

**CALVARY PANDAN
BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 31

ISAIAH

CHAPTER 31

Theme: “Wrestle not against flesh and blood but principalities!”

THEME VERSE

Isaiah 31:3 (KJV) “Now the Egyptians *are* men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD shall stretch out his hand, both he that helpeth shall fall, and he that is holpen shall fall down, and they all shall fail together.”

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah 31 continues where Isaiah 30 left off. The focus is still on Israel in relation to Egypt and Assyria. For man to depend on other men for help in times of testing and adversities is very common. This has been man’s ways for eons. The arm of the flesh has been man’s foundation against all foes. For him to break away from his old ways require superhuman effort. He has to swim against the tide as they say. He is surrounded by every nation, past and present, testifying to this route as the only way of salvation. For many, this is indeed the way of salvation. Making alliances with superpowers or other powers that face

the same enemies have been the logical way to tread for centuries. To break away from this mould is what the LORD demands of Israel, His people.

God’s people are not like other nations. They have the one living and true God on their side as their Guardian, Defender and Provider. To appeal to others for help from a spiritual standpoint is an insult to God. The insult is that the LORD is unable to take care of His own people. Other nations do not have God on their side. They are in sin and do not know any better. They do not have the truth. They are not given the Word of God as their guide, and the Temple as their true and acceptable place of worship. Israel has received all these blessings from God for centuries. For them to turn their backs on God is a serious sin.

The nations did not court Israel’s alliance. Israel went to Egypt for help on her own accord. This made the insult even more damaging. Israel was basically saying to the world that the LORD, Israel’s God, was not able to help so she had to turn to other nations and their gods to help the LORD! Israel carried the Name of the LORD, hence the reputation of the LORD as well. She was forbidden to behave like other nations. She had to be distinct from the rest of the world. God had made her distinct! Israel would have to be chastised for her faithlessness and insult of God.

Those who helped God’s people would not be spared either. They would also be punished by God in order to show Israel that these Gentile nations could not help them because

the problem was spiritual and not carnal. Israel's waywardness would ruin and hurt Egypt. The actions of God's people would hurt those whom they befriended and led into sin. This chapter of Isaiah emphasizes this truth very clearly.

OUTLINE

1. Who is like unto God? (vv.1-5);
2. How shall Israel turn from her sins? (vv. 6-7);
3. Can Israel's enemies stand? (vv. 8-9).

COMMENTARY

Who is like unto God? – 31:1-5

Direct confrontation without mincing words is the best way to deal with sin. It describes and emphasizes the urgency as well as the seriousness of the sin committed. Hence the LORD cried out "Woe." The word "woe" has a very ominous overtone. The target of this woe is Israel. The LORD described them as "them that go down to Egypt for help." This means that Israel, without outside influence or coercion, went to seek help from Egypt. The culprit is Israel and she will bear all the blame for what transpired.

This shameful deed of Israel was inconceivable as they had been blessed by God with everything possible to succeed on earth as a godly testimony. But Israel threw everything away and turned to idols. Their idolatrous heart resulted in this appeal to Egypt for help instead of looking up to God. What did Israel find in Egypt? Israel found the most

modern weapons of war available at that time. Egypt was one of the countries with the best horses. Horses were animals built for speed in the battlefield. Horsemen made very good soldiers. They were swift and on their mounted position had an advantage over their enemies who usually fought on foot. The Egyptians possessed chariots comparable to our modern day tanks. They could overrun enemies' position with ease and mow down foot soldiers if these chariots were fitted with sharp knives around their wheel base. The Egyptians had both these weapons of war in great abundance.

Israel's problem was not the use of these weapons of war but their rejection of the LORD. They did not look to the Holy One of Israel; neither did they seek the LORD. They sought the arm of the flesh for they saw their problem as carnal rather than spiritual.

Israel as a nation of God never battles against flesh and blood but always against principalities. Israel had forgotten this truth. That was the reason why God described Himself here as the "Holy One" of Israel. Holiness is a spiritual, not a carnal issue. It is significant to note that there is a distinction made between the Holy One of Israel and the LORD.

The Holy One of Israel refers to God the Father while the LORD refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. The reference to the Holy One of Israel emphasized the holiness of God and the need for holiness in Israel's existence. The "LORD" emphasizes the covenantal relationship which

points to the covenant Israel made with the LORD. How dare Israel break this covenant by turning to Egypt for help instead of to God? On both counts, Israel was condemned by the LORD.

