

Title: Isaiah Session 15: Woe to the Rebellious Children (Isaiah Chapters 30 and 31)

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. John Oswalt covers Isaiah chapters 30 and 31, along with the conclusion of chapter 29, exploring the theme 'Woe to Those Who Will Not Wait.' The session analyzes Judah's foolish attempt to secure its political future by secretly making a military alliance with Egypt rather than seeking divine direction. Dr. Oswalt emphasizes the spiritual necessity of waiting on the Lord, illustrating how human self-reliance acts as a broken potter's vessel or a bulging wall destined for sudden collapse. Ultimately, the lecture highlights God's promise of quiet mercy and His supernatural defeat of the Assyrian forces without human hands.

Outline

I. Introduction and Announcements

A. Welcome and Opening Remarks

1. Lecture covering Isaiah chapters 30 and 31, with concluding sections of chapter 29.
2. Humorous reference to Monday night weather ('not raining, so it must not be Monday night').

B. Francis Asbury Society (FAS) Announcements

1. Upcoming symposium on freedom in 19th-century America by Ron Smith.
2. Request for volunteers to assist FAS with mailing and office work, directing names/emails to Katie Diddle or Sarah McQueen.

C. Opening Prayer

1. Thanksgiving for Jesus Christ's voluntary substitutionary death on the cross.
2. Petition for spiritual understanding of the written word as a foundation for holiness and christian living.

II. Structural Context of Chapters 28 through 33

A. Thematic Overarching Label: 'Woe to Those Who Will Not Wait'

1. Waiting is established as the practical Old Testament synonym for active trust.
2. Refusal to wait acts as the diagnostic proof of a lack of genuine trust.

B. The Sequence of Woes in this Division

1. First Woe (Chapter 28): Targeted at the proud, drunken leadership of the Northern Kingdom (Ephraim).
2. Second Woe (Chapter 29:1): Directed against the spiritually blind leadership of Ariel (Jerusalem).
3. Third Woe (Chapter 29:15): Addressed to those who try to hide their secret political advice from God.
4. Fourth Woe (Chapter 30:1): Focused on those running down to Egypt for an alliance without consulting God.
5. Fifth Woe (Chapter 31:1): Directed at those who trust in material horses, chariots, and physical flesh rather than spirit.

III. Exegesis of the Third Woe: Hiding Counsel (Isaiah 29:15–24)

A. The Secret Counsel and Upside-Down Theology (29:15–16)

1. Political advisors attempting to hide their backroom Egyptian alliance strategies from the Lord.
2. The five-person ancient Near Eastern court structure: King, Queen, Prince, Princess, and Counselor.
3. Turning things upside down: The clay treating the Potter as though He has no understanding, attempting to use God to rubberstamp human agendas.
4. Human self-deception of hiding from the Creator, tracing back to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3.

B. The Transition to Promised Sight and Sensitivity (29:17–21)

1. The shifting proportion in Isaiah: brief warnings of judgment followed by grand visions of hope.
2. Reversal of the Chapter 6 curse: The deaf will hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind will see out of gloom and darkness.
3. The meek and poor exulting in the Holy One of Israel as their true source of joy.
4. Worldly versus Christian joy: Grounded in eternal relationship and divine character rather than temporary circumstances.

C. The Preservation and Sanctification of the Remnant (29:22–24)

1. Jacob will no longer be ashamed or face disgrace, which is the inevitable outcome of failed false trusts.
2. Witnessing children as the miraculous work of God's hands in the midst of war and devastation.
3. Sanctifying and hallowing the name of the Holy One of Israel through deliberate obedience and life actions.
4. Astray spirits coming to understanding and murmurers accepting true instruction.

IV. Exegesis of the Fourth Woe: Rebellious Children and the Nile Alliance (Isaiah 30:1–17)

A. Geopolitical Context of the Egyptian Crisis (~710–700 BC)

1. Assyria's rapid march along the coastal plains toward Egypt, threatening the Judean hills.
2. Judah's strategic geographic position in the Assyrian rear forces Sennacherib to deal with Jerusalem.
3. Jerusalem's politicians propose an alliance with Egypt as a humanly sensible defensive buffer.

