

TO TRUST OR NOT TO TRUST, THAT IS THE QUESTION GOD ANSWERS

Isaiah 31

Once upon a time there was a little boy who begged his daddy for a chemistry set for his birthday. The father went through all the stores and found just exactly the right one for his son. He wrapped it up in festive paper and gave it to him on his birthday. After the ice cream and cake were consumed the little boy tore the wrappings off his present and his eyes lit up with joy when he saw the chemistry set. He immediately set about trying to use it. His father, who was a professional chemist, offered to give the boy guidance and help. But the boy loudly insisted he could do it himself and set about working on projects as the father watched from afar, sad that his son wasn't following the directions carefully. Several hours later, after much frustration, the boy made a terrible mistake and everything he had been working on exploded with a loud noise and went up in smoke.

You and I can listen to that story and wonder at the boy's stubbornness and rebelliousness to have refused the help of his father who knew exactly how to guide his son to get the most enjoyment and satisfaction out of his new chemistry set. But on a larger scale don't God's children often treat Him that way? We will find as we begin chapter 31 of Isaiah that such is the case with the people of Judah and their relationship with God. They were setting about planning how to protect their homeland from invasion, but were determined to do it their way, without any assistance from their heavenly Father.

Isaiah 31 continues right where we left off in Isaiah 30. We begin by seeing again that Israel was going to go right ahead and do things their own way, ignoring what God wanted them to do. The end result was that both Israel and Assyria (who God was using to punish Israel) would both suffer heavy casualties.

We find three themes in chapter 31: first, God warns, then God delivers, and finally God calls His children back to Himself. Let's look closer at each section.

God's warning. Isaiah 31:1-3, NAS:

1 Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, And rely on horses, and trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong, but they do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the LORD!

2 Yet He also is wise and will bring disaster, and does not retract His words, but will arise against the house of evildoers, and against the help of the workers of iniquity.

3 Now the Egyptians are men, and not God, and their horses are flesh and not spirit; so the LORD will stretch out His hand, and he who helps (Egypt) will

stumble and he who is helped (Judah)¹ will fall, and all of them will come to an end together.

Once again we hear God's prohibition and warning against turning to Egypt for help in defeating the Assyrians. When we compare this verse to David's words in Psalm 20:7(NIV), "*Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God . . .*" we see that the Israelites did the exact opposite! They did not ask the Lord God Jehovah, their mighty Protector and Guide, for help. They did not seek the Lord. How tragic. And how tragic that today so many who think they are Christians also do not seek the Lord on a regular basis for daily guidance and assistance.

But the people of Judah were bound and determined to rely on Egyptian horses and chariots; they turned to Egypt rather than to God for help and by doing so they violated God's specific command in Deuteronomy 17:16. Since God does not go back on His words, He would judge the nation for her disobedience. **The Egyptians** could not help Judah (Isaiah 30:3, 5, 7) for they were a weak nation. **Only God could ultimately protect them from their enemies. After all that God had done for His people, they turned away from Him and sought the help from a weak nation like Egypt.**² If Judah persisted in seeking an alliance with Egypt, God told Judah through the prophet Isaiah that both countries would meet disaster.³

God promises deliverance. Isaiah 31:4, 5, NAS:

4 For thus says the LORD to me, "As the lion or the young lion growls over his prey, against which a band of shepherds is called out, will not be terrified at their voice, nor disturbed at their noise, so will the LORD of hosts come down to wage war on Mount Zion and on its hill."

5 Like flying birds [eagles]⁴ so the LORD of hosts will protect Jerusalem. He will protect and deliver it; He will pass over and rescue it.

God likens Himself here to a mighty lion and then to an eagle. Why should the Lord fear the Assyrians? Does a lion fear a flock of sheep and their shepherds? Or do eagles fear as they hover over their young in the nest? God will pounce on Assyria like a lion and swoop down like an eagle, and that will be the end! As we will see later, in one night, the Assyrian army was wiped out by God's supernatural intervention (Isaiah 37:36).

God calls His children. Isaiah 31:6-9, NAS:

6 Return to Him from whom you have deeply defected, O sons of Israel.

7 For in that day every man [woman] will cast away his [her] silver idols and his

¹ Parentheses added.

² Wiersbe, W. W. 1996, c1992. *Be Comforted. An Old Testament Study*. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

³ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. 1983- c1985. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

⁴ Brackets added.

