

## ISAIAH 31 | *Woe to Those Who Go Down to Egypt*

### *Trusting in Chariots*

1 Woe (הוי) to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult (דרש) Yahweh! 2 And yet he is wise (חכם) and brings disaster. He does not call back his words, but will arise against the house of the evildoers and against the helpers of those who work iniquity. 3 The Egyptians are man, and not God, and their horses are flesh (בשר), and not spirit (רוח). When Yahweh stretches out his hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will all perish together.

### *Undaunted Lion*

4 For thus Yahweh said to me,

As a lion (אריה) or a young lion growls over his prey, and when a band of shepherds is called out against him he is not terrified by their shouting or daunted at their noise, so Yahweh of hosts will come down to fight on Mount Zion and on its hill. 5 Like birds (צפור) hovering, so Yahweh of hosts will protect Jerusalem. He will protect and deliver it. He will spare and rescue it.<sup>1</sup>

### *Idols Cast Away*

6 Turn (שוב) to him from whom they have deeply revolted, children of Israel. 7 For in that day [701 bc/Jesus' second coming] everyone shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which your hands have sinfully made for you.

### *Sword Not of Man*

8 And the Assyrian [in 701 bc] shall fall by a sword (חרב) not of man, and a sword not of man shall devour him.<sup>2</sup> And he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be put to forced labour. 9 His rock (סלע) shall pass away in terror, and his officers desert the standard (נס) in panic, declares Yahweh, whose fire (אור) is in Zion and whose oven (תנור) is in Jerusalem.

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<sup>1</sup> God doesn't need Egypt's help in rescuing Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> Jesus' word is the supernatural sword.

## Commentary

### 1. Overview.

- a. Ch. 31 repeats the structure and message of ch. 30, in shorter form.<sup>3</sup>
- b. There are two reasons Judah should trust in God, not Egypt, to save them from Assyria. The negative reason is Egypt will be crushed by Assyria. The positive reason is God can and will break Assyria. Egypt is Judah's false hope. God is Judah's true hope.

### 2. Trusting in Chariots (Is 31:1-3).

- a. **Is 31:1-3** 1 Woe (הוי) to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult (דרש) Yahweh! 2 And yet he is wise (חכם) and brings disaster. He does not call back his words, but will arise against the house of the evildoers and against the helpers of those who work iniquity. 3 The Egyptians are man, and not God, and their horses are flesh (בשר), and not spirit (רוח). When Yahweh stretches out his hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will all perish together.
- b. Isaiah again warns Judah not to depend on Egypt to save them from Assyria (v. 1).
- c. Judah is trusting in Egypt's horses, chariots, and horsemen instead of looking to and consulting God (v. 1).
  - (1) By Isaiah's time, chariotry had revolutionised warfare.
    - (a) **Is 36:8-9** 8 Come now, make a wager with my master the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them. 9 How then can you repulse a single captain among the least of my master's servants, when you trust in Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?
    - (b) Present-day equivalents would be aircraft carriers, submarines, nuclear weapons, stealth fighters and bombers, ICBMs, military satellites, and artificial intelligence.
  - (2) Chariots, though, are dangerous thing to trust in, unless they're God's chariots.
    - (a) **Ex 15:19** 19 For when the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, Yahweh brought back the waters of the sea upon them, but the people of Israel walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea.
    - (b) **Dt 20:1** 1 When you go out to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them, for Yahweh your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.
    - (c) **2 Ki 6:14-17** 14 So he sent there horses, chariots, and a great army, and they came by night and surrounded the city [Jerusalem]. 15 When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, Alas, my master! What shall we do? 16 He said, Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. 17 Then Elisha prayed and said, Yahweh, please open his eyes that he may see. So Yahweh opened the

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<sup>3</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 570.

eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

- (d) **Ps 20:7** 7 Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of Yahweh our God.
  - (e) **Ps 46:9** 9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear. He burns the chariots with fire.
  - (f) **Ps 68:17** 17 The chariots of God are twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands. Yahweh is among them. Sinai is now in the sanctuary.
- (3) What Isaiah is so upset about is that Judah isn't consulting God at all.
- (a) "As Calvin sagely observes, a believer may use many intermediate means to benefit or defend himself or herself that do not conflict with a prior dependence upon God."<sup>4</sup>
  - (b) "[W]hen any people feel that special weapons can relieve them of dependence upon God, they are on the road to destruction. This is not to say that weapons and faith in God are mutually exclusive in a fallen world, but it is to say that commitment to God's ways, with whatever that may mean for weapons in a given situation, is primary."<sup>5</sup>
- d. The reason Judah should look to God is because he is wise and more than capable of dealing with Assyria (v. 2).
  - e. God will rise against those in Judah who have wickedly turned away from him (v. 2).
  - f. Judah should be relying on God, who is spirit, rather than the Egyptians, who are mere flesh (v. 3).
    - (1) **Ps 56:4** 4 In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust. I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?
    - (2) **Ps 56:11** 11 In God I trust. I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?
    - (3) **Ps 146:3** 3 Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.
    - (4) **Lk 12:4-5** 4 I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. 5 But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!
    - (5) **Ro 8:35-39** 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Messiah? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ...37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Messiah Jesus our Lord.
  - g. Egypt and those Judeans who rely on her will stumble, fall and perish (v. 3).
  - h. Theology.

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<sup>4</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 570.

<sup>5</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 571.

