

A BETTER KING, SERVANT, CONQUEROR

The Book of Isaiah

Isaiah 28—30

Verse to Remember

Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! Isaiah 30:18

A woe is an extended lament that here expresses the prophet's "concern and compassion"¹ for God's people who have gone astray and who are under his just judgment. Chapters 28—35 contain six woes and this week's passage consists of four of them: a brief one for Ephraim (28:1—6) and three longer ones directed toward Judah and her leaders.

As you read the passage this week, look for the ways Isaiah directs Judah to find her true rest and salvation in the Lord alone.

Historical Context


In 740 B.C. the Assyrians first attacked the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Ephraim), as God had promised they would. In 722 B.C. they completed their conquest by destroying Israel's capital city, Samaria. When King Hezekiah and the people of Judah heard about this destruction, they feared for their own safety. Initially, instead of turning to the Lord to protect them, they desired an alliance with Egypt. Isaiah was writing chapters 28—30 during this tumultuous period.

Day 1 — Woe to Samaria, the wreath and pride of Ephraim, the fading flower. Read Isaiah 28.

1. In verses 1—6, Isaiah is addressing Samaria as "that wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards...." By using this language, he is comparing the great hilltop city to a wreath or crown atop a person's head. What images does Isaiah use to describe the destruction God will bring against Samaria through Assyria? (Is. 28:2)
2. In the middle of this declaration of Ephraim's destruction, Isaiah describes the LORD and what he will do for the remnant of Israel that he will save. What is the contrast between Ephraim and the LORD?
Ephraim (Is. 28:1, 3—4):


The LORD (Is. 28:5—6):

3. In verse 7, Isaiah turns our attention to the Southern Kingdom, Judah (and from here on in this lesson, the focus remains on Judah). How are Judah's leaders similar to the people of Ephraim? (Is. 28:1, 7—8)

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In Isaiah 28:9–10, Judah’s leaders mock Isaiah’s rebuke by turning his words into the babbling sounds one makes to a child.² The irony of their mocking is that they are in fact like stubborn toddlers who think they know better. But God says they will “fall backward, be injured and snared and captured” (28:13).

Notes:

- In 28:12, Isaiah reminds the people that God offers them rest, which they refuse. As a result, God said he would speak to his people through the “foreign lips and strange tongues” (Is. 28:11) of the nation he will send against Judah.
- In 28:21–22, Isaiah refers to Mount Perazim and the Valley of Gibeon, where the Lord used his power to rescue his people. Now this same power will be used against them.³ (To read these stories, see 2 Samuel 5:17–20 and Joshua 10:1–14.)
- Isaiah ends this woe with a parable to show that God knows how to carefully thresh each nation to carry out his will according to his great wisdom.⁴ (Is 28:23–29;  * Rom 11:33–36)

4. The rulers of Judah mockingly call an alliance with Egypt a “covenant with death” (28:15) and an agreement with the grave.
 - a. What is their view of such an alliance? (Is. 28:15)
 - b. What is God’s view of such an alliance? (Is. 28:17–20)
 - c. What is the only sure alliance for them and for us? (Is. 28:16; 1 Pet. 2:4–8)

Day 2 — Woe to Ariel. Read Isaiah 29:1–14.

1. Why has Ariel (Jerusalem) come under God’s judgment? (Is. 29:1, 13; Is. 1:11–16)
2. What is the outcome of God’s judgment on Ariel (Jerusalem)? (Is. 29:4, 14b)

In contrast, what is the outcome of God’s judgment on her enemies? (Is. 29:5–6)

3. How is what God told Isaiah at his commissioning now coming true? (Look at Is. 6:9–10 and Is. 29:9–12.)



Check out
Matthew 23:13–37
where Jesus encounters
the very same blindness
and hypocrisy among
the Pharisees of
Jerusalem in his day.

Day 3 — Woe to those who work in secret.
Read Isaiah 29:15–24.

1. In this woe, God is addressing people who “go to great depths to hide their plans from the LORD, who do their work in darkness” (29:15).
 - a. Why is the image Isaiah uses in 29:16 helpful to understand what these people are like?
 - b. How does their attitude show a complete lack of understanding of who God is? (Ps. 139:1–12)
2. Isaiah interrupts this woe to describe the transformations that will happen in the future. Choose one that leaves you in awe of God. (Is. 29:18–24)
3. God’s people persistently refuse to see and hear and understand his message, so ultimately God gives them over to spiritual blindness and deafness and seals the scroll to keep them from understanding. In 29:18, God promises to reverse this judgment. How does Jesus fulfill this promise?
Lk. 4:16–21

1 Cor. 2:9–16

Rev. 5:1–10 (Note that Jesus is described here as “the Lamb.”)

Day 4 — Woe to obstinate children.
Read Isaiah 30:1–18.

1. Why are God’s people in Judah being called “obstinate children”? (Is. 30:1–2)
2. What does God say the people of Judah will bring upon themselves for going to Egypt for help? (Is. 30:3–5, 16–17)


Zoan and Hanes, mentioned in Isaiah 30:4, were possibly small kingdoms or cities on the outskirts of Egypt in Isaiah’s time. By mentioning them, Isaiah highlights the fact that the officials of Judah are well on their way to Egypt to solidify an alliance to protect themselves from Assyria.⁵

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Consider why it is ironic that the people of Judah are seeking help from the Egyptians, of all people. (Ex. 1:8–14; Lev. 26:13)

3. Why doesn't "the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel" (30:15a) want Judah to seek the help of Egypt? (Is. 30:6–7)

4. Look at what Isaiah records as a testimony against Judah in 30:9–11. What are the consequences of this rebellion? (Is. 30:12–14)
5. Tragically, what does Judah really forfeit by seeking Egypt's help? (Is. 30:15;  Ex. 14:14)

The oracle in Isaiah 30:6–7 describes how perilous the route is that the camels and donkeys are taking as they carry Judah's officials to Egypt. This was the same route Israel took out of Egypt when God rescued them from bondage.⁶ Egypt, which God calls "Rahab the Do-Nothing" (30:7b), appeared to be a powerful ally, but it was in fact an "utterly useless" (30:7a) source of help.

Day 5 — Woe to obstinate children (continued). Read Isaiah 30:18–33.

1. What does the LORD say he longs to do for Judah if they will "cry for help" (30:19)? (Is. 30:18–26;  Lam. 3:19–26)
2. What does the imagery Isaiah uses tell us about God's judgment of the Assyrians? (Is. 30:27–33)

How will Judah respond to God's justice toward her enemy? (Is. 30:29)

3. Isaiah repeatedly presents God as offering his people rest through trusting in him. God makes this same offer to us. How can we enter into this rest?

Tophet
signifies "the place of eternal torment."⁷

*The  symbol indicates verses for further study.

¹ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, Volume 2 Chapters 19–39 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 335.

² Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 155.

³ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 234–235.

⁴ Young, 301.

⁵ Young, 338.

⁶ Young, 340–341.

⁷ Young, 370.