavy" message of what God expects of us as believers.
16. Verse 29: "You will be ashamed because of the sacred oaks in which you have delighted; you will be disgraced because of the gardens that you have chosen. ³⁰ You will be like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water. ³¹ The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire."
- a) If you only get one thing out of this lesson, it should be that this heavy lesson on what'll happen to the Israelites if they continue in their disobedience to God, very much applies to us today as it did to them millenniums ago. I don't want us to read this lesson to think "Oh, too bad for those people who lived so long ago". The issue is always what are we as followers of Jesus doing about it? Are we saved by faith alone? Of course. Even with our saving faith, God expects us to use our lives to make a difference for Him. That'll be a key theme throughout the book let alone through the whole bible.
 - b) If you've read this lesson and thought, "I already do plenty for God" or "I already have a busy enough life as it is, why should I get involved?" let me give you something to pray about: Ask God, am I living as He desires I live? Am I doing what He's called me to do at this moment? Then let God answer. He may make it obvious to continue to do whatever we're doing or He may be calling us to do something else. God can't resist a submission prayer to His will. He'll make His answer obvious to us His way and on His timing. In the meantime, let's finish this chapter;
 - c) Historically, what Isaiah is referring to is tree's that were cut to make into idols. The idea is those carved images represented the false gods that they worshipped. God's saying to them that He'll burn those images since those Israelites should have known better and put their trust in God, so He'll burn the images that represented those false gods.

- d) You might say, "I don't make any carved images". Those carved images were prayed to in order for the Israelites to prosper financially or seek whatever they sought. The same way you or I today might trust in our own ability to financially prosper, or lead us to what we think we need to do to be happy, was represented by those images back then. My point is God cares about His people worshipping Him the way He demands we do, which means to obey His commandments and relying upon His power in order to do so. God is also a God of justice in the sense that He doesn't expect Christians to sit around and ignore all of the bad things occurring around us. We can't solve all problems, but God desires to work through us as we make a difference for Him in the world around us. That's also the point of this lesson in a few quick sentences.
 - e) With that said we made it through the first chapter of Isaiah. I will pick up the pace as we go through the book, and not every lesson will only cover one chapter. Still I've got a long way to go to get through this "mini-bible" within the bible, but I figure that since God got me through other big projects, he'll lead me through this one as well as I use my time so I can draw closer to Him by studying what it is He expects of me as I use my life to make a difference for Him. My hope for those of you who read these lessons is that you too, use your lives to make a difference for Him by whatever way God's calling you to make some sort of difference for Him. If you don't know what to do, "do something" and He'll guide each of us, often by trial and error so we can use our lives to make a difference for Him.
17. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, the God not only of the Israelites, but also of the whole world, who is above all that's created, yet cares deeply for each of us that He's created so that we can use our lives to make a difference for Him, help us to not waste the greatest gift God's given us, our time and use it for His glory. Help us to live as You desire and obey Your commandments and follow the destiny that You've designed for each of us as we use our lives for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.