B. The Sin of Unconsulted Action (30:1–5)

1. The core sin is not Egypt's paganism, but the politicians making structural decisions without asking God.
2. Rebellious and stubborn children carrying out plans that are not the Lord's and making alliances not of His spirit.
3. Human self-reliance must reach the absolute end of its resources before we are willing to let God act.
4. Numbers 20 parallel: Moses' failure to sanctify God's name at the rock because he took personal credit for the water.

C. The Futile Negev Caravan: Transition by Contrast (30:6–7)

1. A graphic poetic portrait of Judean ambassadors taking heavy gold and silver tribute to Egypt.
2. Traveling through the dangerous, lion-infested southern wilderness of the Negev to bypass the Assyrian-controlled coastal road.
3. High financial cost and danger yielding absolute zero: Egypt's help is empty and in vain, leading to the name 'Rahab who sits still'.

D. The Written Indictment of Smooth Things (30:8–11)

1. God commands Isaiah to write the warning on a tablet and scroll as an enduring witness.
2. Lying, rebellious children refusing to hear the 'Torah' (defined as life-giving instruction rather than restrictive law).
3. The people demand that their prophets speak 'smooth things' and illusions, begging 'let us hear no more of the Holy One of Israel'.

E. The Metaphors of Sudden Doom (30:12–17)

1. Ironic response: 'Therefore, thus says the Holy One of Israel...'
2. Sin compared to a high wall with a bulging crack that suddenly collapses without warning.
3. Sin compared to a thin clay potter's vessel shattered into a thousand useless shards, with no piece left large enough to scoop ashes or water.
4. The call to strength: 'In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.'
5. Judah's active refusal: 'No, we will flee on swift horses,' resulting in being chased away by swifter enemies until they are isolated like a lonely flagstaff on a mountaintop.

V. Exegesis of the Divine Wait and Restoration (Isaiah 30:18–33)

A. The Lord's Wait to Show Mercy (30:18)

1. Because Judah refuses to wait for God, God waits to show them mercy.
2. Divine pedagogical allowance: Allowing His children to hit the wall and experience the consequences of their choices to prepare them to receive grace.
3. Waiting as the active, relational expression of trust rather than passive stagnation.

B. The Teacher and the Quiet Way (30:19–26)

1. Receiving the bread of adversity and water of affliction, yet seeing the Divine Teacher.

2. Hearing the gentle whisper behind: 'This is the way, walk in it,' when turning to the right or left.
3. The quiet, non-yelling nature of the Holy Spirit, which is easily drowned out by the constant noise of self-effort.
4. Rejection of defiled idols of silver and gold as a natural byproduct of seeing the Teacher.

C. The Defeat of Assyria as a Holy Festival (30:27–33)

1. God's majestic voice and descending arm destroying the Assyrian army with burning anger.
2. The supernatural defeat celebrated by Judah with songs in the night, tambourines, lyres, and gladness of heart.
3. Worship as the natural response when we allow God to act and take the glory instead of solving problems ourselves.
4. Detailed analysis of the Hebrew root 'Pakad': meaning to visit, inspect, judge, bless, or enumerate.
5. Relational difficulty: Trying to see God over the terrifying spears of 185,000 Assyrians.

VI. Exegesis of the Fifth Woe: Flesh versus Spirit (Isaiah 31:1–9)

A. The False Security of Material Hardware (31:1–3)

1. Woe to those who rely on physical chariots and numerous horsemen instead of looking to the Holy One.
2. The theological axiom: 'The Egyptians are man, and not God; and their horses are flesh, and not spirit.'
3. When the Lord stretches out His hand, both the helper (Egypt) and the helped (Judah) will fall together.

B. The Lion and the Hovering Birds (31:4–5)

1. The Lord of Hosts compared to a mighty lion growling over its prey, undaunted by a band of shouting shepherds.
2. The Lord of Hosts compared to protective birds hovering over Jerusalem to spare, rescue, and deliver it.

C. The Devouring of the Assyrian (31:6–9)

1. Immediate call for the children of Israel to turn back from their deep revolt.
2. Cast-away idols of silver and gold as the first sign of repentance.
3. Prediction: The Assyrian will fall by a sword 'not of man' (supernatural intervention), with his strong rock passing away in terror.
4. God's presence as a consuming fire in Zion and a blazing furnace in Jerusalem.