The “he” in verse 2 refers to God. He is wise in His dealings with Israel. God wanted Israel to return to the path of holiness and righteousness. God will do what is right for His people even though His people do not realize that this is what they need most. God will bring evil i.e. calamities and will not call back His word. This means that God’s Word through the prophets, whom He sent to warn Israel of impending doom, would not be reversed. They would come to pass precisely as proclaimed. God would rise up against the house of the evil doers i.e. Israel. What they had done by going to Egypt was an evil act in the sight of God. God’s standard of holiness is revealed here. Making alliance may be just a matter of course for other Gentile nations but not for Israel. God expected a higher standard from Israel because she had been given much more than the Gentile nations in terms of spiritual truths.

Not only would God punish Israel but He would also punish the one who helped Israel. In this instance, it was Egypt! Egypt was charged for helping Israel commit iniquity. This is a serious charge. God’s people must realize that when they err from the truth and go to the heathens for help, they will cause the heathens to be punished as well. It is crucial that God’s people do not harm others because of their own waywardness.

These powerful Egyptians were men and not God. This is a loaded statement. No matter how powerful the Egyptians might be in the eyes of man, it was abundantly clear that they would never be as powerful as God! The horses of the Egyptians were powerful weapons of war but they were not spirit. It was a spiritual warfare that Israel was fighting. How could Israel not realize this? When the LORD stretched out His hand i.e. He took action, both Israel and Egypt would fall together. Note that the sequence of whom God would punish first is reversed. In verse 2 Israel was mentioned first but in verse 3, Egypt was mentioned first. This is to draw the attention of the reader to the punishment of God upon the two parties.

Isaiah testified how the LORD related the issue to him, “Like as a lion and the young lion roaring on his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, he will not be afraid of their voices, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so shall the LORD of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof.” Using animals as imagery to convey truths is common in Holy Scripture. In this instance the imagery is of the LORD fighting for Israel, if only Israel would let Him. Israel was to be obedient and be reasoned into repentance. Israel was to turn back to the LORD so that the LORD could intervene and help. It is in light of this understanding that Israel was said to let the LORD protect her.

The lion and the young lion roaring on his prey means that the

lions have already caught the prey and are about to kill and consume it. The young lion is strong, fearless and tireless. The older lion is experienced and stealthy. Combining the two of them together make a very potent adversary. When the multitude of shepherds is called forth against them, the lions will not be afraid of their voices. The singular pronoun "he" refers to the young lion which probably already has the prey between his teeth as he roars. He will just ignore all of them. The shepherd's duty is to protect the flock. The multitude of shepherds is a sizeable force to frighten any lion. But here the LORD said that the young lion will not be at all afraid of them even though he knows that they are there to stop him from getting his prey. In the same manner, the LORD of hosts i.e. heavenly armies will come down to fight for mount Zion and for the hill thereof.

Fighting for Israel is what the LORD has always been doing and wants to do. The LORD, however, could not protect Israel in her state of sin because to do so would encourage her to sin more and the LORD would be charged with breaking His promise as stated in the covenantal agreement. The agreement said that the LORD would curse Israel when she disobeyed Him. The LORD could not defend and fight for Zion when Zion disobeyed Him.

Flying birds protect their young from prey. By rising high up in the sky, they can see far and the protection begins even before the enemy comes near to the prey. Flying also implies swiftness. The LORD would not delay

to deliver Israel. He revealed that He would defend, deliver and preserve. He would fight for Israel against all her enemies. They would be no match for the LORD.

The LORD is more than able to protect and take care of Israel so there is no need for Israel to go to Egypt or any other Gentile nation for help.

How shall Israel turn from her sins? – 31:6-7

The only way out of every sin is repentance. Repentance has to be done according to God's prescription, not man's. A mere bad feeling in the heart is not repentance. Crying for sin committed without turning to the LORD is not genuine repentance when applied to God's people. Genuine repentance results in a restored relationship with God.

Israel was commanded by the LORD to return to Him. The reason was that the children of Israel had seriously revolted and rebelled against the LORD. The command from the LORD was for them to stop sinning, turn back from evil and return to holiness.

Backsliding is not, as some think, a small sin. Some may think that it is the norm for a believer to backslide, and therefore backsliding is fine and the LORD will not mind! This is far from the truth. The LORD always minds when His people stray from Him. Israel had strayed very far from Him. How could the LORD not mind?

The LORD wanted Israel to return. But how should Israel return to the LORD? A repentant nation will

firstly remove all idols of silver and gold. These may be precious but they are to be cast away i.e. no longer found in their homes. They can be melted down if they are purchased by the owner before his conversion. There is nothing wrong with melting the idol. The cost of destroying these idols is high. It is supposed to be high. The cost should not be a factor in the believer's decision.

