Lesson 15 Isaiah 30 Security Is Not Found in Human Alliances Introduction

War in our times

Russia invaded Ukraine. I struggle to imagine the evil in the mind of Vladimir Putin to make a choice that would cause so much death and pain, loss, to so many people, seemingly with the primary goal of satisfying his own lust for power and glory. The first map I saw showed the huge red landmass that is Russia looming over the small blue territory that is Ukraine. I immediately thought of our present section of Isaiah and Assyrian's invasion of Judah. Tiny Judah being swallowed up by the empire of the north as its army conquers city after city to surround the capital.

Ukraine is not as small, 44 million people, but small compared to Russia. We are watching destruction of towns and villages located in the invaders path to the capital. Kiev has been surrounded. We see diplomatic entanglement of regional powers and super-powers as NATO supports Ukraine and China supports Russia. All of that draws a comparison between the long ago war of our present section of Isaiah and this very real and present catastrophe.

Isaiah has already expressed to us a future vision ongoing wars among the nations. The city of man is chaotic. When have there not been wars in Europe? That last century began with "The War To End All Wars." The assumption among the victorious powers was that the West would never allow such a thing to happen again. At least not in Europe. They were wrong. Twenty years later, World War II forced historians to rename "The War To End All Wars," "World War I." Another 50 years after World War II and the West was shocked again as the former Yugoslav nations engaged in bloody conflict. That war came out of the upheaval of failed Communist states. But with the tearing back of the Iron Curtain, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the end of the Balkan war, surely now Europeans have entered into an era where war in Europe is unthinkable.

There is definite elitism in this idea. "Sure, there are wars in Africa and the Middle East. Of course, those people have wars. But civilized Europe?" Has secularism in Europe changed the heart of man? Does power no longer corrupt? Has the city of man stopped being the city of chaos?

The Biblical view of human civilization, combined with the history of humankind, combined with the apparent narcissism of a leader like Vladimir Putin all point towards the reality that wars will continue to occur through time all over our planet, until the true King vanquishes evil and establishes a new kingdom populated by individuals whose hearts have been transformed to love.

The comparison of Russia to Assyria, Ukraine to Judah works in an abstract sense. We see the evil of war. We see an invading empire. We see the rightness of standing with Ukrainians against this attack on their basic human dignity as created in the image of God.

So, there is some sense where the comparison is helpful. But very importantly, whenever these parallels occur to us between Old Testament events and modern events, we have to remember that Israel had a singularly unique role as the Old Covenant people of God. No other nation is the chosen people Israel.

Judah here will be rebuked for making an alliance with Egypt. Does that mean Ukraine should not make alliances with other nation states against Russia? And God promises Jerusalem that Assyria will be defeated. Does that promise apply now to Ukraine?

No. Neither of those comparisons apply from this text concerning Assyria and Judah. We can learn principles from this text that apply to our modern experience. But we have to carefully consider what the text meant in its original context to the original audience before we can begin to make applications for our own day. The people of Israel are a unique entity in salvation history. And even for Israel, salvation history took a major shift with the coming of Christ and the establishment of the New Covenant. Israel is not the New Covenant people of God. That has changed.

Under the Old Covenant, the people of God understood their definition to be tied to the theocracy that was the geo-political state of Israel. That nation state is no longer the locus of God's people. The definition of God's people is defined by the current covenant God is operating with. Right now, that is the New Covenant established by Jesus. The New Covenant is the constitution for the people of God in our current moment of salvation history. With the shift from old to new, we are no longer defined as a geo-political entity. We are a spiritual entity. We are the Church. We are all those who have truly believed in Jesus Christ. And we exist all over the world, in a multitude of nation states, as part of the population in each country.

The nation state of Ukraine is not parallel to the nation state of Judah in a theological sense. The church of Ukraine, the body of believers in Ukraine, they come much closer to paralleling Judah. And so, when we consider possible principles or promises from our present text that might apply to Ukraine, we have to keep in mind the shift from Old Covenant people of God to New Covenant people of God.

After we consider the text of Isaiah 30, I will come back to this question of possible application to our modern reality. I am not promising there will be significant application. I didn't choose this text to apply to Ukrainian situation. It just happens to be the text we're in right now as this crisis is unfolding.

The Second Set of Three Woes

The invasion of Judah by Assyria takes place at the end of our current major section titled, *The Lord of History*. Six woes are followed by the narrative of invasion and rescue. So there will be a couple of lessons before we get to the narrative of invasion. The six woes occur in two sets of three.

