

We have come to the fifth out of six woes in Isaiah 28-35.

These woes have warned against trusting in Egypt for help.

Each woe has built upon those before in convicting Judah of their folly.

Egypt failed to help Israel when the northern kingdom fell 20 years ago.

God has promised that he will judge Jerusalem for entering a covenant with death,
but he has also promised that he will annul that covenant,
and will restore his kingdom.

Why should we care about this?

Why are you sitting there listening to yet a fourth sermon about
an obscure political alliance of the eighth century B. C.?

And you know that a fifth one is coming next week!

Why should we care about whether an ancient city entered into an alliance with Egypt?

And it really doesn't answer the question to say “this is the Word of God.”

Why would God give us 8 chapters of commentary on this one measly political alliance?

There were lots of prophets who didn't write everything down.

And most of the prophets seem to have written down only one or two of their prophecies.

Why must *we* hear the six woes against those who trust in Egypt?

Who is Isaiah speaking to?

Judah—the people of God.

But more precisely, the rulers of Judah—especially the house of David.

In the morning service we have been hearing about how Jesus is the final sacrifice.

Jesus, the Son of David, was facing that enemy of which Assyria was only a shadow.

What would he do?

His fathers had trusted in the chariots and horses of Egypt.

But Jesus trusted in Yahweh of Hosts.

This one little alliance at the end of the eighth century B.C.

is symptomatic of the human condition.

Who do you trust?

Where is your heart set?

This fifth woe reveals the sovereignty of God over the affairs of human history.

He is the one who will accomplish his purposes.

There is a Trinitarian structure to Isaiah 31-32.

the work of Yahweh in delivering Mount Zion (31:1-9)

the reign of the King (32:1-8)
the coming of the Spirit produces a bountiful harvest (32:9-20)
There is a certain connection here between the work of Yahweh in delivering Jerusalem,
the reign of the King in bringing justice,
and the outpouring of the Spirit in producing a harvest.
Isaiah probably did not understand the doctrine of the Trinity,
but he did understand that the rule of God was intimately bound up
with the rule of the Davidic king—
and of all the prophets, Isaiah was the one who saw most clearly
that the eschatological king was rightly seen as a divine person in some sense.
He also understood that the reign of this king was connected
with the outpouring of God's Spirit.

In other words, we can see in Isaiah a glimpse of the Trinitarian structure of redemption,
even before the doctrine of the Trinity was clearly revealed.

1. The LORD of Hosts Will Deliver Mt. Zion (31:1-9)

*31 Woe^[a] to those who go down to Egypt for help
and rely on horses,
who trust in chariots because they are many
and in horsemen because they are very strong,
but do not look to the Holy One of Israel
or consult the LORD!*

First we look at the work of the Holy One of Israel in delivering Zion.

As we have seen repeatedly,
those who trust in Egypt will be cast down.
It is remarkable that Judah does not trust in the LORD.
He has chastened them with adversity—and they will not listen.
Now he is going to deliver them from Assyria—in spite of their sin—
and still they will not listen.
He is going to strike down 185,000 Assyrians,
and yet Judah will remain stonehearted.

But after all, those who would go down to Egypt for help—
those who would enter a covenant with death—
do not have any spiritual discernment to begin with!
They do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or consult Yahweh.

And yet...

*² And yet he is wise and brings disaster;
he does not call back his words,
but will arise against the house of the evildoers*

and against the helpers of those who work iniquity.

Who is the house of the evildoers?

The house of David—who dared to enter a covenant with Egypt.

And Egypt is their helper.

Yahweh is supposed to be the help of the righteous.

The Psalms regularly speak of Yahweh as the helper of his people,
and especially the helper of his anointed King—or of Zion.

I often point out that in the Bible, the “helper” is one who does for you
what you could not possibly be for yourself.

Here, the term “helper” is used of Egypt –
albeit ironically!

Since, in fact, Egypt is *no help* at all!

But the point should be clear:

the house of David becomes a house of evildoers
when they put their trust in Egypt for help!

