

Lesson 13 Lecture
Isaiah 30:1-32:20

Welcome! Our reading today is a continuation from Chapters 28-29 that Carol went through last week. She mentioned of 6 woes, and she covered the first three. To refresh your memories, they were:

- 1 - Woe to Ephriam (Samaria) the northern kingdom
- 2 - Woe to Ariel (Jerusalem) and formalized religion
- 3 - Woe to those who think they can hide anything from God

In chapter 30, we arrive at the 4th woe - Woe to the Obstinate Children. **Isaiah 30:1b-2**: “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.” So, Isaiah is telling Judah to not go to Egypt – what they’re looking for there is not going to solve their problems. The good news is Judah heeded the warning. The bad news is the Northern Kingdom did not – they would end up in Assyrian captivity.

This isn’t the first time God’s people made the mistake of going to Egypt. We have to go back all the way to the 12th chapter of Genesis to see the first journey into Egypt by the Patriarch of the Nation of Israel, of all people – the man of great faith – Abram. As you may recall, God had told Abram to get out of his country and promised him He would make a great nation out of him and would give him the land of Canaan. A famine arises in the land of Canaan, so he decides to go down to Egypt for a while because the famine is severe. He loses all chances of winning Husband of the Year Award when he tells his wife Sara to act like she’s his sister instead of his wife – fearing if Pharaoh thinks she’s his wife, he’ll kill Abram – basically allowing her to become one of Pharaoh’s wives. He eventually comes back to the land of Canaan, but we learn that he came back with some extra baggage in Chapter 16 – namely Hagar. Sara can’t give birth to the promised son, so she has Abram hook up with Hagar, and they produce who? Ishmael.

Do you remember how the angel of the Lord described what Ishmael would be to Hagar? **Genesis 16:12**: “He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers.” While Ishmael was the first biological offspring of Abram, God never acknowledged him as the rightful heir to the promised nation made by God because his conception was not an act of faith – it was an act of the flesh. It wouldn’t be until Sara would give birth to Isaac until the lineage leading down to Jesus would begin. God promised Hagar that he would make a “great” nation from Ishmael - he is believed to be the father of the people of Islam. We have clearly had our issues with some of the extreme portions of the Islamic faith. Later in the book of Exodus, we’ll read about the Nation of Israel leaving what country for the promised land? Egypt. Egypt is a symbol of sin and the flesh in Scripture, so it should come as no surprise that we see Isaiah telling the people of Judah to not look to that country for help. Isaiah would tell them that not only will Egypt be no help, but they will also be put to shame and disgraced for seeking their assistance. Why all the attitude about Egypt?

As I mentioned earlier, Egypt was a symbol of the flesh, and God’s children are to be living under the guidance and Lordship of God. More personally, though, God looks to His children as just that – **children**. He is God, but He is also Abba – Father God. He’s got some serious paternal instincts. He describes one of them in Exodus 20:5, “You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.” In this verse, God is specifically relating to the issue of worshipping carved images, but the message is the same for any attempt of God’s children to look for something or someone else to worship and seek for help – He loves us so much and knows nobody can

care for us better than He can. Therefore, when we seek anything but Him in times of trouble, He's hurt by this – He's jealous of anything or anyone who would take the place of His rightful position as our Mighty Fortress, Defense, and Protector.

Back to the story – we read of a caravan of donkeys and camels carrying all sorts of treasures – no doubt payola to buy Egypt's protection. It's interesting that the land they travel to is described in such detail – the Negev – the south. **Isaiah 30:6a**: "Through a land of hardship and distress of lions and lionesses, of adders and darting snakes." Hello?? Anybody else see a red flag in this description? Think maybe God set this up as some kind of warning to stay away? How many times in our lives has God sent up warning signals to us when we were headed towards our own "Egypt?"

Isaiah is then charged with wearing a sandwich board that says, "For these are rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the Lord's instruction." How do you think the people responded to this? How do people today respond to warnings of God's judgment and being called out for their unrighteousness? Who says history doesn't repeat itself?

The homework offers a couple of Scriptures in Jeremiah and Zechariah about other times in history when people didn't want to hear the Word of the Lord. Can't you see them putting their fingers in their ears and going, "La la la la la"? The description of their refuting Isaiah's prophetic warnings is most interesting, "Give us no more visions of what is right?" Seriously. Even though they know what Isaiah is proclaiming is right, they don't want to hear it. Does that sound like our country today? Ever expanding deficits, rapidly declining morality, more and more joblessness, and what do we get from our leadership? "Change we can believe in" or "I need 4 more years to finish the job."