We have done the first three, and those three suggested three principles. And here are the three principles that we took out of those first three woes.

- (1) From the 1st woe, when God's people reject His Word and Covenant, destruction follows, according to God's divine purposes (28:1–29).
- (2) From the 2nd woe, there is disaster and deliverance in God's divine purposes, but historical deliverance does not change people spiritually. Spiritual deliverance needs a further divine action, which is already planned by God (29:1-14).
- (3) And from the 3rd woe, people may think to run the world without God, but He is the sovereign, and His transforming purposes will work out spiritually, morally and socially, fulfilling what began in Abraham to the establishment of a truly renewed people (29:15-24).

There are the three principles that Motyer suggested. We concluded with them in our last lesson. The first three woes communicate these principles without concretely identifying the historic occasion. There is plenty enough in those woes for us to guess which nations we are talking about, but neither Egypt nor Assyria are explicitly named, not until this 4th woe. Beginning with the 4th woe, the second set of three woes occurs in a historically defined situation.

So, first we have three woes that establish principles concerning Yahweh as the Lord of History. Then we have three woes that affirm those three principles through examples of practical application.

Motyer sets the first three woes in a parallel column beside the second three woes. The 1st woe parallels the 4th woe. The 2nd woe parallels the 5th woe. And the 3rd woe parallels the 6th woe.

I'll treat this 4th woe independently of the 1st woe. I'm not going to be going back and forth. I want us to get a feel for chapter 30. But in the end, I will consider how this 4th woe provides an example for the principle from the 1st woe. So, once again, here is that principle from the 1st woe, "When God's people reject His Word and Covenant, destruction follows, according to God's divine purposes (28:1–29)."

4th Woe (30:1-33)

Now to the 4th woe delivered in chapter 30. The structure is chiastic. It's simple, there's an outer frame and an inner frame. The outer frames give us a human perspective, what we can see going on in the narrative. The inner frames give us God's perspective on these events.

A Human perspective: Alliance with Egypt will be no help (1–7)

B Divine perspective: our just God promises death for those who reject His Word (8–17)

B' Divine perspective: our patient God promises blessing for those who return to Him (18–26)

A' Human perspective: Invasion of Assyria will be no threat (27–33)¹

A Human perspective: Alliance with Egypt will be no help (1–7)

We start with the human perspective of the alliance with Egypt, which in the end will be of no help to Judah. This is Isaiah 30:1-7.

"Woe to the rebellious children," declares the LORD,
 "Who execute a plan, but not Mine,
 And make an alliance,

but not of My Spirit,

In order to add sin to sin;

² Who proceed down to Egypt Without consulting Me,

To take refuge in the safety of Pharaoh

And to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt!

Therefore the safety of Pharaoh will be

And the shelter in the shadow of Egypt,

your shame your humiliation.

⁴ "For their princes are at Zoan And their ambassadors arrive at Hanes.

⁵ "Everyone will be ashamed because of a people who cannot profit them, who cannot profit them, also for reproach."

The oracle concerning the beasts of the Negev. Through a land of distress and anguish,

From where *come* lioness and lion, viper and flying serpent,
They carry their riches on the backs of And their treasures on camels' humps,

young donkeys

To a people who cannot profit them;

⁷ Even Egypt, whose help is vain and empty. Therefore, I have called her "Rahab who has been exterminated."

We need to set up the historical context. This is going to take a little bit of time. We are now a couple of generations removed from the Assyrian emperor Tiglath-Pileser III, who is the one Ahaz sought out for help against Syria and Israel back in Isaiah 7. Tiglath-Pileser ended up subjugating all three smaller nations, Syria, Israel, and Judah. Israel later rebelled against Assyria and like Judah now, they at that time sought help from Egypt. It did not work then either. Tiglath-Pileser's son Shalmaneser V destroyed Israel's capital Samaria, exiled the people of Israel, and brought people from other lands to populate their cities. That was in 722 BC, the sixth year of Hezekiah's co-regency with his father Ahaz.

722 BC is also the date the next Assyrian emperor Sargon II began his rule. In fact, Sargon may have finished the siege of Samaria begun by Shalmaneser. Historians debate that. The siege took three years, so it is possible.

