

Robert Vannoy, Major Prophets, Lecture 11

Isaiah 30-32

Setting Isaiah 30 – Alliance with Assyria to Egyptian Option

Let's go on to Isaiah 30. I suggested that chapters 28 and 29 have as their setting a banquet of nobles celebrating their alliance with Assyria and Isaiah addressing those leaders of Judah. When you get to chapter 30, it's difficult to tell if it has the same setting or whether it's a completely separate discourse at some later time. I think it's quite possible that the latter is the case; it seems to deal with something that took place later. You notice how it begins: "Woe to the obstinate children," declares the LORD, "to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin; who go down to Egypt without consulting me; who look for help to Pharaoh's protection, to Egypt's shade for refuge."

2 Kings 19:8-9 Historical Context

In other words, it is a response to what the nobles again are thinking: "Look, if you're condemning us for an alliance with Assyria, if that turns against us, well, we'll just go make an alliance with Egypt then. We have another option." It may be that's what they were thinking, or it may refer – and I'm inclined to this latter suggestion – to an actual attempt to do that. If you look at 2 Kings 19:9, you read there in the context of Assyria's attack on Judah in the time of Hezekiah, beginning in verse 8, "When the field commander heard that the king of Assyria had left Lachish, he withdrew and found the king fighting against Libnah. Now Sennacherib received a report that Tirhakah, the Cushite king *of Egypt*, was marching out to fight against him. So he again sent messengers to Hezekiah with this word: 'Say to Hezekiah king of Judah...'" So in 2 Kings 19:9 you have a reference to this Ethiopian king coming out of Egypt to fight against Assyria. So that may be what's in view here, when Judah seeks some sort of aid from Egypt in face of the Assyrian threat; but in any case, that's just some

suggestions with respect to background for the chapter.

Isaiah 30:1-7 Rebuke Judah for Failing to Seek Their Help from the Lord and Turning to Egypt

As far as what chapter 30 says, verses 1-7 rebuke Judah for failing to seek their help from the LORD and turning to Egypt. And verses 1-7 say that that will be of no benefit or help. So “Woe to those who go down to Egypt,” we read in verse two. Verses 3-6 say, “But Pharaoh's protection will be to your shame, Egypt's shade will bring you disgrace. Though they have officials in Zoan and their envoys have arrived in Hanes, everyone will be put to shame because of a people useless to them, who bring neither help nor advantage, but only shame and disgrace. An oracle concerning the animals of the Negev: Through a land of hardship and distress, of lions and lionesses, of adders and darting snakes, the envoys carry their riches on donkeys' backs, their treasures on the humps of camels, to that unprofitable nation, to Egypt, whose help is utterly useless. Therefore I call her Rahab the Do-Nothing.”

Isaiah 30:7 Translation Egypt/Rahab the Do-Nothing

Now, verse seven's an interesting verse from the point of view of translation. Look at that. In the King James version Isaiah 30:7 says, “Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose: therefore have I cried concerning this, their strength is to sit still.” The NIV says, “To Egypt, whose help is utterly useless. Therefore I call her Rahab the Do-Nothing.” It doesn't look much like the King James. The NASB: “Even Egypt, whose help is vain and empty. Therefore I call her Rahab, who has been exterminated.” If you were comparing translations you might wonder, what's the verse saying? How do such different translations come out of the same Hebrew words?

If you look at the Hebrew down there at the bottom and follow across, you have *umitzraim* “and Egypt,” *hevel* is “in vain” *waw-riq* “and to no purpose” yet

do they help. So literally, “In Egypt in vain and to no purpose do they help.” Then you get *‘al ken*, “therefore I have called this” – and then you have *sheveth* literally, “a Rahab, they are a resting.” So, “in Egypt in vain and to no purpose do they help; therefore I have called this a ‘Rahab, they are a resting.’” This is the translation if you just take it word for word literally.

Look at your citations, page 24, second paragraph here from E. J. Young’s commentary on Isaiah, volume two, which I think is helpful: He says, “In vain and to no purpose do they help.” Young says, “With these words, Isaiah characterizes the country to which Judah looked to help – Egypt may try to help, but her efforts amount to nothingness and vanity. They are no help at all. They bring Judah no profit or benefit. It is for this reason that the prophet, speaking in God’s name, calls the land *rahav*” – “therefore I have called *rahav*.” Do you see that second line? “Therefore I have called this a Rahab.” Elsewhere, this term is used as a poetic name for Egypt. In itself the word merely means “arrogance, storm.” Young says, “It is apparently used, however, in some biblical passages to designate a serpent, or crocodile, and thus refers to Egypt conceived as a great serpent, or crocodile, lying along the sea. As applied to Egypt, the word suggests that the land was a storm to let loose upon the Israelites – a storm that would devour them if it could.” It’s this Rahab. “The nation itself as a powerful entity together with its gods would rise as a storm against Israel – it was truly a Rahab.”

