

# GOD'S WARNING TO THOSE WHO TRUST IN MEN INSTEAD OF GOD

## ISAIAH 31:01–09

### *Introduction*

Misplacing our trust — whether in an individual, a religion, technology, a machine or even directions — can have disastrous consequences. It is every person's responsibility to find out who is or is not trustworthy before taking any major step or making an important decision. Why? Because failure to do so can result in any number of problems:

- => being shamed or embarrassed
- => getting fired
- => losing your home
- => getting sick or injured
- => losing your life or causing the death of someone else
- => failing a test
- => going bankrupt
- => hurting your family
- => being conned or deceived

The list could go on. But simply put, *the object of our trust* must be trustworthy for our efforts to achieve something or to be successful.

True believers know that only the Lord can meet the permanent longing and needs of the human heart. Thus it is the Lord who should be trusted, not men. And because the Lord is totally trustworthy. He is the One who should be honoured and respected, trusted and obeyed.

The present Scripture is a strong warning to both the leaders and people of Isaiah's day. They all professed to know the LORD, but they ignored Him and His Word. They refused to do what He said. Instead of trusting God, they placed their trust in Egypt (the world). But sadly, the world will eventually fail all who put their trust in it.

This present warning is the fourth *woe* issued by the *LORD* to His people. Like the previous warning, this *woe* is also directed at the pro-Egyptian group within Judah. Remember that some of the leaders were seeking to form an alliance with Egypt in order to withstand the Assyrian threat that lay just over the horizon. But the Lord had warned the leaders against forming a partnership with the unbelieving, wicked Egyptians. Nevertheless, in defiance of God these leaders disregarded the Lord and His warning. They formed the alliance and placed their trust in Egypt, that is, the world. This is, *Woe — A Strong Warning to Those Who Ignore God and Place Their Trust in Egypt (the World): A Message to All Who Foolishly Misplace Their Trust*.

- I. God's warning to those who ignore Him and trust the military power of Egypt (a symbol of the world): a picture of trusting men instead of God (vv. 31:1-5).
  - II. God's invitation to those who ignore and rebel against Him: a call to repent, turn back to Him (vv. 31:6-9).
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## **I. *Isaiah 31:01–05 God's Warning to Those who Ignore Him***

God gave a strong warning — a woe — to those who ignored Him and trusted the military power of Egypt. Remember that Egypt is a symbol of the world, of ungodly and wicked societies who totally ignore the only living and true God.

King Hezekiah of Judah and his people were facing a terrible crisis. The Assyrians, the most powerful nation on earth at that time, were a cruel people who sought world domination. Their war machine was unstoppable, and Judah lay right in its path. Isaiah warned Hezekiah and the leadership against forming alliances with surrounding nations to withstand the Assyrian forces. Instead of trusting the *arm of the flesh*, the power of other nations, they needed to trust the *LORD*. But a strong pro-Egyptian party in Judah wanted to form an alliance with Egypt, and they were successful. They formed an alliance with Egypt in an attempt to discourage the Assyrians from attacking either nation. What follows is a clear picture of people placing a far greater value in the wisdom and power of men instead of in the *LORD*, the only living and true God.

1. God issued a twofold indictment against the people of Judah, in particular against King Hezekiah and the pro-Egyptian party (v. 1). First, they did not trust Him, the Holy One. He alone is holy, *set apart and above* His creation, and He alone is righteous. Sitting above the universe, He knows exactly what should be done, and He has the power to deliver those who trust Him *through* the crises of life. Judah's only hope of deliverance from the Assyrian threat was the Lord, but the Jews totally ignored Him.

Second, the people of Judah did not seek the Lord's help. Instead, they looked to Egypt and relied on its military power to help them. Although Egypt was a fading power on the world scene, it apparently still had a large, well-equipped army, with a large cavalry and a huge number of chariots (1 Kng 10:28-29). Based solely on human observation, an alliance with Egypt seemed to be the only possible way to secure Judah against the Assyrian threat. But this was in direct violation of the Lord's Word. God's people were not to place their trust in horses or in Egypt, that is, in military power or in the wicked, godless nations of the world. But sadly, this was exactly what King Hezekiah and the people of Judah did. Ignoring the Lord, they sought the help of Egypt. Instead of placing their confidence in the Lord, they trusted the armies and weapons of unbelievers and the swiftness of their own horses.

2. God issued a strong warning to Judah, in particular to the pro-Egyptian politicians who ignored the *LORD* and sought the help of Egypt (vv. 2-5). His warning was fivefold.
  - a) The *LORD* would prove that His wisdom far exceeds the wisdom of politicians. The *LORD* is the One who is truly wise and therefore should be trusted (v. 2). The leaders of Judah felt that the only wise course was to seek an alliance with Egypt, but in His wisdom the *LORD* knew better. And through His prophet Isaiah, God warned the leaders not to seek the help of Egypt (30:1-14). Just as Isaiah predicted, if they sought

an alliance with Egypt, disaster would come. The Lord's wise prediction would be fulfilled.

