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Woe to the Obstinate Children, Declares the LORD

30: 1-7

Woe to the obstinate children, declares the LORD DIG: What is the basic problem with their desire to form an alliance with Egypt against Assyria? How would you feel as one of Judah's ambassadors to Egypt, when Isaiah approaches your caravan and gives you this oracle? How does the nickname, Egypt the Do-Nothing, contrast with the description of God throughout these chapters?

REFLECT: Judah's shame is repeated three times here. She looked for the right thing (security), but in the wrong place (an alliance with Egypt). What are some of the wrong places you have hoped to find the right things like security, love, and acceptance? When was the last time you went against God's will even though you knew better? Judah eventually ended up in bondage. How about you?

In the eighth century BC, **Egypt** was long past its prime. After about 1000 BC, it was never again a dominant force in the ancient Near East. After its heyday, **Egypt** was ruled first by the Libyans from the west. After that, by the Nubians from the south; **they** seemed to lack the energy or the initiative to rule on **their** own. Thus, **Egypt** appeared to be powerful but really was not. We do not know how obvious that was, although from the remarks made by the field commander in **36:6**, **the Assyrians** seemed to recognize it. In any case, those with spiritual discernment recognized the situation: **Isaiah** and **Jeremiah** both recognized it.

That is the kind of discernment we need. Are those on whom we are tempted to rely on just as weak as we are, though giving a good appearance? Do they have our best interests at heart or only their own? Are we relying on them as a way to avoid the risk of trusting **God**? Have we sought the guidance of those with spiritual discernment concerning the relationship? Have we sincerely sought **ADONAI's** guidance? In many cases destructive relationships are clear to those around us. Our problem, like **the Judeans**, is that we are afraid to let go of **the splintered reed (36:6)** and so do not allow ourselves to look at the situation with true discernment. If we would first let go of it emotionally and spiritually, **God** would open our eyes to its dangers.¹⁰²

Chapters 30 and **31** center on the foolishness of attempting to make **an alliance** with

Egypt to ward off **the Assyrian** threat. **Egypt** was waning as a world power and could be of no real assistance to **Judah** in **her** fight against the strong **Assyrian** empire. But a strong faction in **Judah** wanted to seek aid from **Egypt**, rather than turning to **God** for protection. **This is the third woe in the Book of Woes.**

The **woe** was pronounced against those in **Judah** who wanted to form a **near historical alliance made with Egypt**. The prophet spoke to those people as if they were children, and **obstinate children** at that. **Woe to the obstinate children, declares the LORD, to carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by My Spirit, heaping sin upon sin (30:1)**. Like **children, they** did not have the proper perspective to know what was best for **them**. Desperate to save **themselves** and **their** nation, **they** were forming **plans**, but **they** were not **God's plans**. When **ADONAI** made **His** Covenant with **Isra'el, she** was a child of **God**. Once in the Land **she** should have become an adult, but **she** had not grown up. Because of **her** rebellious nature in **forming an alliance** with **Egypt she** was acting like an **obstinate child**.

God's word concerning alliances with **Egypt** was very clear. **They** were forbidden (**Exodus 13:17; Deuteronomy 17:16; Ezeki'el 17 and 19:4**). **They** didn't need a new word from **ADONAI, they** only needed to obey the one **they** had. Any alliance with **Egypt** would involve the recognition, if not the worship, of **the Egyptian** gods. But the mind that is set on this world's ways cannot see the wisdom of **God's** way (**First John 2:15-17**). To it, rebellion is not rebellion but merely common sense. Therefore, **the Spirit** did not lead the decision by King **Hezekiah**. The reason it was like **heaping sin upon sin** was because the original idea of rebellion against **Assyria** was sin, and now aligning with **Egypt** only adds to **their sin**. And finally, by going down to **Egypt, they** were ignoring **God's** prophet **Isaiah** . . . yet another **sin**.

Those who went down to **Egypt without consulting ADONAI** were looking for **help** from **Pharaoh. Hezekiah** and **the leaders** of **Judah** had not consulted with **Isaiah** before or after making **their** plans. **They** most likely knew **they** wouldn't get the answer **they** wanted (**Second Timothy 4:3**). Instead of looking to **God** for **protection, they** looked to **Egypt's shade for refuge (30:2)**. The **woe** was pronounced because **Hezekiah** was making this covenant for the purpose of security, hoping at long last to escape the dominance of **Assyria**. It was a **woe** because of its disastrous results.



But to Pharaoh's protection will be to your shame, Egypt's shade will bring you disgrace (30:3). Her time as a world power was over. Shabako, the **Pharaoh** at that time, was a Nubian, not even an **Egyptian**. **Egypt** did not even have the cultural strength to produce **her** own leadership, let alone protect anybody else's. So, **Isaiah** says that to lean on **the staff** of **Egypt** was **to bring disgrace to Judah**. Later Sennacherib's **field commander** would mock **the Jewish** delegation on the walls of Jerusalem when **he** said: **On whom are you depending that you rebel against me? Look now, are you depending on Egypt that splintered reed of a staff, which pierces a man's hand and wounds him if he leans on it! Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who depend on him (36:5b-6).** Tragically, **they** had rejected to trust in **the LORD** who would not have failed **them** and, instead, aligned **themselves** with **Pharaoh**, who most assuredly would.