What does that sound like? "Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions." You want to know why so many leaders want us to stop confronting them with the Holy One of Israel? It's not because of the lame excuse that it risks offending those who don't believe. It's because the Holy One of Israel will shine a light of truth on their offensiveness and make their followers no longer believe their lies!

Sadly, the rejection of God's Word isn't just at the political level. We're seeing it in the church. Fewer and fewer churches are devoting serious time to teaching the Word of God. They're substituting rooting the brothers and sisters in truth and indoctrinating them with the character of God as it is laid out so beautifully in the Scriptures with programs, community events, and eloquent sermons that spend more time glorifying the one giving the sermon than the One who the sermon is supposed to be about.

Do you wonder why the Word of God is being pushed out of churches? I believe it is because it is the truth, and the truth hurts if you aren't living in the truth. The truth reveals the lies and the folly of those who are in positions of leadership as representatives of God. More and more pastors are becoming entertainers – they've been deceived into thinking if they can show people a good time, they'll keep coming back, and the church will grow in numbers – but not necessarily saved souls. The Apostle Paul warned of this in his second letter to Timothy. **2 Timothy 4:3**: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables."

In verse 12, Isaiah proclaims that the Holy One of Israel has seen that they have rejected the message of truth, relied on oppression, and depended on deceit. That's an interesting sequence of statements. First – he makes it clear that they have rejected the message – he's calling them out for their actions – holding them accountable. So, what happens when you reject the truth? You fall into having to rely on lies and deceit – that is the unavoidable and direct result of rejecting the truth.

The word oppression is especially enlightening. What happens when you tell the truth? Even if it is bad news, there is a freedom in being honest. There's no fear of misleading someone else or even yourself. When you're living a lie, it is oppressive. Why? You're in fear of getting caught or found out. Have you ever told a lie and knew at some point it was going to be revealed? What did that feel like? Verses 13 and 14 give a marvelous description of the pressure building up on the lie until it finally blows. What do you think that pressure is? It's the truth. What's left after that great high wall of deceit breaks? Shattered pieces that bear no resemblance to the form it once was. Not a pretty picture of those who are rejecting the truth of the Word of God – is it?

A lot of people struggle with God in the Old Testament because He appears to be so judgmental and condemning. This is why it is so important that we do expository teaching because we see that the merciful, grace-filled, and forgiving God in the New Testament found in Jesus, is the same God in the OT. God is immutable – He doesn't change. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We see this in verse 15, Isaiah gives the people a hint of what God offers to those who repent – they find rest and salvation; to those who remain quiet and trust in the Lord, they are strong.

God could have just said, "I'm done with you stiff-necked knuckleheads." I know I would have. Jumping down to verse 18, Isaiah uses the emphatic word, "longs" to be gracious to these rebellious people. That doesn't sound like a God who is quick to judge and condemn does it? He yearns to shower people with His grace and compassion. The fact that He *is just* only further emphasizes the magnitude of his grace and compassion. If He is not a God of justice, then His grace and compassion have far less value. May we all learn to wait on the Lord – we will be blessed!

In Isaiah 31:1, we learn of the fifth woe – basically an expansion on the previous woe – a pronouncement of judgment on those who seek human strength over Godly strength. **Isaiah 31:6-7**: "Return, you Israelites, to the One you have so greatly revolted against. For in that day every one of you will reject the idols of silver and gold your sinful hands have made." I singled out these two verses in this chapter because I believe they indicate a spiritual cause and effect.

What I mean by this is if we choose to truly return to God and begin to search the fullness, desire, and capabilities of His provision to those who do return to Him, you will recognize the sufficiency of His provision.

What the world has to offer- what Satan has to offer - is a progressive list of temptations triggering our flesh to seek more and more of it – each level more enticing but less satisfying than the previous because of the building up of the next level of wants. The only end to the pursuit of the flesh is death – death of the finances we've raided to pay for the temptations – death of our relationships which were sacrificed for the lures of another – death of our moral balance – serving the flesh leads to a degrading of our moral standards and we end up doing things we would no more think is possible – if we were being led by the Spirit. Recognizing the sufficiency of Christ makes us realize the devaluation – the worthlessness – of those things our flesh once treasured and coveted. That is what is happening in verses 6 & 7 – an exchange of the idol worship for Godly worship. We should all be continuously doing an inventory of those things in our lives that we hold as precious and comparing them to the preciousness of God as our primary pursuit.

