

Lesson 18
Isaiah 30-31
STORM CLOUDS OVER JERUSALEM (part 2)

Memory verse: "if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot disown Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13 NIV)

In the three "woes" of chapters 30 to 33, Isaiah became more specific. In the first three woes of chapters 28 to 29 he stressed principles of God's dealings with His people, but in these last three woes (chapters 30 to 33) he applied the principles to the historical situation they faced. However, there is a blending of historical and eschatological emphases in these "woes."

Chapter 30 begins with the Judeans sending an envoy to Egypt with the motive of seeking an alliance against the invading Assyrian army. Isaiah denounced this as adding sin to sin. Even though their princes reached Zoan and Hanes, capital cities, and succeeded in their object, it would not help them. The beasts of burden might traverse the deserts with presents and bribes, but all would be in vain. These truths, however, were unpalatable, and the politicians endeavoured to silence the prophet. The true policy, urged by Isaiah, would be to renounce these efforts for Egyptian help and return to rest in the loving care of God. In returning and rest they would be saved!

God had forbidden returning to Egypt (Exod. 13:17; Deut. 17:16). He knew that Egypt would tempt them to do things contrary to His will. These Judeans added to the sin of acting without divine direction, the sin of seeking security from a source other than the Lord Himself.

Christians often do the same thing. God has said, "Do not go there," regarding some places that we may think will provide satisfaction for us (e.g., pornographic websites, restaurants where we can go to fill up so we feel better about some sorrow in our lives, a mall where we can buy something new that we think will make us feel better, etc.). In rebellion, we sometimes go there anyway. Similarly, when God's people today go to places that God has prohibited, to find satisfaction apart from Him, the result is disappointing at best, and disastrous at worst.

The fifth "woe" in chapter 31 is a brief summary of what Isaiah had already told the people. Indeed, he was teaching them "line upon line, here a little, and there a little" (Isa. 28:10), and yet they were not getting the message.

We will find in these chapters that in the midst of human unfaithfulness, there is divine faithfulness. Human unfaithfulness does not destroy divine faithfulness. Mercy, grace and justice are shown in His faithfulness.

We often wonder why the Lord waits to do things in our lives. Isaiah tells us plainly that it is so He may "be gracious to you". Whenever the Lord waits or seems to delay, it always has a loving purpose behind it. We can trust that even when we don't understand it. Do you know that when God has mercy on us, it exalts Him? Mercy does nothing to exalt the person who receives it; mercy recognizes the guilt of the one who deserves the punishment. But mercy exalts the goodness of the person who gives it. It shows them to be loving, generous, and full of mercy.

On the surface, mercy and justice seem to oppose each other. If a guilty criminal stands before the judge, he has the choice to show either mercy or justice. But God is so great, He can show both at the same time. Because on the cross, Jesus took the punishment we deserve, God's justice is satisfied. At the same time, He shows mercy by extending the work of Jesus to us as payment for our sins. Only God can reconcile mercy and justice, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26).

There is a built-in blessing for those who wait for Him. Isaiah doesn't mean wait just in the sense of passing time, but in the sense of patiently waiting for and trusting God's promise.

Scripture reading: Isaiah Chapter 30:1-18

Things to learn: 1) Sin of Rebellion 2) God's steadfast faithfulness 3) Waiting and Trusting

Discussion Questions:

1). Review God's rebuke for the people of Judah in their sin of rebellion as declared in Isaiah 30:1-17.

2) Show how God will restore His people in spite of their unfaithfulness as prophesied in verses 18 to 33.

3) What must the people of God learn from the events that will unfold in chapter 31?