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Woe to Those Who Go Down to Egypt for Help 31: 1-9

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help DIG: How is this woe related to the one in 30:1? What similarities do you see? What differences? What reasoning is given here for the warning in the previous woe? If you were a leader in Judah, why would you be seeking this alliance? What have these leaders overlooked as they formed it? In contrast to the stumbling of the Egyptians, how will God help Judah during the Assyrian attack? How will the LORD be like a lion? Like a mother bird? Like a fire? How will this be like another Passover for Judah (see Exodus 12:12-13)? What will be the result for the Assyrians? For the Jews? What does it mean that God does not wait until we have repented to act mercifully on our behalf?

REFLECT: What pressures have you felt lately? In practical terms, does relying on God in such times mean not involving the help of anyone else? How can you tell when it is wise and right to seek godly counsel? When have you actually lived as though the LORD didn't matter? What difference does it make to you to realize that even in those times God is protecting you as a lion or a mother bird? Judah made a wrong choice in forming an alliance with Egypt. What amounts to a wrong choice for you? Is there *anything* that you are trusting in more than God right now? What would happen if you put the LORD first in your life?

Like the previous woe ([to see link click Fs - Woe to the Obstinate Children, Declares the LORD](#)), this one was directed against the Egyptian alliance that some in Judah thought they needed for protection against the Assyrian threat. Not only would Egypt not be able to help Judah, but in going, she had rejected ADONAI. She would reject the true and choose the false. As a result, Judah would experience the terrible reality of her sin (Jeremiah 52:1-34 and the book of Lamentations). **This is the fourth woe in the Book of Woes.** But this one also points to the Messiah who will one day deliver His people (32:1-20).

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help (31:1a). What He promised in the

previous chapter is going to be carried out. Those who went **to Egypt for help**, and who relied on **Egyptian horses** and **chariots** instead of **God**, will be punished. Both actions, going to **Egypt** and acquiring **horses** and **chariots**, violated the Torah (**Deuteronomy 17:16**). **God does not go back on His words; He** would judge the nation for **her** disobedience. Again, **Isaiah** points out that **Egypt** is going to prove to be weak and helpless. **The Egyptians** are **men**, not **God**. **The horses** are made of flesh, not of **Spirit**. **The Egyptians** can only help as long as **the flesh** is able to help. And that will prove to be worthless, because **the flesh** of **Assyria** is stronger. Only **God** could ultimately protect them from **their** enemies. Consequently, **God's** judgment will cause **both Egypt** and **Judah** to **fall**. Both the helper and the helped will **fall** together. **The Egyptian** alliance would fail as **Isaiah** had prophesied, but **God** would not abandon **His** people.

Woe to those who rely of horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen (31:1b). The emphasis upon **horses** here suggests the likely reason why **Egypt's** help seemed especially attractive. Ever since the introduction of **the horse** into the Near East in the Middle Bronze Age (1800 BC), warfare had been revolutionized, first through chariots, then by this time, through the beginning of cavalry. Apparently this weapon had an almost magical effect on the leaders of **Judah**. No matter how mighty **the Assyrian** army might be, **they** thought an alliance with **Egypt**, with **their** horses and chariots, would ensure safety. So, it would be like a splash of cold water in the face when Sennacherib's field commander sarcastically commented that **Judah** would not know what to do with **horses** even if **they** had **them** (see [Gr - Please Speak to Your Servant in Aramaic!](#))!

In the ancient Near East, at this time, **horses** and **chariots** were something like the "ultimate weapon." When the horse, with its speed and stamina, was hitched to a light two-wheeled chariot on which was a two or three-man crew, the results could be devastating. Along with the driver, there was at least one archer with a powerful bow. In some cases, there was also a spearman. They were so desirable that even countries like **Judah**, whose hills and valleys meant the **chariots** were of limited usefulness, felt they had to have a chariot force. Today, we look for defense by other kinds of armaments: shell-proof tanks, stealth aircraft, and laser-guided missiles. But where is our defense? Both nationally and personally, what is it, or who is it that we are trusting in?¹¹⁰

But the destiny of a country does not rest upon either horses or missiles, and when a 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 are mutually exclusive in a fallen world, but it is safe to say that commitment to **God's** ways, with whatever that may mean

for weapons in a given situation, is of foremost importance. This kind of commitment was clearly lacking in **Judah**. They had not sought **ADONAI's** direction, nor did **they** put **their** trust in **Him**. As a result of **their** faithlessness, **God** said: **Do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD (31:1c)**. **Judah** would have to suffer the consequences of **her** actions.

