

Isaiah 31-32 Handout

Isaiah 30-32 fit together to form one movement:

- Last week in Isaiah 30 we saw the problem: misplaced trust. Judah is looking to Egypt to help them face Assyria rather than trusting in God. The people are rebuked, yet the Lord still invites them to return and promises eventual restoration.
- Isaiah 31 - The warning: return to God. The warning intensifies here in this chapter and the call for the people to turn back to God continues, for He alone can defeat their enemies.
- Isaiah 32 - The solution: a righteous King and restored people. This chapter shifts to hope with the description of a righteous King, the Spirit bringing transformation, righteousness that leads to peace and God bringing lasting security to His people.

So we see that together, these chapters move from false trust, to repentance, to the promise of true and enduring peace under God's rule.

Remember, we are still talking about the same situation - Assyria has launched a massive military campaign and has been exerting extreme pressure on the entire region. They have already conquered many fortified cities in Jerusalem and are marching on Jerusalem to lay siege to it.

Verse 1

We get the fifth woe here in verse one.

Who is it against? _____

It gives a list of what they are trusting in:

- Rely on horses
- Trust in the multitude of chariots
- In the great strength of their horsemen

Who do they not look to or seek help from? _____

They are choosing to trust the creation rather than the Creator.

In the Ancient Near East at this time, the horse and chariot were like the ultimate weapon. You had the horse with its speed and stamina that was hitched to a light two wheeled chariot where there would be a two to three man crew. This could be devastating to unprepared foot soldiers. Along with the driver, there was usually at least one archer who would have a powerful bow. Sometimes there would also be a spearman who could provide more offensive power. These would have been the elite troops in armies at this time. Chariots would have been expensive to get as well as to maintain. In order to get the right balance between being light weight and durable, chariots had to be carefully crafted and were in constant need of repair. But they were a desirable thing to a nation like Judah, even though the terrain there would not have been ideal.

Verse 2-3

In these two verses, Isaiah is basically comparing God's resume with Egypt's, and explaining why trusting in political alliances instead of God is dangerous.

What does the beginning of verse 2 say? _____

Judah saw their leaders as being wise in forming an alliance with Egypt. Isaiah is reminding them that it is God's wisdom that they should ultimately be seeking.

What does verse 3 say about the Egyptians? _____

Isaiah is trying to warn Judah that relying on Egypt for help is completely foolish. God is the one who is truly wise and powerful. He will act against rebellion and those who support evildoers. Egypt's army and horses are limited and fragile. When God intervenes both the helper (Egypt) and those seeking help (Judah) will stumble and fall.

What does it say at the end of verse 3? _____

Verses 4-5

These verses use two different animals in nature to show how God will protect Jerusalem.

What is the first animal? _____

Even though an entire band of shepherds comes against it, the lion is not frightened by them.

What will the Lord Almighty come down to do? _____

What is the second animal used to depict the Lord? _____

Listen to what the Lord will do for Jerusalem:

- Shield it
- Deliver it
- Pass over it
- Rescue it

God gives assurance to Judah that He will defend Jerusalem.

Isaiah uses the imagery of a lion and hovering birds to describe God's protection. What does each image teach us about His character?

Verses 6-7

There is a call for the people to return to the Lord – the One they “so greatly revolted against.”

What are we told they will do in verse 7? _____

True repentance will be shown when the people reject and abandon their idols and turn completely to the Lord, giving wholehearted devotion to Him.

Verses 8-9

What kind of sword will Assyria not fall by? _____

What will happen to their stronghold? _____

God gives a clear and final prediction of what will happen to Assyria. They will fall by the sword, but it will not be a human sword. Instead, God will miraculously intervene and take out Assyria and show the uselessness of Egypt's "help". Remember, the Lord took out 185,000 Assyrian troops in one night and caused the rest to withdraw from Jerusalem and go home.

"Whose fire is in Zion" - Zion often represents Jerusalem as the place where God dwells among His people. "Fire" in the Old Testament usually symbolizes God's holy presence, His power and judgment against enemies. So this phrase shows how God's active, powerful presence is in Zion and ready to defend His people and judge their enemies.

"Whose furnace is in Jerusalem" - a furnace intensifies a fire. This imagery in the Bible represents purifying heat and consuming judgment. Here it seems to suggest that Jerusalem is the place where God's judgment burns intensely against those who oppose Him.

