

Matthew Henry on Isaiah 30:8-17

Isa 30:8-17:

(8) Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever:

(9) That this *is* a rebellious people, lying children, children *that* will not hear the law of the LORD:

(10) Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits:

(11) Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.

(12) Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon:

(13) Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant.

(14) And he shall break it as the breaking of the potters' vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water *withal* out of the pit.

(15) For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not.

(16) But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift.

(17) One thousand *shall flee* at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on an hill.

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Here, I. The preface is very awful. The prophet must not only preach this, but he must write it ([Isa 30:8](#)), *write it in a table*, to be hung up and exposed to public view; he must carefully *note it*, not in loose papers which might be lost or torn, but *in a book*, to be preserved for posterity, *in perpetuam rei memoriam* - *for a standing testimony* against this wicked generation; let it remain not only to the next succeeding ages, but for ever and ever, while the world stands; and so it shall, for the book of the scriptures no doubt, shall continue, and be read, to the end of time. Let it be written, 1. To shame the men of the present age, who would not hear and heed it when it was spoken. Let it be written, that it may not be lost; their children may profit by it, though they will not. 2. To justify God in the judgments he was about to ring upon them; people will be tempted to think he was too hard upon them, and over-severe, unless they know how very bad they were, how very provoking, and what fair means God tried with them before he brought it to this extremity. 3. For warning to others not to do as they did, lest they should fare as they fared. It is designed for admonition to those of the remotest place and age, even those *upon whom the ends of the world have come*, [1Co 10:11](#). It may be of use for God's ministers not only to preach, but to write; for that which is written remains.

II. The character given of the profane and wicked Jews is very sad. He must, if he will draw them in their own colours, write this concerning them (and we are sure he does not bear false witness against them, nor make them worse than they were, for the judgment of God is according to truth), *That this is a rebellious people*, [Isa 30:9](#). The Jews were, for aught we know, the only professing people God had then in the world, and yet many of them were a rebellious people. 1. They rebelled against their own convictions and covenants: "They are *lying children*, that will not stand to what they say, that promise fair, but perform nothing;" when he took them into covenant with himself he said of them, *Surely they are my people, children that will not lie* ([Isa 63:8](#)); but they proved

otherwise. 2. They rebelled against the divine authority: "They are *children that will not hear the law of the Lord*, nor heed it, but will do as they have a mind, let God himself say what he will to the contrary."

III. The charge drawn up against them is very high and the sentence passed upon them very dreadful. Two things they here stand charged with, and their doom is read for both, a fearful doom: -

1. They forbade the prophets to speak to them in God's name, and to deal faithfully with them.

(1.) This their sin is described, [Isa 30:10](#), [Isa 30:11](#). They set themselves so violently against the prophets to hinder them from preaching, or at least from dealing plainly with them in their preaching, did so banter them and browbeat them, that they did in effect *say to the seers, See not*. They had the light, but they loved darkness rather. It was their privilege that they had seers among them, but they did what they could to put out their eyes - that they had prophets among them, but they did what they could to stop their mouths; for they tormented them in their wicked ways, [Rev 11:10](#). **Those that**

silence good ministers, and discountenance good preaching, are justly counted, and called, rebels against God.

See what it was in the prophets' preaching with which they found themselves aggrieved. [1.] The prophets told them of their faults, and warned them of their misery and danger by reason of sin, and they could not bear that. They must speak to them smooth things, must flatter them in their sins, and say that they did well, and there was no harm, no peril, in the course of life they lived in. **Let a thing be ever so right and true, if it be not smooth, they will not hear it. But if it be agreeable to the good opinion they have of themselves, and will confirm them in that, though it be ever so false and ever so great a cheat upon them, they will have it prophesied to them. Those deserve to be deceived that desire to be so.** [2.] The prophets stopped them in their sinful pursuits, and stood in their way like the angel in Balaam's road, with the sword of God's wrath drawn in their hand; so that they could not proceed without terror. And this they took as a great insult.

When they went on frowardly in the way of their hearts they said to the prophets, "*Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the paths*. What do you do in our way? Cannot you let us alone to do as we please?" Those have their hearts fully set in them to do evil that bid their faithful monitors to stand out of their way. *Forbear, why shouldst thou be smitten?* [2Ch 25:16](#). [3.] The prophets were continually telling them of the Holy One of Israel, what an enemy he is to sin and how severely he will reckon with sinners; and this they could not endure to hear of. Both the thing itself and the expression of it were too serious for them; and therefore, if the prophets will speak to them, they will make it their bargain that they shall not call God *the Holy One of Israel*; **for God's holiness is that attribute which wicked people most of all dread.** Let us no more be troubled with that state-preface (as Mr. White calls it) to your impertinent harangues.

Those have reason to fear perishing in their sins that cannot bear to be frightened out of them.

