

When you face difficulty,
who do you trust?

When you see trouble coming – where do you turn for help?

All six woes in chapters 28-35 fit together!

All of them focus on the futility of trusting in Egypt against the power of Assyria,
and call Judah to trust in Yahweh to deliver them.

Assyria is coming.

That is the relentless theme of chapters 1-35.

Assyria is coming.

Your only hope is to trust in the LORD,
because he alone can deliver you from their hand.

Tonight we will look at the Woe to the stubborn children.

Finally, in chapter 30, Isaiah explains the context.

Woe to the Stubborn Children!

There is a sense in which chapter 30 summarizes the three woes in chapters 28-29.

It makes explicit what was implicit in the first three woes.

Because the stubborn children are the leaders of Judah,
the house of David in all its folly.

1. Here and Now: Egypt No Help (v1-7)

a. Pharaoh’s Protection Will Fail (v1-5)

30 “*Ah, stubborn children,*” declares the LORD,
“*who carry out a plan, but not mine,*
and who make an alliance,^[e] but not of my Spirit,
that they may add sin to sin;
²*who set out to go down to Egypt,*
without asking for my direction,
to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh
and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt!

God had said of Israel – Israel is my son – my firstborn.

But now Israel is a stubborn son – a rebellious son.

They carry out a plan—but not Yahweh’s.

They make an alliance—but not of his Spirit.

They prefer to take refuge in Pharaoh rather than in their God.

In Deuteronomy, God had said *not* to return to Egypt –
which meant – not to *trust* in Egypt.

Trusting in Egypt means trusting in political and military power.

After all – the Assyrians are coming.

Jerusalem does *not* have the political or military power to stand up against Assyria.

So what should they do?

Should they surrender?

Or should they look for allies who can help them?

But the shelter of Egypt will prove a humiliating failure. (Read v3-5)

³ *Therefore shall the protection of Pharaoh turn to your shame,
and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt to your humiliation.*

⁴ *For though his officials are at Zoan
and his envoys reach Hanes,*

⁵ *everyone comes to shame
through a people that cannot profit them,
that brings neither help nor profit,
but shame and disgrace.”*

Egypt cannot help you.

If you trust in political power – if you trust in military power to deliver you from trouble,
then it will fail you.

Because no earthly power is able to rescue you.

Verses 6-7 then give a vivid picture of the futility of Egypt’s assistance. (Read)

b. Egypt Is “Rahab Who Sits Still” (v6-7)

⁶ *An oracle on the beasts of the Negeb.*

The Negeb was a dry and waterless land—
a land without economic value, occupied only by wild beasts.
Even so is Egypt.

*Through a land of trouble and anguish,
from where come the lioness and the lion,
the adder and the flying fiery serpent,
they carry their riches on the backs of donkeys,
and their treasures on the humps of camels,
to a people that cannot profit them.*

⁷ *Egypt's help is worthless and empty;
therefore I have called her
“Rahab who sits still.”*

Psalm 87:4 also refers to Egypt as “Rahab,”

Rahab was the name of a mythical beast.

It is spelled differently in Hebrew from the prostitute in the book of Joshua.

Later, in Isaiah 51:9, Isaiah refers to God slaying Rahab,
as a way of referring to God's triumph over Egypt at the Red Sea,
drying up the sea to allow his people to escape the land of death.

So to call Egypt "Rahab" is to speak of the might and power of Egypt.
Imagine – if you will – a great sea monster lying in the Nile River!
(Ezekiel will also use this image in Ezekiel 29)
This is a sea monster that could destroy anyone!

But here Egypt is "Rahab who sits still."
Egypt is a mighty monster who accomplishes nothing.

It's as scary as a stone dragon!

Which means...

To enter an alliance with Egypt is to make a covenant with death
that cannot possibly succeed! (as we saw in 28:15)

2. Coming Events: The Children Are Unwilling to Hear (v8-17)

And so God tells Isaiah:

a. The Lying Children Do Not Want to Hear (v8-11)

⁸ *And now, go, write it before them on a tablet
and inscribe it in a book,
that it may be for the time to come
as a witness forever.*

This is a problem that won't go away.
It's a problem for us as much as for them!

⁹ *For they are a rebellious people,
lying children,
children unwilling to hear
the instruction of the LORD;
¹⁰ who say to the seers, "Do not see,"
and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us what is right;
speak to us smooth things,
prophesy illusions,
¹¹ leave the way, turn aside from the path,
let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel."*

Do we *want* to hear the instruction of the LORD?
(The word “instruction” is the word “*torah*” – the Law of the LORD)
Do we want to hear God’s instruction for our lives?

Or do we say to the seers – “do not see”!
And to the prophets “do not prophesy to us what is right”

Do we want to hear *truth*?
Or do we want “smooth things”?
Do we want easy, comfortable sermons that allow us to live as we have always lived?
Or do we want to hear what the Holy One of Israel actually calls us to do?

