

Isaiah 30 Handout

Last week in chapter 29 Jerusalem was confronted about their hollow religious rituals (“lip service”) while their hearts remained distant from the Lord. This spiritual blindness leads them to treat God like the clay rather than the potter, thinking they are hiding their plans and motives from Him. We also saw God reveal His purpose for confronting them: to humble them, open their eyes and lead them back to genuine reverence and understanding. In the end, God’s desire is not just outward obedience, but transformed hearts that truly honor Him.

Chapter 30 is going to address Judah’s decision to seek an alliance with Egypt for protection against Assyria rather than trusting in the Lord. We are going to see the chapter move from rebuke → explanation → invitation → future restoration → victory over Assyria.

Woe From Seeking Help From Egypt (vs.1-7)

Verses 1-2

We get the fourth woe here in this chapter. It is the first of two aimed at the alliance with Egypt that the leaders of Judah are urging. A little background of what is happening at this time – Israel has already been taken into exile by Assyria who is the dominant power at this time and has been exerting extreme military pressure on the region. Around 701BC, the Assyrians had launched a massive campaign and had conquered 46 fortified cities in Judah and were marching on Jerusalem where Hezekiah was king. Basically Judah has four options in this dire situation:

- They can submit to Assyria without a fight and suffer the consequences.
- They can wage war against the Assyrians which would most likely end in certain death for most of the people.
- They can make an alliance with another Gentile nation - probably Egypt, who might be able to help save them from the Assyrians.
- They can humbly repent of their sins and seek a miraculous deliverance from the Lord.

Who is this “woe” to in verse 1? _____

He gets more specific with his confrontation. He accuses them of carrying out plans that are not His, specifically forming an alliance.

What does it say at the end of verse 1 that they are doing? _____

Verses 3-5

Who are they making this alliance with? _____

Desperate to escape Assyrian destruction, Judah’s leaders ignore Isaiah’s warnings and seek a military alliance with Egypt. Because they refuse to be led by the Lord, they do the very thing they were forbidden to do: go back to Egypt. In Deuteronomy 17:16 it says, *“The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, “You are not to go back that way again.”* From a human standpoint, aligning themselves with Egypt seems to make sense. No other nation offers hope of protection. On the surface, Egypt looks strong and powerful enough to be a “shade for refuge”.

What does verse 3 say about Pharaoh's protection? _____

Making an alliance with Egypt will fail and bring humiliation on them because they are trusting in the wrong source for safety.

Shade in the Ancient Near East was incredibly important. Shade from the searing sun could actually mean the difference between life and death for them. The sun was so direct and hot that a person could easily become dehydrated before they were even aware of the danger. Shade truly was a refuge.

Listen to some Psalms about shade/shadow:

Psalm 17:8 - *"Keep me as the apple of your eye;
hide me in the shadow of your wings."*

Psalm 36:7 - *"How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings."*

Psalm 57:1 - *"Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me,
for in you I take refuge."*

*I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings
until the disaster has passed."*

Psalm 63:7 - *"Because you are my help,
I sing in the shadow of your wings."*

Psalm 91:1 - *"Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty."*

Psalm 121:5-6 - *"The LORD watches over you—
the LORD is your shade at your right hand;
6 the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night."*

So we see that shade is a metaphor for shelter or refuge. Isaiah says this refuge they are seeking (Egypt/Pharaoh) will lead to disappointment and embarrassment, because their plan will collapse. So, why was it wrong for Judah to make an alliance with Egypt? Couldn't God have used them to save His people from the coming threat of Assyria? Later on, God does use a foreign nation (Persia) to deliver His people from Babylon. This would lead us to believe that there isn't necessarily anything intrinsically wrong with God using Egypt in a similar way. The problem here is that Judah was making plans without ever consulting the Lord. They weren't looking to Egypt as God's way of delivering them. They were looking at Egypt as their way of delivering themselves.

It must have been so hard for Isaiah to understand why his own people would choose to exchange God's shadow (protection) for that of a human being. Why would they look to Pharaoh to save them over the Lord Almighty?

But aren't we prone to do the same thing? That's not to say that it isn't appropriate to place a certain amount of trust in other humans. But if those are the ultimate places where you seek shelter to the point you exclude God from the picture, we are in for huge disappointment. For the best of humans will fail us. Any time we expect someone to give only what God can, we are setting them up to fail.

An interesting thing that I came across while studying this chapter is that at this time Egypt was actually politically and militarily weak. At this point in history, Egypt was well past its prime. After about 1000BC it was never again a dominant force in the ancient Near East. Egypt appeared to be powerful, but really was not. They had a fragmented leadership and the Pharaoh at this time had limited internal control. They had a smaller army which was largely defensive and wasn't even capable of projecting power effectively into Judah's region. Egypt actually had a history of making alliances for its own benefit and then abandoning partners if it was convenient for them. All this being said, Egypt was not a trustworthy or strong ally at this time. Judah's reliance on them was completely misplaced.

