



Preaching Through The Bible, Michael Eaton

Isaiah

Part 44

New King, New People (31:1–32:8)

• God calls the people to turn to Him as their rescuer

The fifth 'Ah' passage (31:1-32:20) corresponds to the second¹. The main point of 29:1–14 was the way in which Judah's sin would be followed by God's rescue. Now Isaiah 31:1– 32:20 has much the same theme. God calls the people to turn to him as their rescuer. The section also continues the theme of Isaiah chapter 30 in that it explicitly mentions Egypt, and rebukes Judah for turning to Egypt for help.

29:1-14

When God is angry there is no value in putting hope in false solutions

1. When God is angry there is no value in putting any hope in false solutions. God was sending the Assyrians against Judah because he was angry with the nation's idolatry. Judah turned to Egypt, but this was not the answer. Egypt cannot defend Judah against God! God will even 'come down to fight against Mount Zion'. He will resist his own people.

It is a mistake to trust in modern techniques in the things of God. In Isaiah's day the best military weapons around were horses and chariots! Judah is mistaken to be trusting in them and forgetting the reality of their Saviour-God.

• Judah is mistaken to trust in military weapons

¹Ah, how terrible for 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 Judah, or seek Yahweh.

• They were forgetting the character of God

They were forgetting the character of God.

²Yet he too is wise and can bring disaster; he does not take back his words.

• They failed to trust God's wisdom and promises

They trusted the wisdom of Egypt but failed to trust the wisdom of God. They trusted the promises of Egypt, but they were acting as if God's promises had been cancelled.

He will rise up against the house of the wrongdoers, against the help of evildoers.

• God will not allow Judah to be helped by Egypt

Egypt are supposed to help Judah but they are themselves evildoers; God will not allow his people to be helped by them. They were forgetting the Spirit of God. Isaiah says:

³But the Egyptians are human beings and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit. When Yahweh stretches out his hand, he who helps [that is, Egypt] will stumble, he who is helped [that is, Judah] will fall; both will come to an end together.

⁴For this is what Yahweh says to me:

'As a lion growls, a great lion over his prey – and though a whole band of shepherds is called together against him, he is not frightened by their shouts or disturbed by their clamour – so Yahweh Almighty will come down to fight against Mount Zion and its heights.'

• Weapons do not have God's life-giving power

Once again God rebukes the people for their turning to a wrong solution in time of trouble. They were relying on modern weapons. Horses are flesh and not spirit. They have none of the life-giving power of God at work to rescue his people. Egyptians and Judeans alike will face the enmity of God¹.

31:3-4

Eventually the rebel people of God will be rescued and transformed

But God's anger is chastising anger; it is not the anger of rejection. Eventually the rebel people of God will be rescued and transformed.

*⁵Yet like birds hovering overhead,
Yahweh Almighty will shield Jerusalem;
he will shield it and deliver it,
he will "pass over" it and will rescue it.'*

• God will renew His people's redemption

'Pass over' is of course the language of the original Passover! God will renew his people's redemption. God will surely not let his people wander from him for ever. He gives them eternal life; they will never perish. He gives Judah permanent significance; they will never lose it.

• Isaiah asks the Judeans to respond

Isaiah asks the Judeans to respond to what God will certainly do. He will 'pass over' his people, so let them come back to him.

⁶Return to him, against whom you people of Israel have so deeply revolted.

• They will eventually return to God

They will return to God eventually; they may as well do so now.

⁷For in that day every one of you will reject the idols of silver and gold your sinful hands have made.

• Assyria will be defeated

The immediate enemy – Assyria – will certainly be defeated.

*⁸Assyria will fall by a sword that is not of man;
a sword, not of mortals, will devour them.
They will flee for their lives before the sword
and their young men will be put to forced labour.
⁹Their rock will pass away amidst terror;
at sight of the battle standard their commanders
will panic.'
It is an oracle of Yahweh,
whose fire is in Zion,
whose furnace is in Jerusalem.*

• Holy fires – burning holiness of God

In Jerusalem is the temple and its holy fires speak of the burning holiness of God.

• A King will come to rescue God's people

A King will come to Jerusalem; a new Jerusalem will come into being. The rescue of God's people consists of the sending of a King.

*¹See, a king will reign in righteousness
and princes will rule with justice.*

The King will bring:

God's kingdom will involve the sending of God's King. People like David and Hezekiah are only faint forerunners of a King who is yet to come, says Isaiah. When the King comes there will be protection and refreshment. He will raise associates ('princes') to reign with him.

• Protection and refreshment

*²This man^a will be like a shelter from the wind
and a refuge from the storm,
and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.*

• Illumination and a new ability to hear

When the King comes there will be illumination and new ability to hear.

*³Then the eyes of those who see will no longer be closed,^b
and the ears of those who hear will listen.*

• **Spiritual understanding and the gift of sharing**

When the King comes there will be a spiritual understanding and the gift of sharing it with others.

*⁴The heart of the rash will be discerning so as to understand,
and the stammering tongue will be fluent so as to be clear.*

• **A new appreciation of the wise**

When the King comes there will be a new appreciation of the wise, and those who have been scoundrels in their 'ministries' will find they have no congregations.

*⁵No longer will the fool be called noble
nor the scoundrel be highly respected.
⁶For the fool speaks folly,
his heart is busy with mischief.
He practises ungodliness
and spreads error concerning Yahweh;
the hungry he leaves empty
and from the thirsty he withholds water.
⁷The scoundrel's methods are wicked,
he makes up evil schemes
to ruin the poor with lying sayings,
even when the needy speaks what is just.*

• **Eventually there will be enough of the saved to influence society**

When salvation comes people are changed one-by-one, but soon there are enough rescued people for them to be able to influence the whole of society. People become wiser. They are not swept off their feet by convincing people who talk a lot (he 'speaks folly' and has 'lying sayings') and thinks a lot ('his heart is busy . . . he makes up evil schemes') but brings only ruin to those who heed him (he 'spreads error . . . the hungry he leaves empty'; he ruins the poor). The King will have his servants and the people of the kingdom will together with their King have an effect even upon society. True 'noblemen' replace the fools.

• **True 'noblemen' replace the fools**

*⁸But the noble man makes noble plans,
and by noble deeds he stands,
even when the needy speaks what is just.*

Notes

a. The Hebrew idiom of indeterminateness may be used to emphasize. 'This man' is a possible translation and fits well here.

b. This translation understands the verb to be sha'a' (to smear over, to make blind) not sha'ah (to see).

Dr Michael Eaton (1942-2017) was highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. Born in the UK, he lived for many years in Kenya where he became a citizen. He was one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship in Nairobi. His Preaching through the Bible books are highly popular worldwide, written in a clear and down-to-earth style but underpinned by rigorous scholarship. Some of these books have been reformatted as individual sheets for personal and group study and preaching. The New Testament volumes have been re-edited and combined in the Branch Commentary. The Old Testament, including previously unpublished material will follow. More details: www.slices.org.uk.