The construction of the final words is difficult – the object of the verb appears to be given in the words “a Rahab are they a resting.” In other words, the object is expressed in the sentence, as the Masoretic accent suggests; the words ‘Rahab are they’ belong together. These words set forth the common opinion, or designation, of Egypt in the eyes of the Egyptians generally: they were regarded as a Rahab, a powerful monster, that could devour and destroy.

In reality, however, they were but a *sheveth* – a resting. This latter word designates a ceasing of activity, a period of resting, and thus forms a suitable contrast to Rahab. Thus Egypt is to be known not as Rahab, but as “a ceasing or

resting.” So it is a power that can be of no help to God’s people. God has spoken. His mark, as it were, is upon Egypt – she is no Rahab, but only a resting. “Lo thou trusteth in the staff of this broken reed on Egypt whereon if a man leans, it will go into his hands and pierce it; so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust in him” – Isaiah 36:6. Thus Egypt perceives a new name” and here’s really the way he understands the phrase: A Rahab are they? No, rather a resting. Egypt’s mighty power is gone. The nation is not what it once was.

Now, it seems to me that that’s a reasonable way to read the text – in other words, Egypt is viewed as this monster, this Rahab, this crocodile – it’s like a paper tiger; they’re not what they appear to be: they’re a resting, they’re weak, they’re going to be of no avail. So while you may think they are a Rahab, are they not.

Well, maybe that’s not the best word to translate it. In the Hebrew, *sheveth* means a cessation, a sitting still. So here’s this – you see Rahab seems to have the connotation of this reptile, or crocodile, or something who’s powerful; yet it’s sitting still, it’s not doing anything. Now, I don’t know where the newest NASB gets “exterminated.” The NIV – Rahab the Do-Nothing – seems to have captured the idea. Their strength is to sit still. I think the NIV probably gets closer to the thought of the Hebrew. “I call her Rahab, the Do-Nothing.”

Student question: “It seems to make sense for the most part except this one point where he leads from the crocodile to the storm. I can see the metaphor of the animal here, but then it seems the metaphor suddenly switches from an animal to a storm.”

Vannoy’s response: As applied to Egypt – the word suggests that the land was a storm to let loose upon the Israelites, a storm that would devour. Young says, in itself, the word means “arrogance or storm.” If you look up *rahav*, Rahab, the BDB lexicon says literally “storm, arrogance, but only as names – the mythical sea monster, the emblematic name of Egypt.” So it’s used for this mythical sea monster, and it’s used as an emblematic name of Egypt. But its inherent meaning

is “storm” or “arrogance.”

This is sort of an aside. It’s clear what verses one to seven are talking about, apart from how you translate that last phrase, the idea that they could put their trust in Egypt if Assyria doesn’t work but this is also going to be to no avail. I think something like this illustrates the value of at least having some knowledge of Hebrew. A lot of people can say, “Well, why learn these languages? We’ve got all these translations.” You see, there’s certain points where translations don’t help because you compare translations and you’re left with total confusion unless you have some way to get back and look at the original text and see what’s the basis for the difference between these translations.

Isaiah 30:8-17 Israel Decimated but Some Will Survive

Let’s move on to Isaiah 30, verses 8 to 17: “Go now, write it on a tablet for them, inscribe it on a scroll, that for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness. These are rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the LORD's instruction. They say to the seers, ‘See no more visions!’ and to the prophets, ‘Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions. Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!’ Therefore, this is what the Holy One of Israel says: ‘Because you have rejected this message, relied on oppression and depended on deceit, this sin will become for you like a high wall, cracked and bulging, that collapses suddenly, in an instant. It will break in pieces like pottery, shattered so mercilessly that among its pieces not a fragment will be found for taking coals from a hearth or scooping water out of a cistern.’ This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: ‘In repentance and rest is your salvation; in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.’ You said, ‘No, we will flee on horses.’ Therefore you will flee! You said, ‘We will ride off on swift horses.’ Therefore your pursuers will be swift! A thousand will flee at the threat of one; at the threat of five you will all flee away, till you are left like a

flagstaff on a mountaintop, like a banner on a hill.”