Verses 6-7

In these two verses, Isaiah pictures a caravan going across the desert (Negev). The Negev was the desert between Judah and Egypt.

We get a description of this land. It is one of:

- Hardship
- Distress
- Lions and lionesses
- Adders and darting snakes

We see this desert is filled with danger.

What does it say that the envoys carry? _____

They are carrying all of this to Egypt. The use of the word "envoys" suggests that this is a diplomatic mission and that all they are carrying is payment for "help".

But what does it say about Egypt's help? _____

Therefore she is called "Rahab the Do-Nothing". "Rahab" here in this verse is not referring to the woman from Jericho. Rather, it is a poetic name used in the Old Testament to refer to Egypt. It carries a sense of arrogance, pride or a boastful monster. Isaiah seems to be using it as a symbol of a powerful but proud nation.

What we see here is that Egypt may seem big and appear powerful, but they will be able to do nothing to help Judah when it comes to Assyria.

The People Reject God's Word (vs.8-17)

Verse 8

At the core of the people's rebellion is their rejection of the prophetic word of God.

What does the Lord tell Isaiah to do? _____

It is to be an everlasting witness. Writing the words down actually testifies against them. It serves as an undeniable, permanent record or evidence. It shows their rebellion and indictment for their actions. They cannot claim ignorance or hide their willful disobedience. Writing it down allows it to be seen and read by the public, ensuring that everyone sees that the judgment to come was not random, but a direct result of their refusal to listen and that God was justified by His actions.

Verses 9-11

We get a description of God's people in verse 9:

- Rebellious
- Deceitful children
- Children unwilling to listen to the Lord's instruction

What does it say the people want at the end of verse 10? _____

The people just want the prophets to tell them positive messages. The last thing they want is to be confronted by the Holy One of Israel.

In II Timothy 4:3 Paul says, *“For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”*

What Paul is talking about here applies to all humans in all times and places. People have always wanted to hear good things, whether about themselves or what's going on around them. We like our natural inclinations to be affirmed, making us feel validated, accepted and encouraged. There is nothing new in that. If we start to tailor our preaching to do what the people in Judah are asking, then we run the risk of falling in with the false prophets. If preaching takes on this concept we would end up with rapidly growing churches without any real salt and light.

If we want to grow, we are going to need to be challenged. If we are preaching a book in the Bible, we can't just preach on the encouraging passages that make us feel good. We need to take the parts that are challenging, that push us and make us feel uncomfortable.

Take hiking for example. If you just stick to a flat trail, you are never going to be ready to hike Handy's Peak, etc. You can lift your five pound weights every day and feel good about yourself. But the fact is, you won't necessarily get stronger, because you aren't challenging yourself.

Verses 12-14

Verse 12 starts with “therefore”. This emphasizes the connection between the people's actions and the coming destruction. Isaiah's response to the last three verses is to do exactly what they don't want. He's going to tell them exactly what the Holy One of Israel has to say to them. Because they have:

- Rejected this message
- Relied on oppression
- Depended on deceit

What will their sin become like? _____

It will shatter so much that not a fragment will be found. Nothing will be left.

Verse 15

What does the Lord say is their salvation? _____

What will they find in quietness and trust? _____

But they would have none of it.

If they would only repent and turn to the Lord they would find refuge. But we see once again that they refuse. This isn't a new prescription for what ails them. God has told them over and over the prescription for their condition. They just need to turn back to Him rather than frantically rushing around trying to solve their problems on their own. If they would do this, they would find "salvation" and "strength".

Verses 16-17

How do the people respond to what God offers? _____

The people have their own plans to save themselves – if the alliance with Egypt fails, they will hide behind the walls of Jerusalem for protection – if the walls fall they plan to flee on horseback.

But what do we learn at the end of verse 16? _____

If the people would only find their rest in God, they wouldn't be needing to flee in the first place. They can try all kinds of plans to save themselves, but all of them will fail.

Look at the image that verse 17 gives us – the people will be defeated by only a few.

They will be left like a flagship on a mountaintop/banner on a hill. They will be left standing alone and exposed. They will be reduced to a small, vulnerable remnant, isolated like a lone, tattered flag on a hill.

Verse 18

What does this verse begin with? _____

Up until now in this chapter, we have seen nothing but God's disapproval of His people.

But what do we see that God longs for? _____

What is God going to rise up and do? _____

Listen to the last part of this verse again: *"For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!"*

God will always do what is right, and we can depend on Him no matter what. Isaiah gives this picture of God patiently waiting for His people to figure out how foolish they are and turn back to Him so He can lavish His grace and compassion on them.