Isaiah taunted **the leaders** of **Judah** by saying: **Yet He too is wise and can bring disaster (31:2a)**. Hezekiah's royal counselors, who were supposed to be so **wise**, had counseled for dependence upon **Egypt (5:21, 19:11-15, 28:14-15, 30:1-2)**. They acted as if **the LORD** knew nothing, as if **the Creator** of the universe did not really understand their situation. It was as if **Isaiah** was saying, "You know, **God** understands a little something also." **He does not take back His words (31:2b)** means that if we change, this enables **Him** to change **His** approach to us. We can see this in the book of **Jonah (Jonah 3:10 and 4:1-2)**. **God** kept pursuing **Jonah** until he had a change of heart. Unless we change, **He** is relentless as time itself. All the **Egypt**s in the world could not alter what **He** says.

And if **Judah** carried through with **her** plan of faithlessness, **He will rise up against the house of the wicked, against those who help evildoers (31:2c)**. **ADONAI** told it like it was when **He** called them **the house of the wicked** instead of **the house of Judah**. What a scathing denunciation! It didn't matter that they were **the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**. **Their** birthright didn't matter and neither did **their** supposed alliances. If **Judah** refused to **trust** in **ADONAI**, far from being **the apple of His eye (Deuteronomy 32:10)**, **He** would be forced to discipline **her** because **He** loved **her** so much.

So just how do you get **faith**? Or **trust**? Or belief? Where does it come from? The Bible teaches us that **without faith it is impossible to please God** (see my commentary on **Hebrews, to see link click Cn - The Faith of Enoch**). It is a decision. The world-famous evangelist Billy Graham's magazine is named "Decision" for that very reason. And everyone will eventually stand in front of **Yeshua Messiah, the Judge (John 5:22)**, to be held accountable for what **they** decide. **If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9** also see **First Corinthians 15:3-4)**. Our love for **God** needs to be greater than whatever it is that we fear. Most of the time we don't *feel* like it. Our flesh wants the evidence first. But after the decision based on faith is made, the feelings *follow*. Some people get the cart before the horse, but it doesn't work that way.

The Ruach continued to inspire **His** human author when **Isaiah** contrasted **Egypt** and **God** by asserting that the **flesh** is hardly equal to the **spirit**. **He** said: they were merely **men**

and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit (31:3a). This is clearly true, but we human beings have a tough time with this concept. Because of our fallen nature, we tend to value the seen more than the unseen. But **Jesus** said: **The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you - they are full of the Spirit and life (John 6:63).**

In reality, only **ADONAI** could protect them from **their** enemies. **When the LORD stretches out His hand, the nation who helps will stumble, the nation who is helped will fall; both will perish together (31:3b).** If **Judah** persisted in seeking an alliance with **Egypt**, **both** nations would meet disaster **together**.

As in **30:19-33**, here **Isaiah** turned from the condemnation of the false hope in **Egypt** to the declaration of the true hope in **ADONAI**. If **the LORD** were relentless towards sinful **Judah**, **He** would also be relentless in the defense of repentant **Judah**. The motivation to **trust** always was, and always is, both negative and positive. This announcement of **trust** before the fact is typical not only of **Isaiah**, but also the gospel. **God** does not wait until we have repented to act mercifully on our behalf (mercy is not getting what we deserve). More accurately, **His** mercy becomes *the incentive* for repentance. We are invited to repent because of our attraction to **God**, rather than, because of avoidance of **Him**.



God assured the people that **His** greatness would protect them from the terrifying **Assyrian** threat. **As a lion** meets up with a flock of sheep and is unafraid of a number of **shepherds**, so **the LORD** was not afraid of **the Assyrians**. **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 clamor. In other words, **the Lion of Judah** cannot be **frightened** off by a pack of **people** shouting and beating **their** pans. **As a result, the LORD of heaven's angelic armies will come down to do battle on Mount Zion and on its heights (31:4).**

God is also going to protect **Jerusalem** like a **bird** hovering over her nest. **Like birds hovering overhead, the LORD of heaven's angelic armies (CJB) will shield Jerusalem; He will shield it and deliver it, He will "pass over" it and will rescue it (31:5).** Even though 46 of **Jerusalem's** surrounding cities will be destroyed, **God** would protect **the city of David**. Like a **bird** hovering over her nest, **God** protected **Mount Zion** and **the Assyrians** would fail in **their** attempt to destroy **her**.