Chapter 32 is the beginning of four future events to see what God has planned for His people and His world. Wiersbe's commentary notes an interesting progression of the personal connection to the king noted in verse 1 of chapter 32. The king goes from being "a" king, to "the" king, and finally to "our" king. This progression is similar to the growth in our relationship with Christ the King. When we first learn of Jesus, we hear He is *a* King. As we come to know Him better, we understand that He is not just *a* King – He is *the* King – *the* King of Kings and Lord of Lords. As we deepen our knowledge and understanding of Him – recognizing that His love, His mercy, His longsuffering, His compassion, and His

provision is personally for us, He becomes our King. This king that Isaiah is speaking of is none other than the Messiah – Jesus Himself – ruling and reigning in righteousness.

I get excited when I read verses 3-6 of chapter 32 because it demonstrates not so much the righteousness of Jesus' reign but the “rightness” of His reign. In other words, the truth will be the truth – not denied, rationalized, or marginalized. People will see things and hear things for exactly what they are – no spin doctors attempting to introduce a twisting of the truth. His perfect love will cast out the fear and replace it with knowledge and understanding. The ineloquent will become eloquent – free of the fear of speaking the truth.

Conversely, the fool will no longer be called the President of the United States or the scoundrel will no longer hide behind the unjust laws that were passed by the lawmakers he paid to write them with his ill-gotten gains. What comes out of their mouths will finally be revealed for what it really is – folly and evil. Their ungodly behavior can no longer be justified by their lies about the Lord. The truth will reign under Jesus' reign – I can't wait.

In verses 9-14, Isaiah calls out the women of Jerusalem – who appear to be the elite of society – those who find their security in their wealth. He tells them to prepare to lose it all and dress in rags. With the impending invasion of the Assyrian army, all the riches these women had would need to be turned in to help the people survive the invasion. Verse 15 speaks of the Holy Spirit being poured out from on High during Jesus' reign. What does it yield?

- Desert becomes a fertile field
- Fertile field becomes a forest
- The Lord's justice and His righteousness
- Peace
- Quietness and Confidence
- Undisturbed places of rest

Sounds pretty awesome doesn't it. Here's a little secret – much of this is available to each of us today – did you know that? How can I say something like that? Romans 5:5: “And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” All the blessings of the Holy Spirit that will be poured out during Jesus' reign is available to us today because the Holy Spirit is God – and God doesn't change. Therefore, what will be available in the Millennium is ours for the taking today. Now the world – or our circumstances – will likely be dramatically different under Jesus' reign; however, the abundance, the righteousness, the peace, the quiet confidence, and the rest of the Holy Spirit is available to us in our souls – if we believe and have faith.

In my conclusion, I'm going to go back to a verse I skipped over – one that got my attention – I wonder if it got yours? Isaiah 30:20a: “And though *the Lord* gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction,” The idea that God brings adversity and affliction to His children is a topic many Christians are very uncomfortable with – some flat out reject the notion. Well, it doesn't get clearer in this verse – not Satan, not the “Universe”, not “Karma” – the *Lord* gives us the bread of adversity and the water of affliction. I did a search of the word “test” throughout the Bible, and, in the NKJV, there are 26 verses that clearly state that the Lord tests those He calls His own.

Now before I lose some of you, I want to make something very clear. Not all pain, suffering, and affliction comes from God. The Bible is very clear that Satan is called the Destroyer – he goes to and fro throughout the earth looking for people to cause pain and suffering. This is his primary M.O. However, for those of you who remember our study through Job, it is very clear that Satan cannot lay a finger on us without God's consent. So, you may ask then what difference does it make whether God *initiated* or

allowed the adversity in my life? In the end, I'm suffering. I hurt. I can't take it anymore. I want help! This is admittedly a difficult topic for a lot of people, but we need to deal with it. This is a critical component to our growing up in the Lord.

I wanted to take you through a quick "Who", "What", "Why", "When", and "Where" of God's testing. First – who does God test? **Jeremiah 20:12**: "But, O LORD of hosts, You who test ***the righteous***, and see the mind and heart," Who are the righteous? We are. Romans 4:5 confirms this, "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness," By our faith in the redemptive work of Christ crucified, we are declared righteous because God views us through the holy filter of His Son's blood that covers us. So, God **does** give tests of adversity and affliction, AND He gives tests to the righteous.