The last part of the chapter shows what will happen when the people finally come to their senses and turn back to God.

Verses 19-22 (Spiritual Regeneration)

What does verse 19 say about the people in Zion? _____

God will be gracious to them when they cry for help. Listen to the last part of this verse again: *"As soon as He hears, He will answer you."* The image that this gives me is one of God patiently waiting to hear their voices call out to Him. He's just waiting to answer.

The next couple verses speak of radically transformed hearts. Throughout this time, prophets like Isaiah were often ignored and rejected by the people and their leaders. Now though their eyes and ears will be open and they will see and hear God's voice guiding them.

What will they do with all their idols? _____

We see that their rebelliousness ends when their hearts are finally transformed.

Verses 23-26 (Physical Blessings)

What will the Lord send in verse 23? _____ The food that comes from the land will be rich and plentiful. The cattle will graze in broad meadows. So we see that once the people turn towards God, He will bestow blessing on them, one being blessings in agricultural terms.

“The day of great slaughter” could be referring to God defeating Judah’s enemies, particularly Assyria. We see barrenness will be replaced with abundance. Normally, high hills and mountains in Israel were dry. Saying that streams would flow gives the picture of abundant blessing and renewal. It shows us that land is restored through God’s provision and life is returning after devastation.

What does it say about the sun in verse 26? _____ Like the light of seven full days. This imagery is symbolic language for overwhelming blessing and joy after suffering, as well as God’s healing presence.

“*When the Lord binds up the bruises of His people and heals the wounds He inflicted*” – this is a reminder that God brought this judgment on His people, but it was for restoration not destruction. He loves His people enough to discipline them in order to bring them back into a loving relationship with Him.

God Comes in Judgment (vs.27-30)

Verses 27-28

We get a terrifying picture of God’s wrath here.

“*The Name of the Lord comes from afar*” - means that the wrath of God is poured out for the sake of His name.

We get a description of how the Lord comes:

- With “burning anger and dense clouds of smoke”
- Lips are full of wrath
- Tongue is a consuming fire
- Breath is like a rushing torrent

What will He do to the nations? _____

What is He going to put in the jaws of the people? _____

This shows how God orchestrates the history of nations to bring them to their just destruction.

Verse 29-30

What will the people do? _____

Like they would when they celebrate a holy festival.

The destruction of wicked nations will result in celebration by God’s people.

When I was reading this I couldn’t help but think back to Isaiah 22 where the people were rebuked for their misplaced celebration, but here in verse 29 their celebration is welcome and it is the very same story - the Assyrians are marching on Jerusalem and trying to get Hezekiah

to surrender, and the Lord miraculously takes out 185,000 Assyrian troops in one night causing them to retreat and saving His people.

I did a little digging and this is what I came up with.

- In Isaiah 22 (The Valley of Vision)
 - Judah was witnessing Assyria’s threat approaching Jerusalem and they panicked rather than putting their trust in God.
 - God rebukes them for their misplaced celebration and false security.
 - They were celebrating their own scheming and were preparing defenses without ever seeking the Lord for His protection and guidance.
 - The celebration here was self-centered, arrogant and premature.
- Isaiah 30:29 (The Song of Victory)
 - God delivers Judah by miraculously defeating Assyria.
 - The celebration by the people here is because of God’s work, not their own schemes.
 - The celebration here is appropriate and God-honoring because it acknowledges His intervention.

What distinguishes the two celebrations

Feature	Isaiah 22	Isaiah 30:29
Cause of celebration	Human strategy, false security, political schemes	God’s miraculous deliverance
Heart orientation	Self-reliant, prideful, panicked	Grateful, joyous, acknowledging God
Timing	Premature, before God acted	After God acted
Focus	“We’ve got this”	“God has done this”
Divine response	Rebuke (God exposes their pride)	Approval (celebration aligned with God’s purposes)

So even though both of these situations are when Assyria threatened Jerusalem, we see a right response and a wrong response. It’s like two people watching a storm approaching and one panics and boasts about their umbrella while the other marvels at the rainbow after the storm passes. Both see the same sky, but their hearts and responses are completely different.

Assyria Will Be Defeated (vs.31-33)

Verses 31-33

What nation is God bringing His arm down on? _____

We see in these verses God’s dramatic intervention to defeat Assyria. The imagery used here highlights God’s power and justice, showing how He protects His people.

In verse 33 it says, *“Topheth has long been prepared; it has been made ready for the king.”* Topheth was located in the Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna) near Jerusalem. Historically speaking, it was associated with child sacrifice to Molech in Judah (II Kings 23:10, Jeremiah 7:31). It became a symbol of extreme judgment and burning because of the atrocities that were committed there.

