

ISAIAH 31

TRUSTING IN HORSES AND CHARIOTS?

It is evident that this chapter was composed at about the same time as the preceding one, and it relates to the same subject. The general theme is to dissuade the Jews from their contemplated alliance with Egypt, and to persuade them to rely upon Jehovah alone. In doing this, the prophet first denounces a woe upon those who went down to Egypt to seek aid, and he states that God will punish them for it. Then, in strong language, he insists upon the utter inability of the Egyptians to furnish the help which was needed; for the Lord was about to stretch out His arm of judgment over them also, and those who sought help from them would share in their sufferings. The prophet goes on to recall his countrymen from this contemplated alliance, and to induce them to put their confidence in God – assuring them by two beautiful and striking figures (verses 4-5) that He would indeed protect their city in the threatened Assyrian invasion, and save it from destruction. Isaiah calls on them, therefore, to turn unto the Lord; and he promises them that at that time, every man would see the folly of trusting in idols, and forsake them. Finally, he closes the chapter by assuring them of the complete overthrow of the Assyrian army. The theme of the prophecy, therefore, is simple and direct; and its reasons are condensed, striking, and beautiful.

The manner of the destruction of the Assyrian army is very clearly indicated in verse 8. They would not fall by the sword of man. And accordingly, we read that the Angel of the Lord smote the host of enemy soldiers; and in the morning, they were all found to be lifeless corpses! (2 Kings 19:35) The Lord thus taught His people that when He has a purpose to accomplish, He can effect it without any human help! When Peter drew his sword to defend his Master, Jesus said to him, “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matt. 26:53) “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts!” (Zech. 4:6) Surely this was the lesson which Hezekiah and his people must have learned when they arose that morning, and found the Assyrian soldiers all lying dead upon the ground.

But let us observe how, in verses 4 and 5, the Lord expresses His watchful and merciful care for His people in different ways! First, He compares Himself to a young lion who will not give up his prey – even though a multitude of shepherds, with great noise, may endeavor to seize it from his grasp. Thus would the Lord keep Jerusalem, notwithstanding the multitude of the Assyrians. The next figure employed is that of a tender mother-bird: “As birds flying” – or, in other

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A woe to those who trusted the Egyptians for help, and not God – verses 1-3
- ❖ The Lord gives His people assurance of protection in time of danger – verses 4-5
- ❖ A call to repentance and reformation – verses 6-7
- ❖ The overthrow of the Assyrian army is foretold – verses 8-9

words, as mother-birds hovering over their young – “so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem.” This expression immediately reminds us of our Savior’s words in Matthew 23:37: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” But are we not also reminded of Moses’ description of the Lord’s care of His chosen people? (Deut. 32:11-12) “As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him.” Observe how wonderfully our God combines strength and tenderness in all of His dealings with His children! In Him are combined both the strength of the lion, and the tenderness and anxious care of the mother-bird; and all of this is mercifully exhibited for a backsliding and rebellious people, who are continually turning away from their gracious God, and seeking help from everyone except Him!



The latter part of verse 5 evidently refers to the Passover in Egypt: “So will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing over he will preserve it.” The last of the ten plagues inflicted upon Pharaoh for his disobedience to God and his ill-treatment of the Israelites was the destruction of the firstborn throughout the whole land of Egypt. In the middle of the night, the eldest child in every family died. There was not one Egyptian household in which there was not one dead. But the Israelites were spared! God commanded that a lamb should be killed for each of their families, and that the blood should be sprinkled upon the doorposts in the evening. In Exodus 12:23, we read, “When he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side-posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.” Only the houses in which the lamb had been slain, and in which the sacrifice had been offered, were thus protected. And it was because of the sacrifices offered in Jerusalem that God would “pass over” it and protect it from the army of Sennacherib. The prophecy concerning the Assyrians’ overthrow is said, in verse 9, to be the word of the Lord, “whose fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem.” The fire was continually burning upon the altar for sacrifice; and it was because of the fire, and because of the sacrifice which the fire consumed, that Jerusalem was to be saved!

In the same way, it is because of the sacrifice of Christ – because of the Lamb Who has been slain – that the people of God are safe! The person who takes his stand by the furnace of God, places his hands upon the head of the Lamb, and thus casts all of his sins upon the Great Sacrifice – that person is safe and secure. The destroyer cannot touch him, for the Lord Himself will “pass over” him and protect him. Jesus is the sacrifice, and in Him is salvation!

Lord, thank You for combining strength and tenderness in all Your dealings with Your children, even though we have so often been rebellious toward You. Amen.