Our *help* is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

He is our help and our shield.

But too often we are like the house of David.

Too often we do not trust in the LORD.

We look around for someone who fits our needs and wants.

We are not convinced that the LORD is sufficient for us.

We think that we need something more than God.

But in the end all those “other things” fail us.

Did you think that getting married would bring fulfillment?

And then your spouse disappoints you.

Maybe having children will make life meaningful?

But your children have their own lives to live before God.

They are not here for *your* fulfillment!

Whatever we lean on for support, falls down.

Like a broken reed, it pierces the hand of the one who leans on it!

And this should not surprise us!

After all,

³ *The Egyptians are man, and not God,
and their horses are flesh, and not spirit.
When the LORD stretches out his hand,
the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall,
and they will all perish together.*

Yesterday, at John and Jessica's wedding, we sang "Abide with Me."
The first stanza says that "when other helpers fail – and other comforts flee –
"help of the helpless, O abide with me."

All of your "other helpers" will fail.
All of your "other comforters" will flee – they won't be there when you need them most!

Because your helpers are "flesh."
The apostle Paul talks a lot about flesh and Spirit –
but 700 years before Saul of Tarsus was born,
Isaiah the prophet clearly understood the difference between flesh and spirit.
The flesh is weak and unable to accomplish the salvation of God's people.
It is only by the power of the Spirit that deliverance will come!

And when the LORD stretches out his hand, the helper–Egypt–will stumble,
and he who is helped (Judah) will fall and they will all perish together.

If you trust in Egypt –
if you trust in something other than the LORD your God –
then your helper will fail you.

⁴ *For thus the LORD said to me,
"As a lion or a young lion growls over his prey,
and when a band of shepherds is called out against him
he is not terrified by their shouting
or daunted at their noise,
so the LORD of hosts will come down
to fight^[b] on Mount Zion and on its hill.*

⁵ *Like birds hovering, so the LORD of hosts
will protect Jerusalem;
he will protect and deliver it;
he will spare and rescue it."*

Isaiah explains this with two images in verses 4-5:
a lion growling over his prey–defending his prize from the shepherds.
Yahweh is like a lion who will come upon the sheep
without fear of the puny shepherds who challenge him.
Who are the shepherds who will challenge Yahweh?

Again—the house of David—the shepherd king.
But the LORD will accomplish his purposes.
He will come down to fight on Mount Zion.

And therefore Isaiah also speaks of Yahweh as a hovering bird,
who protects Jerusalem and spares it.

Yahweh will come against his people.
Egypt and Judah alike will fall before the Assyrians.
But Jerusalem will stand.

Isaiah is distinguishing between Zion and the people of Judah.
Zion is the city—Jerusalem—who is the bride of Yahweh (the city of God).
Zion has lots of children—the people of Judah—the children of Yahweh.
Isaiah is saying that God is coming against his people.
Zion will stand.
He will protect Jerusalem.
He will protect and deliver it; he will spare and rescue it.

The city is safe.

But what about the people?

(read)

⁶ Turn to him from whom people^[e] have deeply revolted, O children of Israel. ⁷ For in that day everyone shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which your hands have sinfully made for you.

Remember God's first words in Isaiah 1:2

“Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.”
The Father here calls his children to repentance.
Turn away from your idolatry.
Return to me and live.

Now Isaiah says that *in that day* everyone will cast away his idols –
in that day – in the day of the LORD, when the LORD redeems his people –
the revolting people will turn back to the LORD!

After all, as Augustine rightly pointed out –

“You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy,
because you have made us and drawn us to yourself,
and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you.”

(read v8a)

⁸ *“And the Assyrian shall fall by a sword, not of man;
and a sword, not of man, shall devour him;
and he shall flee from the sword,
and his young men shall be put to forced labor.
⁹ His rock shall pass away in terror,
and his officers desert the standard in panic,”
declares the LORD, whose fire is in Zion,
and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.*

God will strike down the Assyrian army with his own hand.
They will be scattered and dispersed by the LORD “whose fire is in Zion,
and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.”

