

Isaiah Chapters 38-39 Summary - John Karmelich

Title: Understanding God's plans for believers, despite our sins and mistakes!

These two chapters are backdated a few years from the previous two chapters (I know chapter numbers didn't exist in the original text as I state often for new readers). In these two chapters Isaiah finishes the first "half" of his book that is mostly about how Israel is blowing it badly! These final 2 chapters of the first half (for a lack of a better term) focus on interaction between Southern Israel King (Israel was two kingdoms then and the North One was in captivity now) and Isaiah. I'll just say their king was messing up left and right, and God's going through with plans for that nation (and us) despite the mistakes made by not living as He desires!

I want to pause for a quick message on the difference between God's desired will for our lives, versus a permissive will! If a child of ours wants something badly and we know it's a bad decision we may give them what they want so they learn "the hard way" it wasn't smart to choose that option, and at the same time learning what's best! The issue's when we do something we know is wrong! Consider times when our instinct tells us, "Don't go there", but we do it anyway!

In these chapters God tells the king through Isaiah, "get your affairs in order it's time to die!" The king then pleads with Isaiah for more time. Short version is God gives this king 15 more years to live. Note that during those 15 years that king gives birth to a son who ruled next, who is considered the worst of the all the Jewish kings. I pondered what went through that king's mind when the 15 years were almost over. Did the king think, "Did God say 15 or 50"? I know we don't want to go through life with regrets (but we will) and we should make the most of whatever time length God gives us! In short, I believe it wasn't God's will for that king to live 15 more years. He allowed it to teach the danger of going against what He desires! In other words, it was God's permissive will for that king and not His desired will!

That leads us to Chapter 39. In short, it's about another bad decision that king made. After recovering from that illness, he gets a visit from representatives of Babylon. At that time the Assyrian Empire was still the "big dog on the block" and Babylon was a small city. As most of us know, Babylon rose to be the next great power in the Middle East. Anyway, the Israelite king made the mistake of showing all of the Israelite (temple) valuables to the Babylonians. Isaiah then shows up to tell the Israelite king, "You just blew it big time" as Babylon will one day conquer and destroy this place (about 100 years later). It is worth nothing that the king's response in effect was, "How does that affect me, if it won't occur until 100 years from now?" The lesson is to think about the long-term consequences of our actions.

That leads to the big question: Why is all this here and why should I care? In the next chapter Isaiah is going to "switch gears" to focus on life after Jesus rules over the world. After dozens of chapters that's effectively one big lecture on "you are blowing it big time" and ending the section with more examples of messing up, why does Isaiah switch gears at this spot? Before I move on, I should state there is a lot of so-called scholars who claim there's "two Isaiahs". One who wrote chapters 1-39, and another who wrote the last 27 chapters. Here's my favorite way to prove there is only one Isaiah: John Chapter 12 is quoting from Isaiah 53 (the so-called 2nd Isaiah) and 2 verses later he quotes Isaiah 6, the so-called 1st Isaiah. In the verse between those two, Jesus states people couldn't believe the same Isaiah is speaking again (John 12:39). My point is if you don't believe Jesus is God, you have much bigger problems than over that stupid debate of there was a single Isaiah or two!

OK you get the gist that these two chapters are mistakes made by a Jewish king 2,700 years ago. Why should I care? At least it's a reminder that when we sin, not only is Jesus forgiving us since we trust in the fact He paid the FULL price of our sins, but at the same time God will still go forward with all HIS plans to rule the world from Jerusalem despite our failures. Such sins cost us an ability to be a witness for Jesus at that moment, but a key point here is despite our failures, not only are we forgiven when we trust in Jesus, but God is still going to do all He plans on His timing!

Let me begin the actual comments by stating these two chapters occur before the dates of the last two. I know this because Chapter 38, Verse 6 tells us how God will rescue the city from a major empire that's threatening Israel and in the last chapter an angel killed 185,000 soldiers surrounding Jerusalem. Here in this chapter the first thing we read is Isaiah tells the king, get your affairs in order as God says it's time for you to die! The king basically begs for more time and God gives him 15 more years. I don't think I would disobey a direct command from God, but as anyone fearing death, I'm sure I'd do no better! As I said in the introduction, the fact that God said he'd die then, then God stating he'd get 15 more years to live is not a contradiction. It is about God's permissive will versus His desire. If God said to me that I have exactly 15 more years to live, I'd make the best of it and not ask for more! Since only God knows when our lives will end, it's up to us to make the most of our time!

Bottom line God tells the king through Isaiah he got 15 more years and don't worry about the Assyrian (the big Empire in that day) "knocking on your door demanding surrender"! The king still lacked faith that all this was true and asks God for a sign. God announced the shadow on a nearby staircase will go back 10 steps. There's lots of speculation on how that worked. I accept the fact "God is God", so that's never been a big issue to me. Then comes the king throwing a "woe is me" pity-party with 10 verses of how sad it is to be that king at that moment. Never mind that the king got to hear from God Himself to tell him he's got 15 more years. Never mind the proof of the sun's shadow moving back. He does give a bit of gratitude but for the most part it is a "woe is me" speech! That king was still worried about his eternal salvation and since he was talking to a prophet (Isaiah) it's a good question to ask! Isaiah never answers that question. The signs given should have been proof enough. Isaiah simply applies medicine to what's causing the king to be sick, and he got the 15 more years! Remember that king gave birth to a son born during those 15 years who became the worst king in their history and probably is the one who had Isaiah killed! History records Isaiah was "sawn in two" during the reign of that son! Well so much for gratitude for how Isaiah helped his father!

Bottom line, the lesson's about trusting God (sign or no sign) and doing what He commands of us to be doing, using our lives as a witness for Him. The final chapter (39) before Isaiah "switches gears" is one more big "screw up" by this king again, before the events of Chapters 36-37! In short, that king is now recovering from that illness and some representatives from Babylon show up to wish the king well! At that time, Babylon at that time was a small city (part of the Assyrian Empire that ruled the Middle East for about two centuries). Since the king was happy to recover and have guests, he showed his guests all that was in his kingdom (riches, weapon status, etc.)

After that just took place Isaiah walked into the room to ask, "What's going on?" The king thought this was no big deal. Isaiah then lectured the Israel king about the future: The Babylonians will destroy this place and take away the kingdom! The sad part is that king knew he had 15 years to live and since that won't happen in his lifetime, he said in effect, "Whatever", as at least I get to live longer!

In effect Isaiah wrote 39 chapters so far on here's how we're messing up and it's not the way God wants to live. The obvious application is that God expects us to use our lives for His glory. He knows we got to deal with practical stuff but that should not stop us from living as He desires. The amazing part is in

spite of our shortcomings, God through Isaiah is going to spend the next 27 chapters in essence, stating how He is going to bless our lives for trust in Him DESPITE our shortcomings. If you don't know, the Old Testament has 39 books and the New has 27 books. There's 27 chapters left to go. I realize that is a big coincidence, but as we say in Bible study, "coincidence is God working in the background"! That is why Isaiah "switches gears" at this moment, to show despite our mistakes, God still is going to bless our lives not because we deserve it, but due to His unconditional promises for believing in Him!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links below. It is still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for you reading this. The rest of this email is links to questions you may have. If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading this!

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That's it. Hope you enjoy it. Don't forget to fire up a prayer prior to your reading.