Isaiah 32

We are now going to see a future transformation of society under righteous rule, where justice, wisdom, and peace replace corruption, complacency, and disorder. The chapter contrasts the current broken state of Judah with what life looks like when God restores His people.

The restoration talked about in this chapter is seen by many scholars as being a layered prophecy – there is an immediate historical backdrop, but then ultimately a fulfillment beyond which is understood as future and messianic.

Chapters 28-31 addressed Judah's crisis with the Assyrian empire in which they were tempted to rely on Egypt to help even though Isaiah called them to trust in the Lord. On the surface, this chapter is speaking into the Assyrian crisis around 701BC. However, what is being described in this chapter goes far beyond what happened historically.

Verses 1-2

This chapter begins in complete contrast to the drunkenness, blindness and confusion of chapters 28-29.

What does verse 1 say a king will reign in? _____

What about rulers? _____

We get a description of what this leadership will be like with four vivid similes:

- Like a shelter from the wind
- Like a refuge from the storm
- Like streams of water in the desert
- Like the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.

This is completely different from what we were seeing from the leaders of Judah a few chapters ago. The question is, who is this king and who are these rulers?

Scholars generally understand the “king” and “rulers” in three main ways, depending on how they interpret Isaiah’s prophecy:

1. This is a future ideal Davidic king - this is the most common view, and is often understood by Christians as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The reasons given for this view are that Isaiah repeatedly predicts a righteous king from David’s line (Isaiah 9 and 11), and the language about righteousness and justice fits those earlier prophecies. In this view the king would be the Messiah and the rulers would be leaders who govern under His righteous reign.
2. This is a reforming king in Isaiah’s near future. Some scholars think that Isaiah had a near historical hope in mind that was maybe connected with Hezekiah, who did rule during Isaiah’s ministry. They see Isaiah contrasting righteous leadership with the corrupt leaders of his time and that the prophecy expresses hope for better governance in Judah.
3. This is a picture of the future kingdom of God. Some scholars see the description here as describing a future restored society where righteousness shapes both leaders and the people. So here, the king represents God’s appointed ruler (often messianic) and the rulers represent administrators who are just and govern rightly.

Verses 3-4

In these two verses, Isaiah is describing the spiritual and moral clarity that will be seen when righteous leadership and God’s restoration come.

What is going to happen to their eyes and ears? _____

The people will finally understand God’s truth, because their spiritual blindness will be removed.

What about the fearful heart? _____

The tongue will be fluent and clear. Their confusion will turn into understanding, and they will gain wisdom and discernment which they will be able to communicate effectively. They will be able to speak the truth plainly and with confidence. They will be spiritually receptive and responsive to God.

Basically we are given a picture of what happens when a society is shaped by righteous leadership.

Verse 5-8

What will the fool no longer be called? _____

The people will now see the difference between a godly leader and a scoundrel.

Fool:

- Speaks folly
- Heart is bent on evil
- Practice ungodliness
- Spread error concerning the Lord
- Withhold food and water from those who need it

Scoundrel:

- Uses wicked methods
- Make up evil schemes
- Destroy the poor with lies even when the plea is just

The word “fool” in Hebrew (nabal) refers to a person acting in a disgraceful, unwise way, who rejects God’s wisdom. They speak folly and act with selfishness (ignoring the hungry), but the focus is often on moral foolishness.

The word “scoundrel” in the Hebrew (kilay) is a more active, deliberate and sinister character. They are described as dishonest, unprincipled and focused on using “smooth tricks” or “crooked schemes” to exploit the vulnerable for their own gain and act without fear of God or social responsibility.

What are we told about the noble? _____

In other words, they make noble plans and carry them out.

We see that the wicked leaders of the past were ungodly fools whose corrupt minds brought about corrupt plans and words. In contrast we see that noble leaders work to use their positions for good; to bless those who are entrusted into their care.

In order to make room for this new society, God must clear away the old corruption.

Verses 9-11

What is being called out here? _____

Scholars seem to think that Isaiah isn’t singling out women alone, but is using them to represent the society’s upper class; those enjoying prosperity while ignoring God’s warnings. They just assume that everything in their lives would continue normally.