The Father will judge his people—but he will yet deliver his city.

And when he does – “a king will reign in righteousness”!
And this launches the second part of our text in verses 1-8 of chapter 32.

2. The King Will Reign in Righteousness (32:1-8)

³² *Behold, a king will reign in righteousness,
and princes will rule in justice.
² Each will be like a hiding place from the wind,
a shelter from the storm,
like streams of water in a dry place,
like the shade of a great rock in a weary land.
³ Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed,
and the ears of those who hear will give attention.
⁴ The heart of the hasty will understand and know,
and the tongue of the stammerers will hasten to speak distinctly.
⁵ The fool will no more be called noble,
nor the scoundrel said to be honorable.
⁶ For the fool speaks folly,
and his heart is busy with iniquity,
to practice ungodliness,
to utter error concerning the LORD,
to leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied,
and to deprive the thirsty of drink.
⁷ As for the scoundrel—his devices are evil;
he plans wicked schemes
to ruin the poor with lying words,
even when the plea of the needy is right.
⁸ But he who is noble plans noble things,
and on noble things he stands.*

We have seen how the house of David is a house of evildoers –
but a day will come when that will change:
For there is a day coming when “a King will reign in righteousness,
and princes will rule in justice.” (32:1)

There will be a day when the king and his princes will be “like a hiding place from the wind.”
They will be like Yahweh (v2), “a shelter from the storm,
like streams of water in a dry place,
like the shade of a great rock in a weary land.”
There will come a day when we will have a king who is truly like God.

In that day, we will finally see repentance! (v3)
“Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed,”
(remember the seers who could not see?)
“and the ears of those who hear will give attention.
The heart of the hasty will understand and know,
and the tongue of the stammerers will hasten to speak distinctly.”

In that day!

Isaiah’s day was full of those whose eyes could not see and whose ears could not hear.
His calling (ch 6) was to shut the eyes and close the ears,
so that God’s judgment could come against the house of David.
He lived in a day when the fool is called noble,
and the scoundrel was said to honorable. (v5)
The fools of Isaiah’s day spoke folly concerning the LORD,
and deprived the hungry and thirsty of food and drink (v6).

But there will come a day when a truly noble king shall arise,
and he will stand on noble things.

The term translated “noble” refers to one who is generous – magnanimous –
princely.

No longer will the fool be called noble – but the one who is noble
will plan noble things – and stand on noble things!

So chapter 31 speaks of how the Father judges his children,
but in the end will rescue his city.
And in the first half of chapter 32, we hear of the coming king,
who sounds an awful lot like Yahweh in how he is a shelter and a shade to his people.
But all this will only happen when the Spirit of God is poured out upon the land.

This is the message of the last part of chapter 32.

3. The Outpouring of the Spirit Will Bring a Harvest of Justice and Peace (32:9-20)

Having heard the news that a king will reign in righteousness,
the people become complacent.

They forget what is coming.

(Read 32:9-13)

⁹ *Rise up, you women who are at ease, hear my voice;
you complacent daughters, give ear to my speech.*

¹⁰ *In little more than a year
you will shudder, you complacent women;
for the grape harvest fails,
the fruit harvest will not come.*

¹¹ *Tremble, you women who are at ease,
shudder, you complacent ones;
strip, and make yourselves bare,
and tie sackcloth around your waist.*

¹² *Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields,
for the fruitful vine,*

¹³ *for the soil of my people
growing up in thorns and briers,
yes, for all the joyous houses
in the exultant city.*

Isaiah calls for the women of Judah to mourn for what is about to happen.

The people of God—my people—are going to grow up in a devastated land.

The city will be deserted.

Yes, that's Jerusalem.

Zion—the city of the living God—will be made desolate,
the hill and the watchtower of Jerusalem will become dens forever
“a joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks.”

