

WHY MAKE THE ENEMY YOUR BACKBONE?

Today's Text: Isaiah Chaps 30-31

Extracts:

1. ***“Woe to the rebellious children,” says the Lord, “...who walk to go down to Egypt, and have not asked My advice, to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt. Therefore, the strength of Pharaoh shall be your shame, and the trust of Egypt shall be your humiliation” [Is. 30: 1, 2-3]***
2. ***Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many, and to the horsemen because they are very strong, but who do not look to the Holy One of Israel.... Now the Egyptians are men, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit. When the Lord stretches out His hand, both he who helps will fall, and he who is helped will fall down; they all will perish together [Is. 31: 1, 3]***

In African folklore, there is the story of a sheep and its lambs that strayed from the flock. They were attacked by a pack of wolves that killed the mother sheep. The lambs said to themselves, “Let’s flee to the lion for protection because the wolves fear him.” When they reached the lion, it was most keen to welcome them. The wolves in deed fled away but the lion ate up all the lambs! Lesson: never make your enemy your backbone!

The backbone or spine is what enables us to stand up and walk erect. Therefore, it is a very important part of our body. In our spiritual walk, we also need a backbone that can keep our spiritual bodies erect so that we can walk straight. Ordinarily, you would think that God plays that role. However, it is not all of us who think that way. Many of us would prefer to run to Egypt, that is, perceived human strongholds that can help them to fight off the attacks of another (and perhaps stronger) enemy. People did it in old times and people still do it today. Therefore, there must be something in it that makes it attractive, in spite of the dangers that God has kept pointing out to us.

In today’s lesson, we shall use the book of Isaiah [Chapters 30 and 31] to examine the theme, look at the benefits and dangers of running to our enemies in times of need and offer an easier and better way to deal with our fears and doubts.

1. Egypt is much more than a place!

Our story today is set in the time that the children of Israel faced imminent attack from the Assyrians. The bigger kingdom of Israel had been defeated and its pride stripped and taken to Babylon. Now, the remaining kingdom of Judah was threatened. Although its capital, Jerusalem, wherein lay Mount Zion, was dear to God and He had promised to protect it, the people were too scared to trust Him. Instead, they developed human schemes to save themselves from the ferocious enemy. One such plan was to escape to Egypt and seek the Pharaoh's help against the Assyrians.

But were the Egyptians friends of the kingdom of Judah? Not at all! We remember that on account of these people of God, Egypt had been virtually destroyed through ten plagues, including the loss of the firstborn son of every household. The cream of its army was destroyed in the Red Sea when they pursued after the children of Israel that God had miraculously rescued from Pharaoh's oppression [**Ex. 14: 13-31**]. From those days to the time of our story, the relationships between the two peoples had been far from friendly. So, why would the people of Israel prefer to seek the help of an enemy that would want them destroyed instead of trusting the Lord their God who had delivered them from numerous dangers over the centuries?

Geographically speaking, Egypt is in the northeastern region of Africa through which flows the River Nile, the longest river in the world. It is all deserts but that famous river sustains it. This place has favoured the people of God. For example, it was there that the nation of Israel was nurtured from a small family of 70 people (that left Canaan with Jacob to join Joseph [**Gen. 46: 26-27**]) to a nation of almost three million at the time of the Exodus, 430 years later [**Num. 1: 2-3, 45-46**]. It was an open society that allowed former slaves like Joseph and sons of slaves like Moses to rise to positions of political prominence. Its economic prosperity attracted people from all over the then known world. In the New Testament, it was to Egypt that the infant Jesus went for protection when Herod sought to kill Him [**Matt. 2: 13-15**]. Therefore, Egypt had its attractions, to the extent that even after the children of Israel had been taken out of there, Egypt could not be taken out of them. They still lusted after its foods and lifestyle [**Num. 11: 4-6**].