Now, in those verses the people will not listen to God or to his prophets. So destruction is going to come on them and most likely at the hands of the Assyrians again. Verse 17 tells us that destruction will be great but that some will be spared. “A thousand will flee at the threat of one; at the threat of five you will all flee away, till you are left like a flagstaff on a mountaintop, like a banner on a hill.” The Jewish people will continue to exist, but they’re going to be decimated and there will be few left.

Isaiah 30:18-26 Yet Peaceful Future

I’m not going to say much about verses 18-26. But 18 to 26 present a brighter future to the people of Zion after the misery of the present judgment. It’s hard to know exactly where to place the things that are described here – it’s perhaps to be viewed as the peaceful condition of Jerusalem that followed 701 B.C. after Sennacherib and the Assyrians were forced to withdraw. But it may be referring to the more distant millennial period. It’s hard to say.

If you glance down through it, we find in verse 23: “He will also send you rain for the seed you sow in the ground, and the food that comes from the land will be rich and plentiful. In that day your cattle will graze in broad meadows. The oxen and donkeys that work the soil will eat fodder and mash, spread out with fork and shovel. In the day of great slaughter, when the towers fall, streams of water will flow on every high mountain and every lofty hill. The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days, when the LORD binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted.” It’s clear that there’s a brighter future; whether that’s in a more immediate situation or a distant, future, millennial period is hard to say.

Isaiah 30:27-33 Destruction of Assyria

Verses 27 to 33 come back to the immediate situation. It tells of the

destruction that Assyria's going to experience at the hands of the Lord. Look at verse 28, "Breath is like a rushing torrent... He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction." Then go down to verse 31: "The voice of the LORD will shatter Assyria. With his scepter he will strike them down. Every stroke the LORD lays on them with his punishing rod will be to the music of tambourines and harp as he fights them in battle with the blows of his arm." So destruction on Assyria ends the chapter.

I would just take this as the eventual defeat of the Assyrians by the Babylonians. Again, it seems to me that you have poetic language here describing a victory. How far you're going to push that when the Babylonians actually attack the Assyrians? Do they have armies who have tambourines? I don't know. Again, you see it says, "Every stroke the LORD lays on the Assyrians." The Babylonians become the instrument in the hand of the LORD to bring judgment on them. In that sense, the LORD judged the Assyrians, but it wasn't as direct a thing as deliverance of Jerusalem in the time of Sennacherib when that plague came on their army. I'd be inclined to just view it as a poetic description of a victory and a defeat in battle.

Isaiah 31 Jerusalem Protected, Assyria Judged

Let's continue on to Isaiah 31. I'm not going to read or go through the whole chapter, but just this comment – it's very similar to chapter 30 – many of the same thoughts are repeated. Look at verse five and eight – "Like birds hovering overhead, the LORD Almighty will shield Jerusalem; he will shield it and deliver it, he will 'pass over' it and will rescue it." But then verse eight: "Assyria will fall by a sword that is not of man; a sword, not of mortals, will devour them. They will flee before the sword and their young men will be put to forced labor." But again I should have mentioned that the beginning of this chapter says, "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their

horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD.” That’s to be of no avail. But the LORD will protect Jerusalem and judge Assyria.

Isaiah 32:1-2 Messianic Blessing of the Present Believers’ Pilgrim Journey

Let’s go on to chapter 32. At the end of 31 we read that Assyria’s going to fall. Verse nine says their stronghold will fall because of terror, and verse one of chapter 32 sets a contrast to that: “See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice.” When you read verse two, you run into a translation problem. The NIV says, “Each man will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm; like streams of water in the desert, and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.” “Each man will be like a shelter.” If you compare that with the King James, you read, “And a man will be like a hiding place from the wind.” In other words, in the King James it looks like verse two is talking about the king of verse one, whereas in the NIV it looks like verse two is talking about the rulers of verse one.

You see verse one says, “A king will reign in righteousness, rulers will rule with justice.” And then, is it, “*a* man will be like a shelter from the wind,” or “*each* man”? I’m inclined to think that the reference in verse two is “a man,” and it’s the same person that’s described in verse one.