[her] *gold idols, which your hands have made as a sin.*⁵

8 And the Assyrian will fall by a sword not of man, and a sword not of man will devour him. So he will not escape the sword, and his young men will become forced laborers.

9 "And his rock will pass away because of panic, and his princes will be terrified at the standard," declares the LORD, whose fire is in Zion and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.

We see in verse 6 that God calls His children to repent and put away their idolatry. God, through Isaiah, also assures them that at the last minute the Assyrians will be defeated, but not by any human means, *not by sword of man*. No human army will shatter this enemy but God Himself would take care of the downfall of the Assyrian army. In verse 9 the term **his rock** indicates the strength of Assyria hightailing it out of Palestine, running all the way back to Nineveh. The **standard**, also mentioned in verse 9, refers to the Jewish battle standard, which doubtless had the name of Jehovah on it. Both in Isaiah's near future and in the distant future, Jerusalem would be God's headquarters for bringing judgment on foreign nations. God Himself is the fire, waiting for all the enemies who attack Jerusalem.

Isaiah Chapter 32

As we come to chapter 32, we see immediately in the first verse that the theme has again changed to the end times, to the Millennium. This chapter also has three sections: The deliverance and rule of the righteous King, a call to the women, and more promises regarding the Millennium.

The deliverance and rule of the righteous King. Isaiah 32:1-8, NAS:

*1 Behold, a king (Jesus) will reign righteously, and princes (saints) will rule justly.*⁶

2 And each will be like a refuge from the wind, and a shelter from the storm, like streams of water in a dry country, like the shade of a huge rock in a parched land.

3 Then the eyes of those who see will not be blinded, and the ears of those who hear will listen.

4 And the mind of the hasty will discern the truth, and the tongue of the stammerers will hasten to speak clearly.

5 No longer will the fool be called noble, or the rogue be spoken of as generous.

6 For a fool speaks nonsense, and his heart inclines toward wickedness, to practice ungodliness and to speak error against the LORD, to keep the hungry person unsatisfied and to withhold drink from the thirsty.

7 As for a rogue, his weapons are evil; He devises wicked schemes to destroy the afflicted with slander, even though the needy one speaks what is right.

⁵ Parentheses added.

⁶ Parentheses added.

8 But the noble man devises noble plans; and by noble plans he stands.

The destruction of the Assyrian army points prophetically to the final world conflict, which will usher in **the rule of Christ, the perfect King** of Israel.

In the Millennium, the **King**, that is Jesus Christ, will reign in righteousness (Isaiah 11:1-5; Jeremiah 23:5). There will be **rulers** under Him; the Christians of previous ages who had died will reign during this time (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 5:10; 20:6; 22:5), and they will govern with perfect love and justice. In fact, every person entering the Millennium will be a believer and each one will be protective of others like “a shelter from the wind” and will refresh others like streams of water in a dry country and a **rock** that gives shade from the desert heat as we read in verse 1.

Christ’s kingdom will fulfill God’s ideal of a holy commonwealth; that is it will be made up of a collection or group of nations who are all loyal to the King, the Lord Jesus. This kingdom will administer perfect righteousness throughout the earth. God’s **King** will provide complete shelter to all who seek refuge in Him, and He will satisfy their thirsty souls with living water. He will bestow upon believers the ability to see clearly and to hear accurately so that they will understand the truth of God. God will also give believers **an understanding heart** and they will give a clear testimony resulting from the complete transformation of their new birth.

Under Jesus’ government and influence, men and women will no longer be deceived by the prince of lies, Satan, because he’ll be locked in the pit for a thousand years, but they will clearly see the difference between moral wisdom and foolishness, appreciating how foolish a person is who seeks a life without Christ. God’s standards of judgment will at last become mankind’s standards.⁷

A call to the women. Isaiah 32:9-14, NAS:

9 Rise up you women who are at ease, and hear my voice; give ear to my word, you complacent⁸ daughters.

10 Within a year and a few days, you will be troubled, O complacent daughters; for the vintage is ended, and the fruit gathering will not come.

11 Tremble, you women who are at ease; be troubled, you complacent daughters; strip, undress, and put sackcloth on your waist,

12 Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine,

13 For the land of my people in which thorns and briars shall come up; yea, for all the joyful houses, and for the jubilant city.