Typically, in the Ancient Near East, various vassal states rebelled from the current ruling empire any time there was a change of emperors. We are told in 2 Kings 18:7 that Hezekiah stopped paying tribute to Assyria. Presumably Hezekiah made that decision when Shalmaneser died, and Sargon took power.

That was a dangerous move. But we are told in that same verse, "The Lord was with him; wherever he went he prospered." In spite of Hezekiah's lack of faith in turning to Egypt for help, he is classified

¹ J. A. Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 244.

in the book of Kings as one of only 8 good kings over Judah. The walk of faith has its ups and downs. that is true of Hezekiah. And we will get more into his specific story in later episodes.

As Hezekiah had outlasted Shalmaneser, he also outlasted Sargon, who died in 705 BC. Sargon's son Sennacherib is the ruling emperor that Judah is now worried about. He is the one that is going to march south. But not right away. He had a number of vassals to bring back in line. Again, it's that typical rebellion that happens when we change emperors.

First, he sent an army into modern day Turkey to punish the people who had killed his father Sargon in battle. That was to the northwest of Assyria. Then Sennacherib focused his attention east on Babylon, his main competitor in Mesopotamia. The Babylonian leader Merodach-baladan, who we are going to meet in Isaiah 39, was a longtime thorn in the Assyrian side. He just keeps popping up. He won't go away. He had been a problem for Sargon. Now he is a problem for Sennacherib. It didn't take Sennacherib too much time: he got Babylon back in line by 703 BC. With east and west under control, he then turned north to quail the tribes in the mountains. After that is done, he is finally ready in 701 BC, four years after Sargon's death, to turn south to bring all Judah and the rebellious vassals of the Levant back in line.

Sometime in this four-year period, Hezekiah sent envoys to Egypt, maybe after Babylon failed in putting up a long resistance. It was also during this time period that Hezekiah had the built the famous Siloam Tunnel from the concealed Gihon Spring, that brought water into the city in case of a siege. In fact, if you don't suffer from claustrophobia and you're ever in Jerusalem, that tunnel is open for tours today. It's still there. And it was an amazing engineering feat. It is a sign that Hezekiah was worried about the potential of a siege. He did not just prepare defensively, like with the tunnel for water. He went on the offense. He attacked Philistine cities loyal to Assyria. So, we have in the historical record that he defeated Ekron and imprisoned its king. So, not paying tribute, attacking pro-Assyrian states, preparing Jerusalem for a siege, all these actions by Hezekiah increased the size of the target on his back. And at some point in this, his counselors convinced him to seek out help from Egypt contrary to the counsel that Isaiah was giving.

Isaiah does not give us this background. He would not have had to explain any of this to his audience. They all lived through this. They had felt the tension, and fear, and the worry of what Assyria might do. They sat around drinking coffee, debating whether an alliance with Egypt was a good idea or not. Shall we sue for peace with Assyria? Should we stand on our own? Shall we find a big brother?

When we see Egypt mentioned in the first verses of chapter 30, this is not a reference back to the history books. This is not going back to the Exodus. This is real time. This is front line news. This is the Egypt of the present, not Egypt of the past.

And Egypt of the present is a super-power. These events occur during the twenty-fifth Egyptian dynasty. Pharaohs Shebitku and Shabaka had unified under their control the entire Nile valley, including Lower Egypt, Upper Egypt and Kush. These pharaohs were not ethnic Egyptians. They were Kushites, also known as, Ethiopians. They are referred to as, the black Pharaohs. Statues left of them show their features. There Pharaohs are black Africans. They are not ethnic Egyptians. And they have achieved the unification that hasn't existed since Moses' day. Egypt had not dominated this much territory since the New Kingdom period. That's the point Isaiah makes in verse 4.

⁴ "For their princes are at Zoan

And their ambassadors arrive at Hanes.

That line doesn't make a lot of sense to use because we have never heard of Zoan and Hanes. Zoan was situated in the Nile Delta, close to the Mediterranean Sea. The city of Hanes was much further south, well past the Delta. Reference to both cities speaks to the unification under these powerful Pharaohs. This Egypt seemed powerful enough to stand up against Assyrians and send them packing back to Mesopotamia. That's what the leaders of Judah concluded.

At the beginning of the chapter which we have already read, Hezekiah's envoy has returned with the self-congratulatory news of alliance with Egypt. They believe they have achieved national security. Isaiah disagrees. Here is his perspective on that. This is verses 1-4 again.

