

The Book of Isaiah

Lesson 12: Woe to Those Who Trust in Egypt -- Isaiah 30:1–32:20

When trouble looms, the human heart instinctively looks for the strongest ally it can find. In Isaiah's day, with the terrifying war machine of Assyria bearing down on Judah, the obvious move seemed to be a treaty with Egypt. Egypt had chariots, horses, a great army, and centuries of prestige. So Judah's leaders sent their envoys south, loaded their donkeys with treasure to buy Egypt's help, and felt, no doubt, that they were being prudent and realistic. They were doing the sensible thing.

But God called it rebellion. "Ah, stubborn children," He says, "who carry out a plan, but not mine, and who make an alliance, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin" (30:1). The problem was not merely a bad foreign policy. The problem was a heart that looked everywhere except to God. They would trust horses and chariots, the diplomacy and the gold, anything they could see and measure, rather than quietly trusting the unseen Holy One of Israel who had promised to save them.

Right in the middle of the rebuke comes one of the most beautiful verses in all of Isaiah: "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and trust shall be your strength" (30:15). There is the whole alternative in a single sentence. Not frantic alliance-building, but returning to God. Not anxious self-protection, but rest. Not noise and hurry, but quietness and trust. And then the heartbreaking close of the verse: "But you were unwilling." The hardest thing about quiet trust is that it requires us to stop running long enough to lean on God.

These chapters hold out a different way to live. There is a Teacher who will no longer hide Himself, whose voice you will hear behind you saying, "This is the way, walk in it" (30:21). There is a King coming who will reign in righteousness (32:1), and a Spirit to be poured out from on high that turns the wilderness into a fruitful field (32:15), pointing us toward Christ and the gospel age in which we now live. The question these chapters press on us is simple and searching: when fear comes, where do you turn? To Egypt, or to God?

Group Discussion: Isaiah rebukes Judah for trusting Egypt's chariots and horses rather than the Holy One of Israel (31:1). What are the modern "Egypt's," the human sources of security we instinctively run to in a crisis, and what makes them so attractive compared to quiet trust in God? Share an example, personal or cultural, where misplaced trust in human power has let people down.

Personal Reflection: Isaiah 30:15 says, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and trust shall be your strength," and then adds, "But you were unwilling." What in you resists quietness and rest in God, and prefers activity, control, or alliance-building? What would one specific act of "returning and rest" look like in your life this week?

Read Isaiah 30:1–32:20

Study Questions

1. In Isaiah 30:1–7 and 31:1–3 God pronounces woe on those who “go down to Egypt for help” and “trust in chariots” but “do not look to the Holy One of Israel.” He reminds them that “the Egyptians are man, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit” (31:3). What does this teach about the fundamental difference between trusting human power and trusting God, and why is misplaced trust treated as rebellion?
2. Isaiah 31:1 condemns those who trust in chariots and horsemen “because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel.” What human “chariots and horses,” the visible strengths and securities you instinctively rely on, are you most tempted to trust instead of God? Be specific and honest.
3. In Isaiah 30:8–11 the people tell the prophets, “Speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions,” and ask them to turn aside from “the Holy One of Israel.” What does this reveal about the human preference for comfortable lies over hard truth, and what is the danger to a people who only want their teachers to tell them what they want to hear?
4. Isaiah 30:10–11 describes people who want only “smooth things” from their teachers. When have you been tempted to surround yourself only with voices that tell you what you want to hear? How can you make sure you are listening to people who will tell you the truth in love, even when it is hard?
5. In Isaiah 30:15 God says, “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and trust shall be your strength. But you were unwilling.” What does this verse teach about where true salvation and strength come from, and why do God’s people so often find themselves “unwilling” to rest and trust?

6. Isaiah 30:18 says, "Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you... blessed are all those who wait for him." Where in your life are you being asked to wait on God's grace and timing rather than forcing your own solution? How can waiting itself become an act of trust rather than mere frustration?
7. In Isaiah 30:19-21 God promises that the people will hear a Teacher's voice behind them saying, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever they turn to the right or the left. How does God guide His people today, and what does this passage teach about His desire to lead those who are willing to listen and follow?
8. Isaiah 30:21 pictures hearing God's guiding voice precisely when we are about to wander "to the right or to the left." In what area do you most need God's clear direction right now? What practices help you hear and obey "This is the way, walk in it" rather than going your own way?
9. Isaiah 31:1-3 contrasts trusting the chariots and horses of Egypt with looking to the Holy One of Israel, and Isaiah 32:1-2, 15-17 promises a King who "will reign in righteousness," a man who will be "like a hiding place from the wind," and the Spirit poured out "from on high" that turns the wilderness into fruitful field and produces "peace," "quietness," and "trust forever." Explain how the contrast between human alliances and trust in God comes to its fullest point in Christ the righteous King and the gospel age of the Spirit. Why is trusting in human power, rather than in the King and His Spirit, finally a dead end, and what does righteous trust look like for the Christian?
10. Isaiah 32:17 says, "the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever." In light of Christ the righteous King and the Spirit poured out in

the gospel age, name one specific way you will let Jesus move you this week from anxious alliance-building to the quietness, trust, and rest that come from resting in Him.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 20:7, some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God; Matthew 11:28–30, Jesus offering rest to the weary, the New Testament voice of Isaiah's "returning and rest"; John 10:3–4, 27, the Good Shepherd whose sheep hear His voice and follow, fulfilling "This is the way, walk in it"; Acts 2:16–18, 33, the Spirit poured out from on high in the gospel age as Isaiah 32:15 foresaw; Philippians 4:6–7, not being anxious but trusting God in prayer, and the peace that guards heart and mind.

More studies available on ChurchOfChristBibleStudies.com