(2.) Now what is the doom passed upon them for this? We have it, [Isa 30:12](#), [Isa 30:13](#). Observe, [1.] Who it is that gives judgment upon them: *Thus saith the Holy One of Israel*. That title of God which they particularly excepted against the prophet makes use of. Faithful ministers will not be driven from using such expressions as are proper to awaken sinners, though they be displeasing. We must tell men that God is the *Holy One of Israel*, and so they shall find him, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear. [2.] What the ground of the judgment is: *Because they despise this word* - wither, in general, every word that the prophets said to them, or this word in particular, which declares God to be *the Holy One of Israel*: "they despise this, and will neither make it their fear, to stand in awe of it, nor make it their hope, to put any confidence in

it; but, rather than they will be beholden to *the Holy One of Israel*, they will *trust in oppression and perverseness*, in the wealth they have got and the interest they have made by fraud and violence, or in the sinful methods they have taken for their own security, in contradiction to God and his will. On these they lean, and therefore it is just that they should fall.” [3.] What the judgment is that is passed upon them: “*This iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall*. This confidence of yours will be like a house built upon the sand, which will fall in the storm and bury the builder in the ruins of it. Your contempt of that word of God which you might build upon will make every thing else you trust like a wall that bulges out, which, if any weight be laid upon it, comes down, nay, which often sinks with its own weight.” The ruin they would hereby bring upon themselves should be, *First*, A surprising ruin: *The breaking shall come suddenly, at an instant*, when they do not expect it, which will make it the more frightful, and when they are not prepared or provided for it, which will make it the more fatal. *Secondly*, An utter ruin, universal and irreparable: “Your and all your confidences shall be not only weak as the potter's clay ([Isa 29:16](#)), but *broken to pieces as the potter's vessel*. He that has the rod of iron shall break it ([Psa 2:9](#)) and he shall not spare, shall not have any regard to it, nor be in care to preserve or keep whole any part of it. But, when once it is broken so as to be unfit for use, let it be dashed, let it be crushed, all to pieces, so that there may not remain one *sherd* big enough *to take up a little fire or water*” - two things we have daily need of, and which poor people commonly fetch in a piece of a broken pitcher. They shall not only be as a *bowing wall* ([Psa 62:3](#)), but as a broken mug or glass, which is good for nothing, nor can ever be made whole again.

2. They slighted the gracious directions God gave them, not only how to secure themselves and make themselves safe, but how to compose themselves and make themselves easy; they would take their own way, [Isa 30:15-17](#). Observe here,

(1.) The method God put them into for salvation and strength. The God that knew them, and knew what was proper for them, and desired their welfare, gave them this prescription; and it is recommended to us all. [1.] Would we be saved from the evil of every calamity, guarded against the temptation of it and secured from the curse of it, which are the only evil things in it? It must be *in returning and rest*, in returning to God and reposing in him as our rest. Let us return from our evil ways, into which we have gone aside, and rest and settle in the way of God and duty, and that is the way to be saved. “Return from this project of going down to Egypt, and rest satisfied in the will of God, and then you may trust him with your safety. *In returning* (in the thorough reformation of your hearts and lives) *and in rest* (in an entire submission of your souls to God and a complacency in him) *you shall be saved*.” [2.] Would we be strengthened to do what is required of us and to bear what is laid upon us? It must be *in quietness and in confidence*; we must keep our spirits calm and sedate by a continual dependence upon God, and his power and goodness; we must retire into ourselves with a holy quietness, suppressing all turbulent and tumultuous passions, and keeping the peace in our own minds. And we must rely upon God with a holy confidence that he can do what he will and will do what is best for his people. And this will be our strength; it will inspire us with such a holy fortitude as will carry us with ease and courage through all the difficulties we may meet with.

(2.) The contempt they put upon this prescription; they would not take God's counsel, though it was so much for their own good. And justly will those die of their disease that will not take God for their physician. We are certainly enemies to ourselves if we will not be subjects to him. They would not so much as try the method prescribed: “*But you said, No* ([Isa 30:16](#)), we will not compose ourselves, for *we will flee upon horses and we will ride upon the swift*; we will hurry hither and thither to fetch in foreign aids.” They think themselves wiser than God, and that they know what is good for themselves better than he does. When Sennacherib took all the fenced cities of Judah, those rebellious children would not be persuaded to sit still and patiently to expect God's appearing for them, as

he did wonderfully at last; but they would shift for their own safety, and thereby they exposed themselves to so much the more danger.

(3.) The sentence passed upon them for this. Their sin shall be their punishment: “You will flee, and therefore *you shall flee*; you will be upon the full speed, and therefore so shall those be that pursue you.” The dogs are most apt to run barking after him that rides fast. The conquerors protected those that sat still, but pursued those that made their escape; and so that very project by which they hoped to save themselves was justly their ruin and the most guilty suffered most. It is foretold, [Isa 30:17](#), [1.] That they should be easily cut off; they should be so dispirited with their own fears, increased by their flight, that one of the enemy should defeat a thousand of them, and five put an army to flight, which could never be *unless their Rock had sold them* [Deu 32:30](#). [2.] That they should be generally cut off, and only here and there one should escape alone in a solitary place, and be left for a spectacle too, *as a beacon upon the top of a mountain*, a warning to others to avoid the like sinful courses and carnal confidences.