- (1) This is the same message as in ch. 30. When faced with a crisis, we are to look to God and consult him as to what we should do. This is because he is both wise and powerful. He is ready to be consulted.
  - (2) Relying on one's military and forming defensive alliances isn't evil in itself. We live in a fallen world, and military deterrence is necessary. However, God should be looked to first. He should be consulted first.
  - (3) God will rise against those who turn away from his salvation in unbelief.
  - (4) The things of the spirit are greater than the things of the flesh. The immaterial presides over the material. Though we are spiritual-physical beings, the spiritual aspect of our nature takes precedence.
- i. Application.
- (1) Who or what do we turn to when faced with a crisis?

### 3. Undaunted Lion (Is 31:4-5).

- a. **Is 31:4-5** 4 For thus Yahweh said to me, As a lion (אַרְיֵהָ) or a young lion growls over his prey, and when a band of shepherds is called out against him he is not terrified by their shouting or daunted at their noise, so Yahweh of hosts will come down to fight on Mount Zion and on its hill. 5 Like birds (צְפוּרִים) hovering, so Yahweh of hosts will protect (גָּנַן) Jerusalem. He will protect (גָּנַן) and deliver (נִצֵּל) it. He will pass over (פָּסַח) and rescue (מָלַט) it.
- b. God is like a growling lion coming to fight on Zion. He is totally unafraid of the Assyrians, who are like a band of shepherds (v. 4).
  - (1) To be undaunted is to be “courageously resolute in the face of danger or difficulty.”<sup>6</sup>
  - (2) This reminds of the Ariel “lion of God” imagery in Is 29:1.
    - (a) **Is 29:1** 1 Ah, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped!
    - (3) God is like Aslan in C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.
- c. God is like like hovering birds protecting Jerusalem overhead. God will protect, deliver, spare, and rescue Jerusalem from Assyria (v. 5).
  - (1) God is like the eagles in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*.
  - (2) Isaiah uses four different words for God's protection:
    - (a) גָּנַן: to enclose, fence, protect.
      - 1) **2 Ki 20:6** 6 and I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you [Hezekiah] and this city [Jerusalem] out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend (גָּנַן) this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake.
    - (b) נִצֵּל: to save, pull out.
      - 1) **Pr 14:25** 25 A truthful witness saves (נִצֵּל) lives, but one who breathes out lies is deceitful.
    - (c) פָּסַח: to pass by, spare.
      - 1) **Ex 12:13** 13 The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over (פָּסַח) you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

<sup>6</sup> [Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary](#) (2003).

- 2) **Ex 12:23** 23 For Yahweh will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, Yahweh will pass over (פסח) the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you.
- 3) **Ex 12:27** 27 ... You shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over (פסח) the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but saved (נצל) our houses. And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

(d) מלט: rescue, bring away.

d. Theology.

(1) God is totally unafraid of man.

(2) God doesn't need anyone's help to save us.

(a) The motivate to trust is both negative—Egypt can't help—and positive—God will help, even though we have sinned by refusing to trust him.<sup>7</sup>

(3) We are to give God the chance to fight our battles for us.

#### 4. Idols Cast Away (Is 31:6-7).

- a. **Is 31:6-7** 6 Turn (שוב) to him from whom they have deeply revolted, children of Israel. 7 For in that day [701 bc/Jesus' second coming] everyone shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which your hands have sinfully made for you.
- b. Though Judah has deeply revolted against God, she may still turn back (v. 6).
- c. When God saves Judah from Assyria, the Judeans will cast away their self-made idols (v. 7).
  - (1) The “in that day” (v. 7) connects what is happening in Isaiah's day to the tribulation, when God will again destroy Israel's enemies through direct intervention.
- d. Theology.
  - (1) Even if we have deeply revolted against God, there is still opportunity to turn back to him.
  - (2) When God acts in our lives in unmistakable ways, it is the right time for us to cast away our idols.

#### 5. A Sword Not of Man (Is 31:8-9).

- a. **Is 31:8-9** 8 And the Assyrian [in 701 bc] shall fall by a sword (חֶרֶב) not of man, and a sword not of man shall devour him. And he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be put to forced labour. 9 His rock (סֶלֶעַ) shall pass away in terror, and his officers desert the standard (נֵס) in panic, declares Yahweh, whose fire (אֵשׁ) is in Zion and whose oven (תַּנּוּר) is in Jerusalem.
- b. A supernatural sword will devour Assyria (v. 8).
  - (1) The solution to Judah's problem is a supernatural one, not a natural one.
  - (2) At Jesus' second coming, his sword will be his word.
    - (a) **Re 19:15** 15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations....

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<sup>7</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 573.

- c. As a result, the Assyrians will flee in a panic and be put to forced labour. All that Assyria has trusted in, her “rock,” will pass away (vv. 8-9).
- d. God’s fire is in Jerusalem (v. 9).
  - (1) This reminds of the Ariel “altar hearth” imagery in Is 29:1-2.
    - (a) **Is 29:1-2** 1 Ah, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped! Add year to year. Let the feasts run their round. 2 Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be moaning and lamentation, and she shall be to me like an Ariel.
  - (2) Just as fire protects but is also dangerous, so God protects but is also dangerous.
- e. Theology.
  - (1) When we are in a crisis, we are to trust God to save us supernaturally.
    - (a) We must be supernaturalists, not naturalists. The supernatural realm is primary, not the natural realm.
    - (b) For example, God has the power to stop Covid-19 in one day if he wants to. Consider the final chapters of Daniel Defoe’s *Journal of the Plague Year*.
  - (2) God loves to save us at the eleventh-hour. That’s why we must never give up hope.
  - (3) God’s fire is there to protect his people.

## 6. Application.

- a. Trust in God, not man, when you face a crisis. Consult him as to what you should do (v. 1).
- b. Give God the opportunity to rescue you in a supernatural way (vv. 4-5, 8). Spiritual help is greater than fleshly help.
- c. If you have deeply revolted against God, turn back to him now (v. 6).