We have heard often of “the Holy One of Israel.”
Isaiah – after all – is the one who saw the vision of the LORD as “Holy, Holy, Holy.”
As the *Holy One* he is high and exalted –
and yet as the *Holy One* he also draws near to us –
and is determined to draw *us* near to himself!

But if you ignore the Holy One of Israel and despise his word –
listen to what the Holy One says:

b. Therefore You Will Be Smashed to Bits (v12-14)

¹² *Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel,
“Because you despise this word
and trust in oppression and perverseness
and rely on them,*

You see, if you despise the word of the Holy One –
then you will trust in oppression and perverseness.

Because if you don’t trust God – you will trust in something that cannot sustain you.
The term translated “perverseness” means to “go crooked.”

The only straight path is the path of the Holy One.
And so because you rely on crooked paths,

¹³ *therefore this iniquity shall be to you
like a breach in a high wall, bulging out and about to collapse,
whose breaking comes suddenly, in an instant;
¹⁴ and its breaking is like that of a potter's vessel
that is smashed so ruthlessly
that among its fragments not a shard is found
with which to take fire from the hearth,
or to dip up water out of the cistern.”*

Jerusalem's walls shall crumble—or better—explode.

The Potter has spoken.

He will take the vessel that he made,
and will smash it into pieces.

Indeed, “among its fragments not a shard is found with which to take fire from the hearth,
or to dip up water out of the cistern.”

The clay vessel, so painstakingly crafted,
will be smashed to bits.

We hear these words echoing in Paul's question in Romans 9:22-24,

“What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power,
has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,
in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy,
which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called,
not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles.”

Paul's hearers would remember what Isaiah had said about Jerusalem,
that it was a clay vessel destined for destruction.

What hope is there?

How can we be saved?

The answer is found in verses 15-17.

c. “In Returning and Rest You Shall Be Saved” (v15-17)

¹⁵ For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel,

*“In returning^g and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.”*

But you were unwilling, ¹⁶ and you said,

*“No! We will flee upon horses”;
therefore you shall flee away;*

*and, “We will ride upon swift steeds”;
therefore your pursuers shall be swift.*

¹⁷ A thousand shall flee at the threat of one;

*at the threat of five you shall flee,
till you are left*

*like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain,
like a signal on a hill.*

Jerusalem's only salvation is found in repentance.

They must turn away from the Egyptian alliance and rest in Yahweh alone.

Jerusalem is trusting in the Egyptians and their horses.

But the Assyrians will be even faster.

Leviticus 26 had promised that “five of you shall chase a hundred,” if they were faithful;
while Deut 32:30 warned that if Israel rebelled,
one enemy soldier would put a thousand Israelite’s to flight.

And that is what will happen.

Because Judah has rebelled, they will be destroyed.

But not completely.

The last phrase suggests a remnant of hope:

“till you are left like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain,
like a signal on a hill.”

Something will be left of Jerusalem!

And that’s why verse 18 promises that the God of Justice will be merciful:

3. Coming Events: The God of Justice Will Be Merciful (v18-26)

a. Justice and Mercy Are Not Opposed to Each Other (v18)

¹⁸ *Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you,
and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you.*

*For the LORD is a God of justice;
blessed are all those who wait for him.*

Notice how God says this.

“The LORD *waits* to be gracious to you.”

He understands.

He sees the big picture.

“and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you.”

Showing mercy is what *exalts* God.

“For the LORD is a God of justice” –

Wait, I thought *mercy* is what exalts God.

Mercy and justice are not opposed to each other!

After all, mercy does not mean “letting people get away with murder.”

And if you think about it, it is *not* merciful to let people get away with murder!

What happens to a child if you let him push other kids around?

He becomes a bully – and if he doesn’t learn his lesson,
he will face worse trouble later!

What happens to Jerusalem if God lets them continue on their wicked path?

They will think that they don’t need God.

They will continue to trust in other nations.

This is why the LORD *waits* to be gracious to you.
He *is* a God of justice.
Therefore the LORD of all the earth *will do right* –
it just may take longer than you were hoping!

But blessed are all those who wait for him.
Just as God waits to be gracious to you –
so also blessed are those who *wait* for him.

Read:

b. If You Turn, He Will Answer (v19-22)

¹⁹ For a people shall dwell in Zion, in Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. As soon as he hears it, he answers you. ²⁰ And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher.

Yes, it is the Lord who gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction.
But in the same way that Jerusalem refused to hear the word of the LORD,
now your *Teacher* will not hide himself any longer –
but your eyes shall see your Teacher!
Because the Word shall become flesh and dwell among us.

²¹ And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,” when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. ²² Then you will defile your carved idols overlaid with silver and your gold-plated metal images. You will scatter them as unclean things. You will say to them, “Be gone!”

Waiting upon the LORD is not a “passive” thing.
Waiting means crying out to the LORD!
Waiting means *turning* to him.
Waiting means *hearing* the word of the LORD “this is the way, walk in it!” –
and then turning to *walk* in that way!