But we see in verse 10 that’s all about to change.

How long will it be before their security falls apart? _____

What is going to fail? _____

Isaiah is warning the people, specifically the “complacent women” that in about a year the Assyrian army will desolate their land.

Verse 11 tells them to strip off their fine clothes.

What does he tell them to wrap themselves in? _____

He is telling them to start mourning now for what is to come.

Why is it easy to become spiritually complacent when life feels stable or comfortable?

Verses 12-14

Isaiah continues by telling them to mourn over the lost prosperity that is coming. Pleasant fields and fruitful vines are symbols of prosperity and stability. This loss shows how the economic foundation of the land will collapse, and the things that made the people feel secure will disappear. The land will become overgrown and unproductive.

What is going to happen to the fortress according to verse 14? _____

The city will be deserted. We see that every level of society will be affected by what is coming.

We are seeing total devastation of the land. While Jerusalem itself was not conquered at this time, the surrounding fortified cities (fortresses) were abandoned or destroyed by Assyria. The city becomes deserted; the countryside emptied. People were fleeing the villages and seeking refuge inside the walls of Jerusalem. Everything comes to a halt. Trade and agriculture stops as the Assyrian army occupied the land.

The campaign that took place in 701BC was considered a lightning fast, high intensity operation. It was a part of a larger era of Assyrian domination that lasted over a century.

The campaign was done in three phases. It started with the Assyrian army moving south along the Mediterranean coast and quickly subduing Phoenician and Philistine city states.

Then Sennacherib moved inland, capturing 46 fortified cities of Judah.

The campaign culminated with the siege of Jerusalem. Since it was so efficient and relied on speed to prevent the enemy from forming coalitions, the total period of active war in Judah is thought to have lasted less than a year.



Stage	Estimated Duration	Key Action
Phase 1	A few months	Conquest of the coastal cities (Tyre, Sidon, Ashkelon)
Phase 2	A few months	Destruction of Judean fortresses (like Lachish)
Phase 3	Weeks/months	The standoff at the walls of Jerusalem

Verse 15

This verse introduces a major turning point in this chapter. In order to understand it, we need to read it against what Isaiah just described in verses 9-14. We just had a description of the devastation that was coming because of their complacency.

The word “till” is important. **The devastation will last until what?** _____
from on high. We see that restoration will come directly through God’s intervention. Isaiah uses imagery from agriculture to show reversal taking place.

What is going to become of the desert? _____

What will become of the fertile field? _____

In verse 13, we saw the land being overrun by thorns and briars (judgment). Now the wilderness becomes a fertile field and a fertile field like a forest, showing transformation taking place.

There are a couple of things that we need to note when we look at verse 15. We see that there is an immediate reference to Judah with the word “us”, but we know there is an ultimate trajectory that is much wider than Judah. So we need to avoid limiting this to just Judah and missing the bigger biblical picture, and at the same time not making it all about a later global event and ignoring the context. That being said, we see that the timing of this “pouring out” of the Spirit from on high and the reversal and transformation that takes place has several layers ranging from historical to future fulfillment:

- Many scholars see a partial fulfillment of this reversal and transformation when the people are brought back after the Babylonian exile.
 - The people returned to the land
 - There was a renewed focus on God
 - So we see some signs of renewal take place during this time, but it’s not the full transformation that Isaiah describes.
- We see a major fulfillment begin with the outpouring of God’s Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2)
 - This fulfills the promise in Joel 2:28-29 where it says, *“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”*
 - The change starts from within people and comes directly from God
 - Spiritual transformation becomes more widespread
 - All of this change starts when God’s Spirit is poured out.
 - Even after Acts 2 and Pentecost, the world is not fully just, peace is still not universal and society isn’t completely transformed.

- We get the ultimate and complete fulfillment and future restoration when Christ returns.
 - The fullest sense of Isaiah 32:15 points us to a future, complete restoration
 - Righteousness, peace, security and justice fill society
 - God's rule is finally realized
 - This will go far beyond anything that has been fully seen in history so far.

Verses 16-17

These verses describe what society will look like after the devastation of vs. 9-14 and the transformation of verse 15. The focus isn't just on political change, but on moral and spiritual renewal as well.

What does verse 16 say will dwell in the desert? _____

His righteousness will live in the fertile field.