Since **God** would rescue **Judah**, **Isaiah** called on the nation to turn back to **Him**. **Isaiah** pleaded with them, saying: **Return to Him you who have so greatly revolted against, O Israelites (31:6).** Eventually, **they** would throw **their idols** away (**30:22**) in favor of the true **God**. **For in that day, every one of you will reject the idols of silver and gold your sinful hands have made (31:7).** In light of **Isra'el's** future national salvation, **Judah** ought to throw them away immediately. They are called to **reject the idols of silver and gold that their sinful hands had made.** When both the helplessness of idols and the grace of **God** are revealed, **the idols** are powerless. Although they are valuable metals, **they** are valueless. When **they** returned from the Babylonian captivity, **they** had learned the invaluable lesson that **idols** are an abomination to **God**. As John Calvin (1509-1564), one of the great pastors during the Protestant Reformation, said, "True conversion does not ask the price." But the opposite is also true: so long as a person continues to question whether he or she can possibly afford to **trust** in **ADONAI**, the cost will always be too high.

The last two verses put the seal upon **the LORD's** promises. It is **God Himself**, and no other, that will destroy **the Assyrian** king and his army. **Assyria will fall by a superhuman sword that is not of man; a sword not of morals, will devour them (37:36).** It will be **Malach ADONAI, the Angel of the LORD** or **Yeshua Messiah**. **They will flee before the sword and their young men will be put to forced labor (31:8).** **The Assyrian** commanders, seeing **Judah's battle standard** and **their** soldiers being slaughtered, would be terrified. **Their stronghold will fall because of terror; at the sight of the battle standard their commanders will panic, declares the LORD (31:9a).**

It is ADONAI, not man, that delivers. This truth resurfaces again and again in the Bible. It appears at the conception of Isaac (Genesis 18:10-15, 21:1-7), when all human power was

gone. It appears at the crossing of the Sea of Reeds (**Exodus 14:19-31**) and again at Jericho (**Joshua 5:13 to 6:27**). It is there in the story of Gideon (**6:1 to 7:25**), and in the rout of the Philistines in Samuel's day (**First Samuel 7:2-17**). Jehoshaphat experienced it in his fight with the Edomites (**Second Chronicles 20:1-30**). This truth is at the heart of Paul's contrast between the flesh and the spirit (**Galatians 5:16-26**). When people believe they can save themselves, they, in effect, dethrone **God** in their lives and doom themselves (**Philippians 3:7**), for it is only as **the King** of our lives that **He** can help us.

Whose fire is in Zion, whose furnace is in Jerusalem (31:9b)? Ariel means two things, the lion of **God** and the burning altar-hearth of **God**. The word is used in the lion of **God** sense in **2 Samuel 23:20**, **Isaiah 33:7** and here. The word is used in the burning altar-hearth of **God** sense here in **Isaiah 29:2** and **Ezekiel 43:15-16**. **Isaiah** will use both figures. **He** will view **Ariel** as a burning altar-hearth and **he** will view **Ariel** as a lion. **God declares**, through **His** prophet **Isaiah**, that **His** burning fire is in Zion, and **His** furnace is in Jerusalem. Therefore, in these verses, **Isaiah** uses both meanings for Ariel; sometimes a lion and sometimes like a burning fire.

In 1887, just following an evangelistic meeting held by Dwight L. Moody, a young man stood to share his story in an after-service testimony meeting. As he was speaking, it was obvious to everyone there that he knew little about the Bible. His closing lines, however, spoke volumes to all the believers there. He said, "I'm not quite sure what I'm supposed to do now. But I'm going to **trust**, and I'm going to obey." Daniel Towner was so struck by the power of those words that he quickly jotted them down, then delivered them to John Sammis, who developed the lyrics to the famous hymn *Trust and Obey*. Towner composed the music and the song quickly became a favorite. It remains popular to this day.

Refrain:

Trust and obey, for there's no other way,

To be happy in Jesus, but to **trust** and obey.

When we walk with **the Lord** in the light of His Word,

What a glory **He** sheds on our way!

While we do **His** good will, **He** abides with us still,

And with all who will **trust** and obey.



Refrain

Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,

But **His** smile quickly drives it away;

Not a doubt or a fear, not a sigh or a tear,

Can abide while we **trust** and obey.

Refrain

Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,

But our toil **He** does richly repay ;

Not a grief or a loss, not a frown or a cross,

But is blessed if we **trust** and obey.

Refrain

But we never can prove the delights of **His** love

Until all on the altar we lay,

For the favor **He** shows, for the joy **He** bestows,

Are for them who will **trust** and obey.

Refrain

Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at **His** feet

Or we'll walk by **His** side in **the Way (Acts 24:14)**.

What **He** says we will do, where **He** sends we will go;

Never fear, only **trust** and obey.

Refrain



For ADONAI is a sun and a shield; ADONAI bestows favor and honor; He will not withhold anything good from those whose lives are pure. The LORD of heaven's angelic armies, how happy is anyone who trusts in You (Psalm 84:11-12 CJB)!