After judgment will come blessing.
God will not forget his covenant.
He will be gracious to his people.
For though he afflicts his people for a time,
he will again lead them in paths of righteousness.

(Read 23-26).

c. “When the Towers Fall” – the Day of Light and Healing (v23-26)

²³ And he will give rain for the seed with which you sow the ground, and bread, the produce of the ground, which will be rich and plenteous. In that day your livestock will graze in large pastures, ²⁴ and the oxen and the donkeys that work the ground will eat seasoned fodder, which

has been winnowed with shovel and fork. ²⁵ And on every lofty mountain and every high hill there will be brooks running with water, in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall.

²⁶ Moreover, the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day when the LORD binds up the brokenness of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow.

When the towers fall – in the day of the great slaughter –
the LORD will begin to renew all creation!

In the same way that judgment is described as the light of the sun and moon being darkened,
so also God’s blessing is described as the “sevenfold” light of the sun!
But the LORD promises that he will bind up the brokenness of his people,
and heal the wounds inflicted by his blow.

After all, judgment comes from *God*.

This pandemic came from God.

Is it not from the Most High that both good and evil come? (Lam 3)

Therefore we trust that God knows what he is doing –
and that he *will* bind up our brokenness!

Together with this portrait of future blessing,
there is also a promise that God will destroy the Assyrians (without Egypt’s assistance).

(v27-28)

4. Here and Now: Assyria No Threat (v27-33)

a. The Name of the LORD Is a Devouring Fire (v27-28)

²⁷ *Behold, the name of the LORD comes from afar,
burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke; ^[h]
his lips are full of fury,*

and his tongue is like a devouring fire;

²⁸ *his breath is like an overflowing stream
that reaches up to the neck;*

to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction,

and to place on the jaws of the peoples a bridle that leads astray.

There are some great images here:

His breath is like an overflowing stream...

He will sift the nations with a sieve of destruction!

He will lead them astray with a bridle.

This is the sort of language that the King of Assyria would use of himself!

He thinks that he is thundering toward Jerusalem in order to inflict wrath...

but in fact, he is thundering toward the grave!

So, what are you supposed to be doing in all this?!
And notice what the people of God do in all this.

They sing and worship God (29)

b. And the LORD Will Strike Assyria with His Rod (v29-33)

²⁹ You shall have a song as in the night when a holy feast is kept, and gladness of heart, as when one sets out to the sound of the flute to go to the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel.

What are you supposed to do?

Worship God.

Praise him.

Trust him.

In the middle of the crisis – go to the house of God and worship the LORD!

Think of the great Feast of the Passover.

On the first Passover night, it was Pharaoh – king of Egypt –
who loomed large in the background.

And yet God called for a feast.

The Passover imagery of the cloud of fire is in verse 27.

What is God telling us?

In the middle of the darkness of this present age,
gather before the LORD and give praise to him!

You may have gladness of heart – even when all seems hopeless! –
because you *know* who your God is!

God is the divine warrior who arises to overthrow Assyria (30-33) – and all his and our enemies!

³⁰ And the LORD will cause his majestic voice to be heard and the descending blow of his arm to be seen, in furious anger and a flame of devouring fire, with a cloudburst and storm and hailstones.

He needs no assistance in battle from his people.

³¹ The Assyrians will be terror-stricken at the voice of the LORD, when he strikes with his rod.

³² And every stroke of the appointed staff that the LORD lays on them will be to the sound of tambourines and lyres. Battling with brandished arm, he will fight with them.

What do the people of God do?

They do not join in the battle—they simply worship God.

And yet their worship contributes to his victory:

“Every stroke of the appointed staff that the LORD lays on them

will be to the sound of tambourines and lyres.”

Do you believe that your Lord Jesus is able to defeat all his and your enemies?

Then worship him!

³³ For a burning place^[i] has long been prepared; indeed, for the king it is made ready, its pyre made deep and wide, with fire and wood in abundance; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of sulfur, kindles it.

This is a picture of hell.

God has prepared a place for the King of Assyria.

He and his armies will burn in hell for their attack upon the people of God.

Listen now to Revelation 19:11ff.

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in^[b] blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.

¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule^[c] them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

As Assyria went, so will all the nations that arise against the living God.
And as Isaiah spoke of the role of the people of God as worshipers
who praise God for his great victory, so also does Revelation.

What do the armies of heaven do in the battle?

Nothing.

They are there simply to praise the King of Heaven.

Both Isaiah and John are calling you to remember that God is the sovereign Lord
of creation and redemption.

You may think that you see the enemies of Christ in power.

You may think that God’s purposes have been thwarted.

But God remains the Potter who molded all things.

He has molded some vessels for destruction,

and others for glory.

Your task is merely to call upon the LORD, and heed his voice,

walking in his paths and worshiping him,

giving thanks for the great redemption accomplished by Christ Jesus our Lord.