Nevertheless, Egypt was an evil empire, sustained by the devilish powers of magic and sorcery [**Ex. 7: 8-13**]. In spite of that, it could not defend itself against Moses who exercised the power of God to rescue from slavery the children of Israel. At the time of Isaiah, the empire had become a relic of its old self [**Is. 36: 6; Ezek. 29: 15**] that would not be able to defend itself against any external invasion [**Is. 19: 2-3**]. How could the people of Judah have preferred such a weak enemy to protect them against the Assyrians?

Does that not sound familiar to you? Many believers are asking for God's blessings in one breath and relying on ungodly sources for their sustenance in

another breath. We compromise our integrity so as to please our bosses who are not God-fearing or to obtain favours that we do not deserve. We befriend our enemies so as to get what we want, not necessarily out of satisfying God's commandment to love our enemies! If we have a choice between God's word to wait and the world's pressure to keep moving, we opt for the latter. Therefore, Egypt is not as far away from us as we may think.

There are certain places that you go to today that look like Egypt. For example, do you read your Horoscope in your daily newspapers to take guidance for each day's expectations or conduct? Do you relish some annual or seasonal festivals and cultural events that are based on satanic practices and beliefs? Do you first go to the experts on pressing issues in your life before or without asking God? Are you living in an immoral relationship, even though it is legally acceptable? If your answer to each of those questions is "yes," then you are in Egypt! You are the person that God is speaking to through the prophet Isaiah.

2. Why your enemy cannot be a strong backbone

From today's text, the following reasons can explain why your enemies cannot serve as your backbone:

a) *They are evil doers and workers of iniquity*

God promised the children of Israel that He "will arise against the house of evildoers, and against the help of those that work iniquity" [Is. 31: 2]. It does not make commonsense to seek help from somebody who is evil-minded because s(he) will wind up making you worse off. For example, the Jewish leaders during Christ's earthly ministry doubted His miracles because they held (erroneously) that He was using the powers of Beelzebub [Matt. 12: 24]. In one instance, after He had healed the man born blind, the Pharisees said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" [Jn 9: 16]. In other words, good cannot come out of evil. So, those who go to Egypt without God's permission are rebellious children that "add sin to sin" [Is. 30: 1]. If your enemy that you run to in time of trouble is evil, s(he) cannot help you!

b) *They are flesh, not God*

The Egyptians only had soldiers and horses, just like the Assyrians. So, through Isaiah, God reminded the people of Israel, "The Egyptians are men, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit. [Is. 31: 3]. What "assuring" news of failure! Yet, we keep believing and behaving as if human solutions are superior to God's.

See what happened to David when he fled to the protection of the Philistine king Achish of Gath to escape from Saul [1 Sam. 27: 6]. In

deed, David received temporary relief in that Saul stopped pursuing him who then settled down in Ziklag, part of Philistine territory. However, when David went to pay the price of his protection, by offering his services to fight for the Philistines, Israel's sworn enemy, against Israel, the Amalekites, another enemy, attacked Ziklag and made away with the wives, children and goods of David and his troops [1 Sam. 30: 1-31]. Neither the Philistines that David had run to nor David himself could restore his losses except by the mercy and power of God.

c) *Your enemies cannot even help themselves!*

God also warned the children of Israel of the consequences of running to Egypt for help when He said, "When the Lord stretches out His hand, *both he who helps will fall, and he who is helped will fall down; they all will perish together*" [Is. 31: 3]. The strength of Egypt is a mere shadow that can only produce shame and humiliation [Is. 30: 2, 3]. A shadow is produced by light which can only reflect the object on which it is focussed. In other words, if your shadow is ugly, you cannot blame the light!

God's light of truth revealed the reality of Egypt as a place that could not help itself. So, why would Israel run there for help? Why should you buy a lottery ticket from a vendor who is in rags? Does s(he) not want to be a millionaire? Why should you go to a marriage counsellor who is thrice divorced to help to save your first and only marriage? Why should you follow a religious leader who is not even sure of his salvation? That is why God has warned, "The Egyptians shall help in vain and to no purpose" [Is. 30: 7]. They cannot help you because they cannot help themselves either!