**Can Israel's enemies stand?
– 31:8-9**

The LORD said that the enemies of Israel would be dealt with by Him. After Israel had returned to the LORD, then the LORD would deliver Israel from the wicked and powerful Assyrians. The Assyrians would fall with the sword. Based on 2 Kings 19:35, Assyria would be devoured by a sword wielded by an angel of the LORD (not a mighty and fierce man) after Israel return unto the LORD during the reign of king Hezekiah. The Assyrians would panic and flee from the sword of the LORD. Their young men who were supposed to be strong and courageous would be discomfited i.e. melted.

Then the Assyrians would pass over to their stronghold because of their fear. What kind of fear could cause such a great nation like the Assyrians to turn around and run? It was the fear of the wrath of the LORD. This would happen when God's people returned to the LORD. The princes of the Assyrians would be afraid of the ensign i.e. a banner or flag that identified a particular nation. The fire of the LORD was in Zion i.e. the presence of the LORD was in the

midst of Israel. Fire destroys everything that stands in its path. The furnace of the LORD was in Jerusalem. The furnace burned up anything that was placed in it. The two imageries, fire and furnace, when combined give a very informative description of the LORD. The LORD will make sure everything and everyone who stands against Him and His people be categorically and thoroughly removed. They will not be able to stand before the LORD.

PRACTICAL VALUE

The LORD is the only God!

When God's people go to Gentiles for help to do God's work, it is as good as admitting that the gods of the heathens are living and able to help. This is no small sin as this chapter of Isaiah reveals. The LORD will not allow such a transgression to stand. He will take action against His own people if they are the culprits.

It is unimaginable that God's people will turn to heathens who worship idols to help build God's kingdom. Yet this is a frequent phenomenon. Do we really mean what we say when we tell the world that the LORD is the only one living and true God! If we do, there are certain things that we just cannot do.

Hurt those who help!

Churches today that approach heathens for help to build God's kingdom will actually hurt the heathens. Israel did just that when she approached Egypt for help. The LORD had to punish both parties in the

process. Thus the actions of God's people have the potential to hurt others because of their troubled relationship with God.

The reasons are that God's people bear God's Name. Therefore they must reflect God's character by what they do. When they fail to do this, the LORD is misrepresented. The LORD will not allow such misrepresentation to continue. The more important reason is that the world needs to see Christ in the conduct of His people. When God's people sin, the world will remain in a state of spiritual darkness and are thus doomed to spend eternity in Hell when they die in their sins.

By their compromise with the heathens, they commit the sin of turning to their idols for help. God intervenes and chastises both parties.

Repentance before Help

Saying sorry alone is not repentance. It is frightening when the person does not genuinely repent of his sins. This was the case of Judas Iscariot. There are also those on earth who have been ordained for destruction. They are not repentant.

Israel must repent first before God can help. This sequence is not negotiable. God cannot vitiate this standard that He himself has set for all times.

After genuine repentance which is evidenced by the removal of idols and cessation of all sins, the LORD will be ready to help His people to victory. The enemies will be destroyed. Israel would be free from her enemies. This

has always been God's way of dealing with His people who are supposed to represent Him in this sin-sick earth! AMEN.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Isaiah 31:1-9

TUESDAY: Isaiah 31:1-9

WEDNESDAY: Isaiah 31:1-9

THURSDAY: Isaiah 31:1-9

FRIDAY: Isaiah 31:1-9.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between a Christian going to the bank and asking for help to start his Christian book room business compared to a local church asking the bank for a loan to do God's work such as overseas missions (assuming that banks give such loans)? Please explain.

2. If a church were to ask a heathen or a worldly organisation to give to its church building fund, will God

punish these people who help the church? Please explain.

3. When can we say that a local church is regarding or treating the heathens and the world as gods by the things that it does? Can you cite some examples?

4. Will you regard the confession of someone as genuine repentance if he were to make excuses for what he has done? What if he begins by saying that "he is not making excuses" and then continues to give reasons for his actions? Please explain your answer.

5. Do you believe that God can take care of your future and that of your loved ones who are also believers? Do you believe that there is no one in this world who can hurt you and your loved ones without His permission? If so, why are you so worried and so stressed by your job, family, service, etc?

6. Is the LORD pleased with you right at this moment? Did you keep a holy solemnity with the LORD? How was your worship of the LORD this morning? Please explain.

7. What lessons have you learnt from this chapter about God's Word and about yourself?