¹ "Woe to the rebellious children." "Who execute a plan, but not Mine, declares the LORD. And make an alliance,

but not of My Spirit,

In order to add

sin to sin;

² Who proceed down to Egypt

Without consulting Me, And to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt!

To take refuge in the safety of Pharaoh ³ "Therefore the safety of Pharaoh will be

your shame

⁴ "For their princes are at Zoan

⁵ "Everyone will be ashamed because of a people who cannot profit them,

your humiliation. And their ambassadors arrive at Hanes.

And the shelter in the shadow of Egypt,

Who are not for help or profit, but for shame and

also for reproach."

It is not clear whether an alliance with Egypt would in all cases be forbidden by God. Isaiah emphasizes that the leadership of Judah went down to Egypt without consulting God. The plan was theirs. The alliance was theirs. If they had asked God, God would have led them. We don't know to what, because they didn't ask God.

They already determined that they would ask Egypt to provide security and shelter. Their hearts were already set. There was no need to ask God. God might say "no." What do you do when you think your parents might say, "No?" You don't ask. You just do it. They are rebellious children.

The result will be shame and humiliation. The security they sought apart from God will not meet their need. Isaiah is telling them, "Not only was it wrong of you to make an alliance without consulting God, but that people you put your trust in above God will fail you. You will be shamed through the failure of this alliance you are so proud of."

In verses 6 and 7, Isaiah highlight's the uselessness of this treaty with the image of a baggage train taking treasure down to secure the treaty. The image employs the double meaning of the word, "oracle." An oracle can be a message concerning what will happen in the future. The word "oracle" also means "burden." This oracle or burden concerns the donkeys and camels, animals of burden that carry on their backs the treasure needed to make the alliance.

⁶ The oracle concerning the beasts of the Negev.

From where come lioness and lion, They carry their riches on the backs of young donkeys

Through a land of distress and anguish,

viper and flying serpent,

And their treasures on camels' humps,

To a people who cannot profit them;

⁷ Even Egypt, whose help is vain and empty. Therefore. I have called her "Rahab who has been exterminated."

The beasts carried riches through dangerous territory for no reason. Egypt cannot profit you. This treaty is vain and empty. Isaiah ends with another word that has a double meaning. The word "Rahab" had become a name for Egypt. The word literally means "arrogance." The last verset can mean two things. It can mean, "Rahab who has been exterminated." It can also mean, "her arrogance ended." Egypt, the proud one, will see an end of her arrogance as she fails to be of any value against Assyria. In our next section we are going to consider God's divine perspective.

B Divine perspective: our just God promises death for those who reject his word (8–17)

In verses 8-17, Isaiah exemplifies the role of covenant lawsuit prophet. He indicts Judah of more than neglecting to consult God. He charges them with refusal to hear God's word and willfully turning aside from God's path. He then proclaims the penalty for rejecting God's word. The indictment comes first. This is 8-11.

8 Now go, write it on a tablet before them That it may serve in the time to come

And inscribe it on a scroll, As a witness forever.

⁹ For this is a rebellious people,

Sons who refuse to listen

¹⁰ Who say to the seers, "You must not see *visions"*;

Speak to us pleasant words,

Get out of the way, Let us hear no more false sons,

To the instruction of the LORD;

And to the prophets, "You must not prophesy

to us what is right,

Prophesy illusions. turn aside from the path,

about the Holy One of Israel."

In the first woe Isaiah described how Judah's leaders mocked his prophetic word as fit only for the nursery. This also sounds like Isaiah experienced firsthand these words of rejection. Judah's leaders say, "You must not prophesy to what is right." They don't want to hear it. They want pleasant words. They want illusion, not truth. They tell him, "Get out of the way, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel."

They were probably not so blunt in their rejection. It's like today. People don't mind hearing about Jesus as long it is a pleasant, permissive Jesus. But that is not Jesus. Jesus calls us to His own vision of holiness, to sacrifice, to a giving up of this life. And people are really saying, "Let us hear no more of that Jesus."

In the same way, I imagine the leaders of Judah were saying, "We don't want to hear your version of Yahweh, Isaiah." But Isaiah was not providing them with just another option. Isaiah spoke of the true Holy One of Israel. Rejecting Isaiah's vision of God was a rejection of God as He truly is.

Isaiah first communicated the charge that Judah has broken covenant with God, rejecting God, and God's word. Now he communicates the consequence of breaking covenant with God, verses 12-17.

Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel,
And have put your trust in oppression and guile,

"Since you have rejected this word and have relied on them,

¹³ Therefore this iniquity will be to you

Like a breach about to fall, a bulge in a high wall,

Whose collapse comes suddenly in an instant,

Whose collapse is like the smashing of a potter's jar, So ruthlessly shattered
That a sherd will not be found among its pieces

Or to scoop water from a cistern."

¹⁵ For thus the Lord GoD, the Holy One of Israel,

"In repentance and rest you will be saved,

has said,

In quietness and trust is your strength."

And you said, "No, for we will flee on horses,"

"And we will ride on swift *horses,*"

One thousand will flee at the threat of one man; Until you are left as a flag on a mountain top But you were not willing, Therefore you shall flee!

Therefore those who pursue you shall be swift.

You will flee at the threat of five,

And as a signal on a hill.

Can you see that image of the smashed potter's jar? You know how you can break a glass in the dishwasher or drop a bowl in the sink, and it cracks into three or four pieces? A bit of that bowl could still be used to take fire from the hearth or water from a cistern. Isaiah says the collapse of Judah will be like dropping that bowl out of a second story window onto cement. The whole thing shatters in an instant. There are no useful little pieces. You can see this picture Isaiah paints.

What path had Isaiah counseled for Judah? "In repentance and rest you will be saved, in quietness and trust is your strength." Repentance is turning from sin back to God. Rest does not necessarily mean doing nothing. To wait, to rest, can be a synonym for faith. It can mean a rest of the heart and mind in God as Savior. You can be very active in this kind of rest. But in your activity, you rest in the assurance that God has got you. The next verset communicates this, "In quietness and trust is your strength." That does not mean you do nothing. You have a quietness of soul. And you know that, in whatever you need to do, the strength that saves you is not your strength. It is God's strength.

That, Isaiah says, is the path they should have taken. God should have been refuge and strength. Isaiah goes on to say in 15b, "But you were not willing." And so, you will fail, and you will run.

When Isaiah writes in verse 17, "One thousand will flee at the threat of one man," he is applying Deuteronomy 32:30 to Judah.

How could one chase a thousand,
Unless their Rock had sold them,
And two put ten thousand to flight,
And the LORD had given them up?

And when he writes, "You will flee at the threat of five," he is reversing Leviticus 26:8 back upon Judah.

Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall before you by the sword.

Judah has walked away from covenant with God. And to, they are not going to experience the covenant promises of victory. Instead, those covenant promises from Moses are turned back onto them. Judah sought a military solution in an alliance with Egypt to go to war against Assyria. That solution has committed them to war. It will fail. And we have no way of knowing what kind of solution God would have provided had they trusted in Him. God could have solved the crisis diverting Assyria from ever invading at all. Or God could have called up a small force, like with Gideon's army, to push the Assyrians back. Or God could have called all of Judah out to fight. All of those could have been the way of faith. We can't know what would have happened if Judah's leaders had not rejected God's word and had not put their trust in their own foreign policy. We only know what did happen as a result of their unfaithfulness.

God is not going to prop up the unfaithful alliance with Egypt. He is going to allow Assyria to invade. But that will not be the end of the story. That is only half of the divine perspective. Isaiah also sees in this punishment the patience of God to bring about promised blessing on those who will repent and return to the way of faith.

B Divine perspective: our patient God promises blessing for those who return to him (18–26)

The next section is our B'. We have just looked at B: indictment and punishment for rejecting God's word. That's how God sees the alliance with Egypt. B' adds the perspective of divine compassion. The section begins this way in verse 18.

¹⁸ Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you,

And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you.

For the LORD is a God of justice;

How blessed are all those who long for Him.

God longs to be gracious. He waits to have compassion. When we talk about people waiting, it's usually a way to speak about faith. When we talk about God waiting, it's a way to speak about His patience. Judah's counselors do not want anything to do with the Holy One of Israel. They have been described as rebellious children and rebellious sons in our first two sections of this woe. They have had enough direction from God the Father. They do not respect His word or His ways. They will make their own way without His foolish, outdated Word. They will make their own covenant with Egypt and mock Isaiah when he calls it a covenant of death. They our proudly confident in their own view. "What do you know about it, Isaiah? This is not death. This is life. This is the way the world works. They have power. We need that power on our side."