14 Because the palace has been abandoned, the populated city forsaken. Hill and watch-tower have become caves forever, a delight for wild donkeys, a pasture for flocks;

⁷ ² Pfeiffer, C. F. 1962. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: Old Testament*. Moody Press: Chicago.

⁸ ³ Feeling or showing an often excessive or unjustified satisfaction and pleasure in one’s status, possessions, or attainments.

You may be asking, “*Why does God pick on women here?*” Well, He’s not. Instead He’s being an “*equal opportunity*” Judge. You see, we have sayings in our culture about the hidden influence of women on men; such as, “*Behind every great man is a woman,*” or, “*The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.*” God is acknowledging here that wives have great influence on their husbands and that mothers also have a great deal of impact on the direction of the culture by what they teach their children. Merrill Unger puts it this way:

“The spiritual state of the women is a sensitive barometer of the moral state of any nation.”⁹

So we see here that behind the selfish rulers of Judah, and influencing them for evil, were the “*aristocratic women*” of Jerusalem, who were complacent and self-confident in a time of grave national crisis (see Isaiah 3:16-26; Amos 4:1-3; 6:1-6). In verse 10 Isaiah is warning them that in a little more than a year the land and the cities would be desolate. This actually took place in 701 B.C. when Sennacherib’s Assyrian army invaded Judah and devastated the land. The Jews confined in Jerusalem were greatly concerned about future harvests, and in verses 12 and 13 Isaiah had a word for them (see Isaiah 37:30-31 as well). But before the siege ended and God delivered Jerusalem, these worldly women in Jerusalem had to sacrifice not only their luxuries, but also their necessities.¹⁰

More promises about the Millennium. Isaiah 32:15-20:

15 Until the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fertile field and the fertile field is considered as a forest.

16 Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness will abide in the fertile field.

17 And the work of righteousness will be peace, and the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever.

18 Then my people will live in a peaceful habitation, and in secure dwellings and in undisturbed resting places;

19 And it will hail when the forest comes down, and the city will be utterly laid low.¹¹

20 How blessed will you be, you who sow beside all waters, who let out freely the ox and the donkey.

Isaiah returns to his description of the messianic kingdom and emphasizes the restoration of peace and prosperity.¹² None of these changes took place after the deliverance of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. or when the remnant returned to Jerusalem from Babylon in 536 B.C., so we must assign these prophecies to the future kingdom during the Millennium.

⁹ Unger, M. F. 1967. *Unger’s Bible Handbook*, p. 325. Moody Press: Chicago.

¹⁰ Wiersbe, W. W. 1996, c1992. *Be Comforted. An Old Testament Study*. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

¹¹ The people needed to learn humility before these predicted ideal conditions can become reality.

¹² Just as with the beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-13, Isaiah spoke of how those who live in the Millennium will be blessed.

Because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, there will be peace and plenty because there will be righteousness in the land (Joel 2:28–32; Zechariah 12:10; Ezekiel 36:26–27). The land will be so productive that the desert will be like a fruitful field and the fruitful field like a forest. The people will fear no enemies, and their work will be rewarded.

Judah could have enjoyed safety, quietness, and assurance had they trusted wholly in the Lord and not turned to Egypt for help (Isaiah 30:15–18; 32:17–18). **Righteousness** is the key word in verse 17, for there can be no true peace without a right relationship with God (Romans 5:1; James 3:13–17). When sinners trust Christ and receive the gift of righteousness, then they can have peace in their hearts and peace with one another.¹³

Isaiah 33

Jerusalem will be delivered (Isaiah 33:1–24)

This is the sixth and final “*woe*” in this section (Isaiah 28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1), and it is directed against Sennacherib because of his treachery against Judah. In unbelief and a lack of trust in God King Hezekiah had tried to “*buy off*” the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:13–15); but Sennacherib had broken the agreement and invaded Judah anyway. He was a thief, a traitor, and a tyrant; and God promised to judge him. Sennacherib had destroyed others, so he would be destroyed. He had dealt treacherously with nations, so they would deal treacherously with him. God is not mocked; sinners reap what they have sown (Galatians 6:7).

Isaiah 33:1-4 NAS:

1 Woe to you, O destroyer, While you were not destroyed; And he who is treacherous, while others did not deal treacherously with him. As soon as you finish destroying, you will be destroyed; As soon as you cease to deal treacherously, others will deal treacherously with you.