¹⁴ *For the palace is forsaken,
the populous city deserted;
the hill and the watchtower
will become dens forever,
a joy of wild donkeys,
a pasture of flocks;*

Yes, God will protect his city—but he makes no promises for its inhabitants,

“Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high.”

(read:)

¹⁵ *until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high,
and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field,*

and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.
¹⁶ *Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.*

Think for a moment about what Isaiah is saying.
Isaiah is saying that the judgment of Jerusalem will continue
“until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high.”

Jeremiah says that the Exile would last for 70 years.

But that’s only referring to the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem.
The return from Exile was not the end of the story.
The judgment of Jerusalem lasted for another 500 years after that!

The prophet Haggai promised that the glory of the second temple
would be greater than the glory of Solomon’s temple.
Why did he say that?
Because there was no glory when the second temple was built.
The glory of the LORD did NOT come down and fill the temple.
The people of God were living in Jerusalem,
but there was no king reigning in righteousness.

Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high,
Jerusalem will be a wilderness.
Only when the Spirit comes will the wilderness become a fruitful field.
Only then will justice dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field

Only then will the vineyard of the LORD stop producing stinkfruit!

Read 17-18.

¹⁷ *And the effect of righteousness will be peace,
and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust^[d] forever.*
¹⁸ *My people will abide in a peaceful habitation,
in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.*

The coming of the King and the coming of the Spirit together will produce righteousness.

Do you see now why the baptism of Jesus is such an important event in all four gospels?
There are *many* reasons for that,
but not least is that at the baptism of Jesus,
the Holy Spirit was poured out on the anointed king.
How do you know that Jesus is the anointed king?
Because the Spirit has been poured upon him—and now upon us.

All three persons of the Trinity gather at the Jordan River.
At the Jordan River, the Father says that *Jesus* is his beloved Son
and the Spirit descends upon the Son as a dove.

And because Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father,
there is now a king reigning in righteousness.
A king who gives to us his peace.

¹⁹ *And it will hail when the forest falls down,
and the city will be utterly laid low.*
²⁰ *Happy are you who sow beside all waters,
who let the feet of the ox and the donkey range free.*

The last two verses are rather cryptic,
but they bring us back to Isaiah's present.
"It will hail when the forest falls down, and the city will be utterly laid low"?
Armies have been compared to forests before (ch 14).
God's judgment will fall from the sky when the Assyrian armies are cut down,
At the same time, the city of Jerusalem will be laid low.
But "happy are you who sow beside all waters,
who let the feet of the ox and the donkey range free."

In other words,
if you're a nomadic farmer, you've got it made!
Jerusalem will be laid low,
the Assyrians destroyed.
Everything will be a wilderness—
just right for those who like to spread out and live off the land!

How should we hear this?
Certainly with gratitude!
The king has come!
The Spirit has been poured out!

But also – we live in between the *beginning* of the promise and its fulfillment.

We live in a time when the Kingdom of God has *begun* –
and yet the city of man has not entirely fallen.

And while we are citizens of the City of God –
we still inhabit the city of man.

There are two stances toward the city of man that you find in the scriptures.
One is found in Jeremiah 29 – "pray for the peace – seek the welfare –

of the city where you live.”
The exile is going to take a while – so seek the peace of Babylon,
because in its peace you will find peace.

But the other stance is equally important:

Come out of Babylon!

Do not identify with Babylon.

Whether Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Rome – or the United States –
the danger is that we identify with the city of man.

We are to pray for the *peace* of the city of man.

We are to pray for the *welfare* of the city where God has placed us.

But we are not to identify with that city.

I’ve had a chance to work on my practice of this in the last couple years.

Historic preservation of older homes is an investment in the welfare of the city.

And I’ve made connections that I hope to use for the good of South Bend, yes,

but if I ever become more concerned with historic preservation

than with the city of God –

then I will need to “come out” of the city.

And it has been encouraging to hear from people in the city

that they can see clearly that my agenda is not just about earthly things.

People should see that our desire for the welfare of the earthly city

is motivated by our commitment to the heavenly city!