Justice is referring to fairness, right governance and moral order. Righteousness refers to living according to God's standards.

We get this striking imagery that replaces the desolate "wilderness" – it will now be filled with righteousness and justice.

Two ideas are being communicated here:

1. Moral restoration – society becomes aligned with God's ways.
2. Complete transformation – places that were once ruined by judgment are now places where righteousness lives.

What are we told will be the fruit of that righteousness? _____

Its effect will be quietness and confidence - **for how long?** _____

We see this total cause and effect. Righteousness → peace, quietness and security. This is not just peace that means the absence of war, but shalom – wholeness and well-being. Quietness is calm stability rather than fear and chaos. We see that the security will be lasting. True peace comes from righteousness; when people and leaders live according to God's ways, peace will naturally follow.

In place of the frantic and chaotic busyness that depending on self requires, those on whom the Spirit falls will be able to live in a continual state of "quietness" and trust, because they will have finally, truly relinquished their lives into the Lord's hands.

These two verses are describing the kind of world that is produced by God's Spirit (vs.15) and the rule of the righteous king (vs.1). Many scholars believe that this will ultimately be fulfilled when Christ reigns.

Verses 18-20

These verses focus on the security and blessing of God's restored people.

Verse 18 says that God's people will live in:

- Peaceful dwelling places
- Secure homes
- Undisturbed places of rest

Even if a physical disaster comes, what will the people be (vs.20)? _____

It says they will sow their seed by every stream and their animals will range free. We get a picture here of an abundant, unhindered life. This is a life of prosperity and blessing, with no threat and freedom from fear. Work is fruitful and secure.

So while everything opposed to God will be brought down, His people will experience true peace. We see that God's restoration doesn't just remove danger; it produces flourishing and abundance.

As we come to the end of our study on Isaiah 31-32, we are left with a simple, yet very searching question: *Where are we placing our trust?* The fact is this isn't a new or isolated idea. This is a theme that runs through all Scripture – it's part of a consistent biblical call. In Genesis, trust is demonstrated before it is commanded. In Genesis 15:6, Abraham believes God. In chapter 12 he follows God even without full clarity. So before God tells people to trust Him, He shows them what trust looks like.

Then it becomes a command - the first one is in Psalm 4:5 where it says, "*Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the LORD.*" It now becomes personal and direct. Trust is not optional – it's the right response to who God is.

❖ Proverbs 3:5-6

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

❖ Psalms 56:3-4

"When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise— in God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"

❖ Psalm 62:8

"Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, God is our refuge."

Trust vs. Self-Reliance:

❖ Proverbs 28:26

"Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe."

❖ II Corinthians 1:9

"Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead."

Here in the book of Isaiah, we see how trust becomes urgent. In Isaiah 30-31, Judah is trusting Egypt. They are choosing visible security over God.

Look at all these warnings against misplaced trust:

❖ Psalm 20:7

"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God."

❖ Jeremiah 17:5-7

“Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the LORD. That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. “But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him.”

❖ Psalm 146:3-5

“Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. **4** When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. **5** Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God.”

❖ Psalms 118:8

“It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.”

All of this is exactly what we've been walking through in the book of Isaiah so far.

We see that as we walk through the New Testament, trust is no longer just in God; it's centered in the person of Jesus.

John 14:1 says, “Believe in God; believe also in Me.” We see here that trust in God = trust in Jesus Christ.

He becomes:

- The object of our trust
- The reason trust is possible
- The fulfillment of everything Isaiah is pointing to (32:1)

All of this brings us to where we ended today - it all comes full circle. Isaiah 32 tells us that righteousness brings peace and trust brings quietness and security. We see that same idea show up in Philippians 4:6-7 where it says, “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*”

We see here that trust replaces anxiety with peace. Trust in God always leads to peace, even if circumstances don't immediately change.

How can you tell the difference between healthy responsibility and misplaced trust?

What are practical ways to ensure your actions (saving, planning, working) are rooted in faith rather than self-reliance?

What does “returning and rest” (Isaiah 30:15) look like in real life?

Personal Application:

What is one specific area of your life where you need to trust God more right now?

What would it look like to actively place that area in God’s hands this week?

Are there any practical steps you can take to shift your trust back to God (prayer, surrender, letting go of control, seeking His direction)?