*The whole basis of our faith is summed up in **Jesus'** words in the garden of Gethsemane: **Yet not what I will, but what you will (Mark 14:36)**. Only one who is absolutely convinced of **ADONAI's** good intentions toward him or her can say those words. All others are doomed to distrust **the LORD** and believe that their will is better than **His**, that they, the pot, know better than **the Potter (29:16)**.*

The Jews even sent a delegation to two **Egyptian** cities - **Zoan and Hanes** - to talk about the **alliance**. But the talks were **doomed** before they left **Judah**. **Though they have officials in Zoan and their envoys have arrived in Hanes (30:4)**. The two cities, **Zoan** (*Zo - long o - an*), and **Hanes** (*Hawn - ness*) are two cities in the Nile Delta region in **Egypt**. But, **Isaiah** says, no matter how strong the covenant is made, **it is doomed to failure** because **everyone** in **Judah** will be put to shame because of a people useless to them, who bring neither help nor advantage, but only shame and disgrace (30:5). **ADONAI** had already said many times through **Isaiah** that **God** would use **Assyria** to wipe

out the northern kingdom of **Isra'el** and to punish the southern kingdom of **Judah**. So, to look to a crumbling empire like **Egypt** for help was useless. When this is all over with, **Judah's shame and disgrace** will be all the more.

For **the Judeans**, their attempt to solve **the Assyrian** problem for **themselves** led **them** back into the very thing **God** told them not to do, to go back to **Egypt**, in spirit, at least (**Hosea 7:11, 9:1-6**). Ultimately, of course, some of **them** did return physically (**Jeremiah Chapters 42-43**). The same is often true for us. Our attempts to take care of ourselves lead us back into the very things from which **God** has delivered us in the first place.

The writer of **Hebrews** refers to this as **the sin that so easily entangles (Hebrews 12:1)**. There are areas of our lives where we are particularly susceptible to temptation. When we refuse to trust **God** in some other area of our lives, perhaps one that appears totally unrelated, we effectively take ourselves out from under the protection of **God** and throw ourselves open to that old area of weakness. Oftentimes, we are weak there precisely because it is something that seems to offer us the pleasure or security of significance we think we must have. When we learn to trust **God** for these things and to find them in **His** ways, not ours, then we experience deliverance from the bondage of those old sins. But when we refuse to trust **God** in any area, we have cut off the power source and are thrown back onto all our old resources. So, it is not surprising that we are defeated at precisely the same points as we were before.¹⁰³

Then **Isaiah** adds **an oracle concerning the animals of the Negev (30:6a)**. This is **an oracle** of judgment. The previous verses merely emphasized the human planning that lay behind **Egyptian alliance**; here, we see the human cost. The point here is that **Egypt's** help would prove to be worthless. The **envoys** traveling to **Egypt** loaded with treasures had to pass through **the Negev**, a desolate, dangerous area with wild desert animals. **Judah's** people were so desperate for help that **they** were willing to risk **hardship** and go to great expense.

*In **Exodus 13:17** the **LORD** would not let **His people** travel through **the Negev** down through Philistia the shorter path from **Egypt**. I wonder if the ambassadors realized that **they** were traveling in the exact opposite direction of the exodus. Before, **they** traveled to freedom; but now **they** were traveling to slavery. But it wasn't like **they** didn't know better. **God's** prophet, **Isaiah**, had warned **them**.*

Through the land of hardship and distress, of lions and lionesses, of adders and darting snakes, the envoys carry their riches on donkeys' backs, their treasures on the humps of camels (30:6b). The **donkeys** and **camels** of **Judah** were carrying the

wealth of **Judah** for the purpose of purchasing the help of **Egypt**. **Judah's people** were so desperate for help that **they** were willing to risk **hardship** and go to great expense. All this is done for nothing, because **Egypt** could not assist **Judah** in any way. At the battle of Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar and his Assyrian army proved their superiority by routing **the Egyptians**.¹⁰⁴

They carried **their** tribute **to that unprofitable nation, to Egypt, who is utterly worthless**. Literally, the Hebrew reads: *Egypt, vanity and emptiness they will help*. **Isaiah** graphically displays **Egypt's emptiness**. **Therefore, I call her Rahab the Do-Nothing (30:7b)**. That is why **God** names **Egypt, Rahab the Do Nothing**. The name **Rahab** is another name used for **Egypt** in **Isaiah 51:9-10; Psalm 87:4; Psalm 89:10**. The word **Rahab** can have two meanings. It can mean *big mouth*. What **God** is saying here is that **Egypt** is a *big mouth* that can **do nothing**. In its adjective form it can mean *arrogance or agitator*. **God** says **Egypt** sits in *arrogance*, or as an *agitator* of inactivity. As a proper noun it also means *hippopotamus*. They are big animals, and in this area you see them all the time, but what are they always doing? Nothing. You never see them do anything except open **their** big mouth. Just as **Isaiah** had prophesied, **Egypt** was no help at all.

Judah had lost the sense of **her** original purpose. **ADONAI** had told **Abram** that **he** would be made **into a great nation**. **The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob** said: **I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you** (see my commentary on **Genesis, to see link click Dt - I Will Bless Those Who Bless You and Whoever Curses You I Will Curse**). **She** was supposed to be a godly example to those nations around **her**, not to sink back into worldly behavior.

In the town of Delburne, Alberta, there was an old water tower built in 1926. Standing empty, the building was bought by two men who wanted to turn it into a dining and cocktail lounge. Plans called for a bar to be built on the second floor. Something similar has already happened in various communities: that which was originally designed to provide the water of life has been "converted" into that which is providing resources detrimental to society. Schools were once thought of as sources of moral and spiritual benefit. In some cases, they now are fountains of agnosticism and atheism. Even churches, built to convey to men and women the water of life, are now the providers of everything but the Gospel.