God will punish these wayward children so that some might turn back. Every loving parent longs to be gracious, waits to have compassion. But not every child will return to the path of faith. The child has to want relationship. The child has to want to return. They have to come to the realization of their need, like the prodigal son when he found himself eating out of a pig's trough and he finally saw that he had chosen a way of death. He still had a decision to make. He could still harden his thoughts against his father, or he could repent and return. He had to want to repair relationship with his father. That's 18b.

For the LORD is a God of justice;

How blessed are all those who long for Him.

Begins with the desire to return. But not only must wayward Judah want to repair relationship with God: they also have to believe that reconciliation is possible. Isaiah is telling them that, yes, from the divine perspective, God does welcome you back home. God has made a way for repair.

I wonder if this word was meant to apply to Hezekiah? This is what will be, if Hezekiah forsakes his false counselors and returns to his trust in God. Or is Isaiah looking further ahead to the New Covenant, or even further to the New Heaven and New Earth? What time do you think Isaiah is talking about when you hear these verses? Isaiah 30:19-26.

¹⁹ O people in Zion, inhabitant in Jerusalem, He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry;

you will weep no longer. when He hears it, He will answer you.

²⁰ Although the Lord has given you He, your Teacher will no longer hide Himself, bread of privation and water of oppression, but your eyes will behold your Teacher.

21 Your ears will hear a word behind you,

"This is the way, walk in it,"

whenever you turn to the right or to the left.

²² And you will defile your graven images overlaid and your molten images plated with gold.

with silver, You will scatter them as an impure thing,

²³ Then He will give *you* rain for the seed and bread from the yield of the ground, on that day your livestock will graze

and say to them, "Be gone!" which you will sow in the ground, and it will be rich and plenteous;

²⁴ Also the oxen and the donkeys which work the ground

in a roomy pasture. will eat salted fodder,

which has been winnowed with shovel and fork.

²⁵ On every lofty mountain

and on every high hill

on the day of the great slaughter,

there will be streams running with water when the towers fall.

²⁶ The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be seven times brighter,

like the light of seven days,

on the day the LORD binds up the fracture of

and heals the bruise He has inflicted.

His people

Let's follow the logic of the section. Verse 19, if Judah will cry out to God, and I think we have to interpret this as a cry of repentance as well as a cry for salvation, if they will turn to the father with words like the prodigal, God will hear and answer. Then in 20 and 21, God has punished with the bread of privation. But punishment always has the goal of leading us back to God. When they come back, God will teach them again with these words, "This is the way. Walk in it." God has been saying that all along. God is willing to be the guide. Now when they are ready to hear it, He does not cut them off. God wants to repair relationship with any child willing to repent.

The first thing God directs them to do is to rid themselves of idolatry. Turning from God always includes idolatry, whether it is actual idols of other gods, or a dependence on human ability as with Egypt, or on our own ability, or even a redefinition of who God is. That is idolatry. We can make God into an idol, just like the Israelites did at Sinai, fashioning a golden calf and calling it, "Yahweh." When we refuse to accept His own definition communicated through His own revealed Word, we are fashioning a god of our own liking. There is no abundant life in false gods. All false gods lead us towards the corruption of ourselves. When we turn back to God, the first step along the way of righteousness is to forsake those other things that we have put ahead of God, to forsake the urge to make God fit our culturally acceptable mode, to say to our idols in Isaiah's words, "Be gone!"

Walking in God's way leads to blessing. We know this is not always 100% true. It is generally true. But good people do suffer. Believers are hurt by the evil of the world. But we also know that life lived with God is the place where we experience God's goodness and blessing. We experience life in God by trusting Him, by

working faithfully, by sharing with others, by raising our kids well. There is blessing and goodness through this earthly life for believers who walk God's path. That is a general promise for the people of God. We experience it only in part now. Isaiah is not here addressing the problem of evil that we encounter when walking with Him, but he acknowledges there is a problem.

Verses 25 and 26 turn our minds to that reality of human evil. You notice the turn from blessing to war, and the acknowledgment that the Lord must bind up wounds we have received. We have been hurt.

²⁵ On every lofty mountain

and on every high hill

there will be streams running with water

on the day of the great slaughter,

when the towers fall.

²⁶ The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be seven times brighter,

like the light of seven days,

on the day the LORD binds up the fracture of

and heals the bruise He has inflicted.