2 O Lord, be gracious to us; we have waited for You. Be their strength every morning, Our salvation also in the time of distress.

3 At the sound of the tumult peoples flee; At the lifting up of Yourself nations disperse.

4 Your spoil is gathered as the caterpillar gathers; As locusts rushing about men rush about on it.

Isaiah 33:2 is the prayer of the godly remnant when Jerusalem was surrounded by the Assyrian army. Isaiah had promised that **God would be gracious to them if they would**

¹³ Wiersbe, W. W. 1996, c1992. Be comforted. An Old Testament study. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

only trust Him (30:18–19), so a few devout people turned His promise into prayer. God spared Jerusalem for David’s sake (37:35) and because a believing remnant trusted God and prayed.¹⁴ **Never underestimate the power of a praying minority.** In fact in 2 Chronicles 7:13,14 NAS, God says:

*13 “If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people,
14 and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

Assyria was proud of her power and the spoils she had gathered in battle. The Assyrian army swept through the land like devouring locusts, but that would change. The day would come when Judah would strip the dead Assyrian army and Sennacherib would be assassinated in the temple of the god he claimed was stronger than Jehovah (Isaiah 33: 36–38).¹⁵

Isaiah 32:5,6 NAS:

5 The Lord is exalted, for He dwells on high; He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness.

6 And He will be the stability of your times, A wealth of salvation, wisdom and knowledge; The fear of the Lord is his treasure.

The Lord was exalted in the defeat of Assyria, for no human wisdom or power could have done what He did.

We must remember that nations and individuals can have stability in uncertain times only when they trust God and seek His wisdom and glory.

King Hezekiah did a foolish thing when he took the temple treasures and tried to bribe Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:13–16), but God forgave him and reminded him that:

“the fear of the Lord is his (your)¹⁶ treasure”.

Unbelief looks to human resources for help, but faith looks to God.

Isaiah 33:7-9 NAS:

7 Behold, their brave men cry in the streets, The ambassadors of peace

¹⁴ God promised to continue Daniel’s line on his throne (2 Samuel 7:16; 9:6,7; 11:1; 55:3).

¹⁵ Wiersbe, W. W. 1996, c1992. Be comforted. An Old Testament study. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

¹⁶ Parentheses added.

weep bitterly.

8 The highways are desolate, the traveler has ceased, He has broken the covenant, he has despised the cities, He has no regard for man.

9 The land mourns and pines away, Lebanon is shamed and withers;

Sharon is like a desert plain, And Bashan and Carmel lose their foliage.

During the time of the Assyrian invasion, the situation in Judah was grim. Judah's bravest soldiers wept when they saw one city after another fall to the enemy. The official Jewish envoys wept because their negotiations accomplished nothing. The roads were dangerous, the fields and orchards were ruined, and there was no way of escape.¹⁷

Isaiah 33:10-14 NAS:

10 "Now I will arise," says the Lord, "Now I will be exalted, now I will be lifted up.

11 "You have conceived chaff, you will give birth to stubble; My breath will consume you like a fire.

12 "The peoples will be burned to lime, Like cut thorns which are burned in the fire.

13 "You who are far away, hear what I have done; And you who are near, acknowledge My might."

14 Sinners in Zion are terrified; Trembling has seized the godless. "Who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning?"

Isaiah uses several images to describe God's judgment on the Assyrians. The Assyrians were pregnant with all sorts of plans to conquer Jerusalem; but they would give birth to chaff and straw, and their plans would amount to nothing. Their army was panting to attack, but their hot breath would only become a fire that would destroy them like dead bones or cut bushes. God is long-suffering with His enemies; but when He decides to judge, He does a thorough job.

The account of the amazing deliverance of Jerusalem was told far and wide, and the Gentile nations had to acknowledge the greatness of Jehovah, the God of the Jews. We witness to a lost world when we trust Him and let Him have His way.

The miracle deliverance of Jerusalem not only brought glory to God among the Gentiles, but it also brought fear and conviction to the Jews. God does not deliver us so that we are free to return to our sins. "*But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared*" according to Psalm 130:4. When Jews in Jerusalem saw 185,000 Assyrian soldiers slain by God in one night, they realized that the God of Israel was "*a consuming fire*" (Isaiah 10:17; Hebrews 12:29).