Look at your citation page 20, under Alexander’s commentary. This comes from pages one and two of his second volume, which is here two volumes in one book. He says, “And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, a covert from rain; a storm as channels of water in a dry place or in drought, as the shadow of a heavy rock in a weary land.” Most of the late interpreters give “each” the sense of a distributed pronoun. That is, each of the chiefs or princes mentioned in verse one shall be, etc. But the word is seldom, if ever, so used, except when connected with a plural verb, as in various other places. Alexander says the meaning, rather, is that there shall be, “*a* man upon the throne” or at the head of

the government who, instead of oppressing, will protect the helpless. This may either be indefinitely understood or applied in an individual or in an emphatic sense to the Messiah. The figures for protection or relief are the same used above in chapter 4:6 and in 25:4.

Now I'm inclined to think that you do have a Messianic reference here: the king is the LORD, that's a reference to Christ. But I don't think it's a reference to the millennial kingdom, but to the present time, to the blessings that we have in Christ now prior to the time of the establishment of the millennial kingdom – “Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, princes shall rule in justice, and a man shall be”—that is the king, that is Christ.

This is very similar to chapter four of Isaiah – remember when we discussed that. Isaiah 4:2-6: is that millennial or is it present time? That's where the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious; and verse five: “Then the LORD will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy. It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.”

And you see here in Isaiah 32:2, “Each man will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.” Seems to me it's speaking of the blessing that the believer has in Christ at a time when all danger is not removed – you're in a pilgrim journey; there's still that which can threaten, and yet you can rest in the protection which Christ gives. Seems to me that that's a reasonable way to understand what's in view in chapter 32 verses one and two. It was the same with chapter four. Appeal could be made to the hymn: “Zion, city of our God, glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God...” with this hymn the LORD's our rock; in him we hide, a shelter in the time of storm. The hymn continues: “Oh Jesus is a rock in a weary land, a weary land, a shelter in the time of storm.” That's taken from this verse in Isaiah 32:2 as the present experience of

the believer.

Isaiah 32:3-4 Seeing Eyes and Understanding Ears

Verses three and four seem to me to describe the results of the activity of this man from verse two, and the king of verse one gives the results of the activity of this man. God will give his people the eyes and the ears to understand his truth as a result of the new birth that comes to all who trust in Christ. “Then the eyes of those who see will no longer be closed, and the ears of those who hear will listen. The mind of the rash will know and understand, and the stammering tongue will be fluent and clear.” That sort of understanding and of seeing is the result of the new birth that comes to those who trust in Christ.

Isaiah 32:5-8 Division of People into 2 Classes

Chapter 32 verses 5 to 8 – suggestion: the division of people into two classes through the preaching of the Gospel. You read, “No longer will the fool be called noble nor the scoundrel be highly respected. For the fool speaks folly, his mind is busy with evil: He practices ungodliness and spreads error concerning the LORD; the hungry he leaves empty and from the thirsty he withholds water. The scoundrel's methods are wicked; he makes up evil schemes to destroy the poor with lies, even when the plea of the needy is just.” “But,” contrast: “the noble man makes noble plans, and by noble deeds he stands”

It seems to me that what may be involved here is this division of people into two classes through the preaching of the Gospel. It will become apparent that those who reject the Gospel, those who remain in their sin, can be spoken of as vile scoundrels, or churls. Moral distinctions will become more evident as people accept or reject the Gospel, so that those who are born again, who accept the Gospel and live in the way in which the Bible enjoins them to live, they will be the “nobles that devise noble things; by noble things shall he stand.” So the people are divided into the vile and the noble according to their response to the Gospel.

That's a suggestion.

Isaiah 32:9-14 Daughters of Zion

Isaiah 32, verses 9 to 14, seems to return to the immediate situation. He says, "Tremble, you complacent women;" that's much like chapter three – the latter part where he describes the daughters of Zion who are haughty and walk with stretched necks, wanton eyes. See, here he says, "Tremble, you complacent women; shudder, you daughters who feel secure! Strip off your clothes, put sackcloth around your waists. Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vines and for the land of my people, a land overgrown with thorns and briars-- yes, mourn for all houses of merriment and for this city of revelry. The fortress will be abandoned, the noisy city deserted; citadel and watchtower will become a wasteland forever, the delight of donkeys, a pasture for flocks."

I see my time is up – I think I'd probably better hold off commenting on these verses until we start the next hour because we really can't get into it now. So we'll stop here and begin with verse nine at the beginning of the next hour.

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