His people

Up to verses 25-26 I could imagine this section applying to Judah after Hezekiah's repentance and the defeat of the Assyrians. But these verses seem to elevate the situation. There was a "great slaughter" when Assyria's army was struck down by God outside of the wall of Jerusalem. But "when the towers fall" suggests God's victory over a human city. God is the one invading. And the moon shining as the sun and the sun shining seven times brighter, like the light of seven days suggests something more.

Remember in 24:23 how God's glory in Zion will shine brighter than an embarrassed sun and moon. This reference of sun and moon brings that reality to mind, though here the brilliance of sun and moon suggests a renewed creation. And the reference to seven days suggests completion. I don't think we have to decide whether this text applies to Hezekiah's day, or to the time of New Covenant, or to the time of the New Zion. I think it speaks of the already-and-the-not-yet. The promises here begin the moment anyone repents and returns to God. That return and promised blessing are already available to the people of Judah. But the ultimate removal of evil and pain, that blessing is not yet true, not until God establishes a New Heaven and New Earth. That's when the promise of fertile ground and abundant life for God's people shifts from a partial reality to a full and guaranteed reality.

A' Human perspective: Invasion of Assyria will be no threat (27–33)

The last section returns us to the human perspective of contemporary events. Isaiah refers to God's defeat of Assyria by name. We will speak in coming chapters about this event, so I will not take much time on these verses now. Make note, though, of the reference to consuming fire, which was a theme of our last woe where Isaiah referred to Jerusalem as, "Ariel," or, "altar hearth." Assyria will be consumed on that altar.

Behold, the name of the LORD comes from

Burning is His anger and dense is His smoke;

a remote place;

His lips are filled with indignation

And His tongue is like a consuming fire;

²⁸ His breath is like an overflowing torrent,

Which reaches to the neck,

To shake the nations back and forth in a sieve,

And to *put* in the jaws of the peoples the bridle which leads to ruin.

²⁹ You will have songs

as in the night when you keep the festival,

And gladness of heart as when one marches to the sound of the flute,

To go to the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of

³⁰ And the LORD will cause His voice of authority to be heard,

And the descending of His arm to be seen

In fierce anger, and *in* the flame of a consuming fire In cloudburst, downpour and hailstones.

³¹ For at the voice of the LORD Assyria will be terrified, *When* He strikes with the rod.

And every blow of the rod of punishment,
Will be with *the music of* tambourines and lyres;

Which the LORD will lay on him,
And in battles, brandishing weapons, He will
fight them.

For Topheth has long been ready, Indeed, it has made it deep and large, A pyre of fir The breath of the LORD, like a torrent of brimstone, sets it afire.

Indeed, it has been prepared for the king. A pyre of fire with plenty of wood;

Don't stand against God. In the Bible, Topheth is connected with child sacrifice by fire to the god Molech. That's in both 2 Kings 23:10 and Jeremiah 7:31. The name may have come from two Hebrew words meaning, "disgraceful burning place." The Assyrians did not know they were climbing onto an altar of judgment when they surrounded Jerusalem. The human perspective of the narrative is this. We made an alliance with Egypt. That alliance failed. Assyria invaded Judah but was struck down outside the walls of Jerusalem.

That perspective has been conveyed here in A and A', the two outer frames of this section. B and B' give us God's divine perspective of the narrative. In B, Judah's alliance with Israel is seen as a rejection of God that demanded punishment. And in B', God communicates desire for wayward Judah to repent and His promise of blessing for those who do return to walk with Him.

The principle of our 1st woe back in chapter 28 was this: "When God's people reject His word and covenant, destruction follows, according to God's divine purposes (28:1–29)." We see in this woe the practical application of that principle. Judah's leaders rejected the word of God communicated through Isaiah. They rejected God's way in their hearts and sought security in an alliance with Egypt. Punishment from God must follow. That destruction was contained in God's divine purpose to bring Judah to repentance and to destroy the Assyrian army. Motyer sums up the application of this woe with this sentence.

"Refuge is sought in Egypt (1-7), rejecting the Lord's word (8-12), but his ultimate (13-26) and immediate (27-33) purposes are accomplished."²

Conclusion

Does this lesson provide us with understanding or application of current events? Can we apply what we read here to Russia's invasion of Ukraine?