3. Only God can be your reliable backbone!

In an earlier chapter, God said through the prophet Isaiah [Is. 10: 3-4]:

What will you do in the day of punishment, and in the desolation which will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your glory? Without Me they shall bow down among the prisoners, and they shall fall among the slain.

Here is a sample of what God can do for the impatient, those who find it so difficult to wait for and upon God:

a) *God is patient and merciful*

God has promised, "The Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to you, ... that He may have mercy on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; *blessed are all those who wait for Him*" [Is. 30: 18]. This suggests that no

matter the mistakes that you may have made before now, walking in human wisdom and fumbling along the way, God will forgive you if you ask Him [1 Jn 1: 9]. God's justice is based on His mercy, not our works or effort. Therefore, there is hope!

b) *Only God knows the true direction!*

In most cases, we do not even know the right thing to do or the right way to go or the right time to move. In His infinite mercy, God takes care of our circumstances because, as He has promised, "Your ears will hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it.' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left" [Is. 30: 21]. What can be more reassuring than that?

c) *Abundant blessings await the waiters!*

Once we learn to move according to His word, not according to our fears, then God will release His blessings. For example, "He will give the rain for your seed... and bread for the increase of the earth; it will be fat and plentiful" [Is. 30: 23]. It is only those who do not know what they want that find it hard to wait!

d) *Only God can be your faithful defender!*

Remember you now have enemies on both sides- the one you are running away from and the one you are running to. You may succeed with one and fail with the other. In most cases, you may fall both ways. In the illustration from African folklore, the lambs that escaped the wolves became prey to the lion! It is only with God that your protection can be assured.

God assured the children of Israel that "Assyria will be beaten down" [Is. 30: 31] and "Assyria shall fall by a sword *not of man*" [Is. 31: 8]. Like a lion roaring over its prey or birds flying about, so did God promise to defend His children against all their enemies [Is. 31: 4-5]. For example, without throwing a single sword, Jehosaphat won a decisive battle over the armies of several nations because the battle was the Lord's [2 Chron. 20: 1-30]. When our ways please God, He will make even our enemies to be at peace with us [Prov. 16: 7]. That was why after David had been delivered from the hands of all his enemies, he sang, "The Lord my God will enlighten my darkness, for by You I can run against a troop. By my God I can leap over a wall" [Ps. 18: 28-29].

4. Conclusion: Make Jesus your backbone!

We cannot avoid worry or anxiety because we live in a world system that is controlled by our greatest enemy, the devil, and “all those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” [2 Tim. 3: 12]. The devil is the enemy on both sides. He is the accuser of the brethren who is all over the place to make war on believers who “keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” [Rev. 12: 17]. Satan will do over time to remind us of our failures and why God’s promises for us are wishful and could never be fulfilled. If he could show Jesus visions of worldly kingdoms during the temptation [Lk 4: 5], why do you think that he cannot deceive us with dreams and visions so as to misdirect our walk with God? That is why you need to ask God for the Spirit of discernment so that you do not run for help from Satan or his agents who are already condemned.

Happily, Jesus has assured us to be of good cheer because in Him we have peace. He has overcome the world that can only give us tribulation [Jn 16: 32]. Therefore, you can make Him your backbone by:

- ❑ *Grafting your spiritual branch into the vine of Christ because without Him, “you can do nothing” [Jn 15: 1-5];*
- ❑ *Looking up to and following Jesus who is the author and finisher of your faith [Heb. 12: 2];*
- ❑ *Receiving the comfort that He alone guaranties in times of tribulation [2 Cor. 1: 3-4];*
- ❑ *Enjoying life in abundance which only the Good Shepherd can give to His flock [Jn 10: 10]; and*
- ❑ *Living in the assurance of eternal life that He guaranties those who believe in Him [Jn 3: 15]*

Next time you are pursued by fear or anxiety, don’t run to your enemy, Satan, or his human agents. Run to Jesus!