Isaiah is using Topheth to show God’s consuming anger against Judah’s enemies as well as the complete destruction by fire – the same fire that once symbolized idolatrous practices is now a metaphor for God’s judgment over oppressive nations.

“It has been made ready for the king” is most likely referring to the king of Assyria or some other enemy of God’s people, symbolizing the fate of those who oppose God.

In verses 19-33 we see several key principles of divine blessing:

- God responds to our sincere cry for help (vs.19)
 - ◆ God’s blessing starts when we turn to Him in honesty and depend on Him.
- God’s discipline is meant to lead to restoration (vs.20)
 - ◆ Even though we experience adversity, God never abandons us.
 - ◆ Hardship can be part of God’s corrective work preparing us to receive His guidance and blessing.
- God provides clear guidance to those who listen (vs.21)
 - ◆ Divine blessing includes ongoing guidance from the Lord for those who are willing to follow His direction.
- Repentance removes idols and restores devotion (vs.22)
 - ◆ Once the people returned to God, they threw away their idols.
 - ◆ God’s blessing often follows turning away from the things that replaced Him.
- God restores provision and fruitfulness (vs.23-24)
 - ◆ The land becomes productive and the livestock are well fed.
 - ◆ God’s blessing includes renewed provision and flourishing
- God brings healing after disciplining (vs.25-26)
 - ◆ God “binds up the bruises” and “heals the wounds He inflicted”
 - ◆ God’s goal is healing and restoration
- God defeats the forces that threaten His people (vs.27-33)
 - ◆ Divine blessing includes God’s protection and justice against oppressive powers.

One thing we see from this chapter is that it contrasts two ways of facing a crisis:

Human Response

Political Alliances
 Running to Egypt
 Fear-driven planning
 Human Strength

God’s Way

Trust in God
 Returning to the Lord
 Quiet faith
 Divine deliverance

Another thing we see is the connection between repentance and rest as one of the central ideas in this chapter. In verse 15 it says, *“in repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness*

and trust is your strength". No real rest can be found without repentance, and there is no real repentance that does not issue in rest.

Repentance means to turn around or turn back. It means to stop going in your current direction and specifically carries the idea of returning to God.

Rest (resting in the Lord) means to stop your frantic striving. It doesn't mean inactivity, but rather stopping anxious efforts to save yourself. In Judah's case, they were scrambling for alliances, trusting in military strength and trying to control the outcome. Rest is confidence that God will act.

Repentance leads to rest. The order matters here. When we turn away from self-reliance and return to God we find rest. There is a peace that comes when we stop trying to carry things that only God can handle.

Why do you think the people preferred running to Egypt rather than resting in God's help?

What tends to keep people from experiencing the rest God offers?

I came across this illustration when I was working on this study.

Imagine a lifeguard trying to rescue a drowning swimmer. Often the most dangerous moment is not when the swimmer is drowning, but when the swimmer panics and fights the rescuer. They thrash, grab, and try to save themselves. In their panic, they can actually push the lifeguard under, endangering both their lives.

Because of that, lifeguards are trained to sometimes wait until the swimmer stops fighting before they can safely bring them to shore. They do this not because the lifeguard doesn't care—but because rescue can only happen when the person stops fighting and lets themselves be saved.

Isaiah 30:15 says: *"In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength."*

Judah kept thrashing—running to Egypt, making alliances, creating plans. But God was saying: *Stop fighting. Stop striving. Stop trusting your own solutions. Return to Me.*

The tragedy of Isaiah 30 is that God was ready to save them—but they wouldn't stop fighting long enough to trust Him.

The question for us is this: *Where are we still trying to rescue ourselves instead of trusting the Lord?*

We touched briefly on how Judah was looking to go back to the very place God told them not to go back to. Egypt represents a return to old patterns. It becomes a symbol of old ways of thinking, human solutions rather than faith and returning to what feels familiar rather than trusting God. For Judah, going back to Egypt is essentially returning to the very thing God had already delivered them from.

I want to connect this to Hebrews 12:1 which warns against this same tendency. It says, *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”*

The image here is of a runner removing anything that would slow them down or pull them backwards. Judah’s desire to return and stay in old patterns that feel safer only hinders their forward movement with God.

We see a shared principle in these two passages. They both warn about looking backward instead of trusting forward.

Isaiah 30

Hebrews 12:1

Judah runs back to Egypt for security

Believers must throw off what entangles

Old alliances replace trust in God

Old habits hinder the race of faith

Running to Egypt slows spiritual progress

Carrying extra weight slows the race

We see that going back to Egypt is like running a race while you are carrying extra weight. God is calling His people to leave old securities behind so that you can move forward in trust.

Why do people often return to familiar solutions even when they know those things don’t ultimately help?

What kinds of “weights” or distractions can keep someone from fully trusting God?

What helps people stay focused on the “race” God has set before them rather than looking back?