The next question we need to ask is "***When*** does God test us". When does God test? I couldn't find any Scripture to answer this question – and that's because God is sovereign. Here are a couple of verses that remind us of this aspect of God

- **Isaiah 55:9**: For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
- **Daniel 4:35**: He does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth.

Personally, God tests me when I least expect it, and I don't think that is an accident. He knows me better than I do, and ***He*** better than anyone knows when I'm in need of His testing. So, when does God test? Honestly – and admittedly fearfully - whenever He feels like it. That may not sound settling, but we must remain focused on the character of God and His motives as He tests us. That leads us to the next "W" question we need to wrestle with as the testing comes – ***Why***?

While I'm sure there are more, I found 5 specific references to why God tests us in the Scriptures. The first reason why is to see where we are in our obedience to His commandments. So, why is obedience important to God? It glorifies Him, it brings blessings, makes us Christ-like, demonstrates our love for Him, and obedience acknowledges His authority – and therefore denies Satan's.

A second reason why God tests us is to know our hearts from Deuteronomy 8:2. God is omniscient and already knows the condition of our hearts, so when He tests us, He's seeking for **us** to realize how our heart is in relation to His perfect holiness. Jeremiah 17:9 reminds us that "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?" Our sinful nature doesn't want us to believe we're all that bad. We can always find someone who is worse than we are, right? You can say, 'At least I'm not as bad as that.' This particular test requires brutal honesty. Until we fully recognize the depth of the depravity and selfishness of our hearts, we will not fully grasp the mercy, grace, and love of God – recognizing that He first loved us while we were still sinners.

A third reason God tests us is to fear Him from Exodus 20:30. Fearing the Lord, in this sense, means we have regard for Him – we have respect for Him. As a result of this regard and respect for Him, we acknowledge that His ways are better than ours and yield to the prompting of His Holy Spirit. What happens when we don't fear God? We get the idea we're ok without Him – we can handle things on our own. I can look back on every major sin and mistake I've committed in my life, and I can say with 100% certainty that my fear of Him during each of those times was absolutely non-existent.

A fourth reason why God tests us is to reveal His faithfulness from Psalm 119:75. Now you may ask, 'How in the world can you possibly link God's faithfulness to Him causing affliction in testing – creating pain and suffering?' If you were observing a child on the playground in the park, and he was starting to wander off towards a busy street – and you saw no evidence of parents around – what would you do? At a

minimum, you would yell at the kid to not go any farther – probably more likely you would chase after him and grab him before he could get hit by a car. That act is an act of faithfulness of your knowing what's right and keeping the child safe. You probably frightened the child by yelling at him – maybe you even bruised his arm as you jerked him from walking into traffic. That caused him pain didn't it? Was the pain worth it? Sure – it was necessary to keep him safe. He wants us to trust that He is faithful.

The fifth reason why God tests us is to find out if we are loving Him from Deuteronomy 13:3. We've given several reasons why God tests us – to see if we're obedient, for us to recognize the true condition of our hearts, whether or not we're fearing Him, and for us to recognize His faithfulness to us. The common motivation behind all of these tests is love. Why does God test us? Because He loves us. He knows love is a matter of the heart, and it involves obedience, respect, and faithfulness. He is ALL of these to us ALL of the time. So, His testing us is to make us realize whether or not we are loving Him the way He loves us. This, for me, is the hardest test to pass. If I'm honest, I can't possibly say that everything I do has a sole motivation to demonstrate my love for Him. There's more often than I'd like to admit a selfish reason I do things that are meant to be for His glory. Many of us can feel really good about our various service or ministries for the Lord, but is that good feeling coming from Him, or from yourself because by doing these things you get recognized?

Why is it so important to God if we're loving Him? 1 John 4:9 reminds us that we love Him because He first loved us. Loving God should be a natural reaction once we recognize the love He first had for us before we knew it and what extent He went to prove it by sending Jesus to the cross to die for our sins. Loving God is a demonstration of our appreciation for who He is and what He has done **and** is doing in our lives. In addition to the act of appreciation for His loving us, loving God is how He changes us into the image of Jesus. If we're not loving God, we are not capable of allowing Him to transform us into the image of Jesus – since Jesus dwells in us, and He is God, and God is love; therefore, we should be loving God. His testing us reveals the truth, or lack thereof, of our love for Him.