I believe we can, though cautiously. We proceed cautiously because the difference in context is quite significant. Only Israel is Israel. And we must now look at events through the filter of the New Covenant, not the Old. I also feel the need to proceed cautiously because I am neither Ukrainian nor Russian. There is much more value in hearing how a Ukrainian brother or sister would apply this text to the invasion of their homeland. So I am not going to say much.

What am I willing to say? I think Isaiah's two perspectives, the human and divine apply. And it may be better to refer to these as the physical and the spiritual perspectives.

We see from the human perspective an invasion of one nation by another. Russia initiated this war. With as much power as he holds I think we even have to say that Vladimir Putin initiated this war. It's on him. That was an evil act. Putin initiated human death and destruction by invading a sovereign, democratic nation. That is what we see from the human perspective.

We cannot yet see from a human perspective the outcome. We do not know if the Russian army will capture Kiev or be pushed back. We cannot see how long they might occupy Ukrainian territory. We continue to see from the physical perspective as events unfold. And we see pain and suffering. We see soldiers fighting. We see courage. We see hundreds of thousands, millions of civilians driven from their homes, and even out of their country. We see loss of life and destruction of property.

We may not be able to say that the people of God are under attack in the sense that Ukraine is not Israel. But all of humanity is part of God's common grace kingdom. We see people who belong to

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² Motyer, 228.

God, who have been made in the image of God, under attack, experiencing death, and pain, and trauma, and loss.

Specifically, though, we can say that the people of God are under attack in that the born-again believers who make up the Church of God in Ukraine are under attack. I read prayer requests from Cru staff in Ukraine. And that's just a little portion of the church in Ukraine. One staff woman just had a baby this week in Kiev as the bombing goes on. I read a conversation, another staff father who was wishing his 20 year-old son a happy birthday as he fights to defend his country. Our brothers and sisters in Christ are under attack.

Now, it's harder to look from a divine perspective. But from a divine perspective, Vladimir Putin and the nation of Russia will be held accountable for the sin of this war. Every nation is going to be held accountable for their own sins. Just like every individual is held accountable for their own sins. I am not singling Russia out. But for this war, Russia will be held accountable, Russia's leadership will be held accountable. They can stop the death and destruction.

We also see from the divine perspective that God allows sinful people to freely act, whether wickedly or righteously. God will bring about justice. God will bring His people into green pastures. That promise is for today, but not completely, and not for every person, and not right now in Ukraine. Ultimate justice waits for a New Heaven and a New Earth. Isaiah does not get into the problem of evil much more than that in chapter 30, but that problem is one of the greatest human problems. How do we believe in a God who allows this level of suffering that is now being allowed in Ukraine? And for that matter, that has been allowed before in Ukraine? You read the history these people have suffered. And that problem of pain and suffering, especially as it is going on in Ukraine, is a problem that Ukrainian brothers and sisters have to help us understand. We need to hear their spiritual perspective on these events. We have to hear their spiritual perspective, because they are the ones suffering the pain and loss.

Maybe the most significant application from these chapters in Isaiah is the call to faith. It is so simple, and it is being rejected by the leaders of Judah. We don't want to make it sound like an easy solution. It's not at all an easy solution. But it is the foundation of relationship with God. Security is not found in human nations or institutions. Security is found in God. Do not let your heart wander away from this most basic of covenants. By grace you are saved through faith. He is your life, your hope. Trust, pray, and act in faith.

Lord God, I do pray, I pray that you will end this war. I pray that Kiev will not fall. That Vladimir Putin will be humbled physically, if not spiritually. I pray for an end to death and suffering in Ukraine. I pray for the protection of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Protection for those who fight, protection for those who are trapped, protection for those who are separated from family, protection for those who have been forced to flee. I pray for the body of Christ, especially the body of Christ in Ukraine, and then in the countries surrounding Ukraine: in Poland; Hungary; Romania; Slovakia; Moldova; also in Belarus and Russia. May the body of Christ in these countries be Your hands, Lord, Your feet, Your heart, to help and care for those driven from their homes or for those displaced inside of Ukraine. May the wider body of Christ respond with prayer, and money, and relief for the people of Ukraine. May the community of nations stand with Ukraine to work to stop this war. I pray that our brothers and sisters in Ukraine who groan in prayer, who don't even know what to pray, that they would experience Your presence as Your Spirit groans in prayer with them. Please, Lord, stop this war. Stop the pain and the suffering. In the name of Jesus, our king who has suffered, and died, and raised again. Amen.