Isaiah 33:15,16 NAS:

¹⁷ Wiersbe, W. W. 1996, c1992. Be comforted. An Old Testament study. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

15 He who walks righteously and speaks with sincerity, He who rejects unjust gain And shakes his hands so that they hold no bribe; He who stops his ears from hearing about bloodshed And shuts his eyes from looking upon evil;

16 He will dwell on the heights, His refuge will be the impregnable rock; His bread will be given him, His water will be sure.

Isaiah 33:15 describes the kind of person God will accept and bless. By ourselves, we cannot achieve these qualities of character; they come only as we trust Jesus Christ and grow in grace. Many religious people in Jerusalem had hearts far from God because their religion was only a matter of external ceremonies (Isaiah 29:13). Isaiah hoped that the miracle deliverance of the city would bring these people to a place of true devotion to the Lord. It is only as we walk with the Lord that we have real security and satisfaction.¹⁸

Isaiah 33:17-24 NAS:

17 Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; They will behold a far-distant land.

18 Your heart will meditate on terror: “Where is he who counts? Where is he who weighs? Where is he who counts the towers?”

19 You will no longer see a fierce people, A people of unintelligible speech which no one comprehends, Of a stammering tongue which no one understands.

20 Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts; Your eyes will see Jerusalem, an undisturbed habitation, A tent which will not be folded; Its stakes will never be pulled up, Nor any of its cords be torn apart.

*21 But there the majestic One, the Lord, will be for us A place of rivers and wide canals **ON WHICH NO BOAT WITH OARS WILL GO, And on which NO MIGHTY SHIP WILL PASS—***

22 For the Lord is our judge, The Lord is our lawgiver, The Lord is our king; He will save us—

23 Your tackle hangs slack; It cannot hold the base of its mast firmly, Nor spread out the sail. Then the prey of an abundant spoil will be divided; The lame will take the plunder.

24 And no resident will say, “I am sick”; The people who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity.

In these verses Isaiah looks beyond the current situation to the end times and sees Jerusalem ruled by King Messiah (Jesus Christ). God’s victory over Assyria was but a “dress rehearsal” for His victory over the whole world system that will one day assemble to destroy the holy city (Zechariah 14:1–9). When our Lord was ministering on earth, the unbelieving Jews said, “There is no beauty that we should desire Him” (Isaiah 53:2). But when they see Him and believe, then they will perceive His great beauty (Zechariah 12:3–13:1; Psalm 45).

¹⁸ Wiersbe, W. W. 1996, c1992. Be comforted. An Old Testament study. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

In contrast to the ordeal of the Assyrian siege, the Jews in the messianic kingdom will experience no terror, see no arrogant military officers, and hear no foreign speech. Jerusalem will be like a tent that will not be moved (Isaiah 54:1–3), pitched by a broad river that will never carry the vessels of invading armies. Jerusalem is one of the few great cities of antiquity that was not built near a river, but that will change during the millennial kingdom (Ezekiel. 47). Of course, the river symbolizes the peace that the Lord gives to His people (Isaiah 48:18; 66:12; Psalm 46:4).

In verse 23 Isaiah states that Jerusalem was a ship that almost sank, but the Lord brought it through the storm (Psalm 107:23–32); and the weakest of the Jews was able to take spoils from the dead army. “*All the functions of government—judicial, legislative, and executive—will be centered in the Messianic King.*”¹⁹ No wonder His people can say, “*He will save us!*”

Both sickness and sin will be absent from the holy city. Messiah will be their Redeemer and Savior, and the nation “*will be forgiven their iniquity*”. In Isaiah’s day, the Jews were a “*sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity*” (Isaiah 1:4), **just as lost sinners are today; but when they see Jesus and trust Him, their sins will be washed away.** If you have never accepted the loving invitation of Isaiah 1:18, “*Come now, and let us reason together,*” Says the Lord, “*Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool,*” you can do so right now and we’ll give you a moment of quiet to speak to Jesus yourself.

Or perhaps you have received Christ as Savior, but are not trusting Him fully to guide your life and give you wisdom in all circumstances. You too may want to speak to Jesus in the quietness of the moment to tell Him you want to trust Him more.

¹⁹ Isaiah 33:22 in *The New Scofield Reference Bible*.