We've talked about **who** gets tested, **when** God tests, and **why** He tests. Next, let's talk about what do God's tests reveal to us? Again, I'm sure there are more, but I have found 4 things that God's testing reveals. First, they reveal sin that is not known, confessed, or repented. The Greek word for repent is metanoeo – which means to think differently or reconsider. Jesus is imploring us to be zealous in seeking Him to reveal our sin and then to think differently or reconsider our current position on it. In other words – don't think it's ok to continue in that sin – it's not acceptable, and you need to deny that sin by taking up your cross and following Jesus. Sin is a big deal to God, and He does not want us taking advantage of the blood His son shed for our salvation.

A second thing God's tests reveal is we're in a need for a peace exchange. What things bring you peace? Your health? Your spouse? Your children? Your job? Your home? Your possessions? Your bank account? There's one thing that all of these have in common – they can all be taken away from you. As God's testing begins, it is likely going to unravel your sense of peace. God is a jealous God, and He wants us to be totally dependent on Him – He's looking for us to exchange out the things we've been taking our peace in for **His** peace. Philippians 4:7 promises that God's peace passes all understanding – giving us peace in circumstances that offer anything BUT peace to the non-believer.

A third revelation to God's tests is where we are in our faith in Him? 1 Corinthians 2:5 exhorts us to think about whom we have our faith in – is it in our spouse, our church, our pastor, our friends? Our faith is to be not in people but in the power of God. What is at risk if our faith is not in God but in someone or something else? The Apostle Paul speaks of a great apostasy – a falling away from people's faith - in the end times. As I've mentioned in earlier lectures, I believe we are in the very latter stages of the end times, so unless our faith is firmly rooted in the power of God, we are putting ourselves at risk of being deceived.

The fourth revelation of God's testing is how are we loving? I said earlier in the "Why God tests" section is to see if we're loving Him. Jesus echoes the commandment I referenced in Deuteronomy 13:3 in Matthew 22:37. Two verses later, though, He issued a new commandment, "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' This really isn't a new commandment – it is merely the summation of 5th through 10th commandments given to Moses in Exodus. I personally believe there is no greater sin than not loving. It is the essence of God's character, and we were formed into His image. We are to be symbols of God's love to an unbelieving world. Therefore, loving should ultimately be the essence of our character – with Christ dwelling in us. With this kind of priority, it should come as no surprise that His testing is seeking to reveal in us how we are loving.

Well, we've covered the who, what, when, and why of God's testing. We now arrive at the where do we go with the test results? I see it as we have two options – two paths. We can turn bitter and angry at God for initiating or allowing such suffering in our lives and walk away. That is an option – we have the free will to do this. I would be lying if I told you there wasn't a time or two during these last several years that I thought, "If this is what it means to be a Christian, I'm done." When I allowed those thoughts to enter my mind, I can tell you it was scary – the darkness covered me like a cold wet blanket.

The second path you can take is to draw closer to God. When you were in school and had a question on a test you didn't understand, where did you go? You went to the teacher – the one who was the author of the test. Jesus is our Teacher. He is also our Helper. He gave up His life for us to be reconciled to the Father because He knows personally there is nothing greater than an intimate relationship with God the Father. In my opinion, the reason He sweated blood in the Garden of Gethsemane was He was having to comprehend the idea of being separated from His Father while on the cross.

Whether God initiated or allowed your testing, He is the one in control. He is love, and He is good. Romans 8:28 should be one of our key life verses to cling to when going through testing, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose." The key words in this verse are "all things" – that means not just the pleasant things of life are working together for good – but also the bad things, the painful things. God has a plan for each of you, and His goal is to walk with you closely as it plays out. When you're in a storm of adversity and affliction, you want it to go away – that's the first and natural reaction. When it becomes evident that it's not going to go away any time soon, what's the next best way to find help? To have a friend come along side you and be with you as you go through it. That is who God is and wants to be to us. What does God's testing ultimately do? It gives us a testimony to testify to. To let people know that there is hope, that we've experienced that hope in our times of testing, and we are willing to be an example of that hope that we have to them. That is what Jesus is to us. He is our Teacher, and He gives us tests. Thankfully, He is also our Answer. Let's pray.