- b) The Lord would keep His Word: all evildoers would be judged (v. 2). As He had warned centuries earlier through Moses, so it would now be: all who disobeyed His Holy Word would face His judgment.
- c) The *LORD* would destroy the wicked in Judah and all their allies (vv. 2-4). The armies of both Judah and Egypt were mere men. Their horses were mere flesh, and their chariots mere machines. When the *LORD* stretched out His hand of judgment, He would utterly destroy both men and their weapons. Like a great lion, the *LORD* is able to consume the prey (v. 4). Even though a band of shepherds oppose the lion, shouting and making as much noise as possible, they cannot frighten the lion.
- d) The *LORD* would return to Mount Zion (Jerusalem) to fight His enemies when they gathered to destroy His people (v. 4<sup>b</sup>). All who opposed the LORD and His people would face the LORD Himself and His hand of judgment. This is a direct reference to the Assyrian army, which would soon set up a siege against Jerusalem (Isa. 36:1-37:38).
- e) Like birds who hover overhead, the LORD would shield and deliver Jerusalem (v. 5). He would save a remnant of believers through whom he would fulfil all His promises. It was necessary to save a remnant through whom He could send the Saviour and His Word to the world.

**Thought 1.** As we carry out our tasks throughout the day, how many of us ignore God, trusting only human power — our own abilities, wisdom and technology — to accomplish the tasks? Think about these questions for a moment:

- => How many CEO's fail to base their business practices on the principles laid down in God's Word?
- => How many managers ignore the Lord's instructions about how to lead people?
- => How many doctors, nurses and medical technicians depend only upon their own abilities, wisdom and the latest technology to heal?
- => How many politicians and government officials carry out their daily tasks without seeking God's will in the decisions they make?
- => How many of us act as if our fate is in our own hands?

Obviously, we are to use what wisdom we have and the technology we can develop to lessen the impact of nature's catastrophic forces as well as the diseases and the aging process of the human body. In fact, when God created man and woman, He instructed them to multiply on the earth and to subdue it, which implies that we are to control all the disorderly forces of nature as much as possible (Gen. 1:28; Psa. 8:6; Heb. 2:8).

But as we go about our daily tasks on earth, we are to acknowledge the Lord and trust Him. Since the Lord created the universe and gave us the intelligence and abilities we

have, we are to acknowledge Him as the Giver of life and of every good and perfect gift. In addition, situations arise in life that we cannot handle, no matter how wise we are or how sophisticated our technology. At such times only the Lord can deliver us. If we place our trust only in ourselves, we will collapse when catastrophe strikes. It will crush us. However, if we trust the Lord, He will give us the strength to *walk through and conquer* the crises, even death itself. Listen to what God's Holy Word says about the danger of trusting only in the power and ability of man:

**Mat 26:33-35** *“Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.*

**Mark 10:24** *The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter into the kingdom of God!”*

**Luke 12:19-21** *“And I'll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”*

**Luke 18:9-14** *To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable. “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

**1 Cor 10:12** *So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!*

**1 Tim 6:17** *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.*

**Job 31:24-25, 28** *“If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, ‘You are my security,’ if I have rejoiced over my great wealth, the fortune my hands had gained,.... then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high.*

**Psa 52:7** *“Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold but trusted in his great wealth and grew strong by destroying others!”*

**Prov. 18:10-11** *“The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe. The wealth of the rich is their fortified city; they imagine it an unscalable wall.”*

**Prov 28:26** *He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.*

**Isa 2:22** *Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he?*

**Isa 30:1-3** *“Woe to the obstinate children,” declares the Lord, “to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin; who go down to Egypt without consulting me; who look for help to Pharaoh’s protection, to Egypt’s shade for refuge. But Pharaoh’s protection will be to your shame, Egypt’s shade will bring you disgrace.”*

**Isa 31:1-3** *Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the Lord. Yet he too is wise and can bring disaster; he does not take back his words. He will rise up against that wicked nation, against those who help evildoers. But the Egyptians are mere mortals and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit. When the Lord stretches out his hand, those who help will stumble, those who are helped will fall; all will perish together.”*

**Isa 47:8-11** *“Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, ‘I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.’ Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells. You have trusted in your wickedness and have said, ‘No one sees me.’ Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you when you say to yourself, ‘I am, and there is none besides me.’ Disaster will come upon you, and you will not know how to conjure it away. A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom; a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you.*

**Jer 17:5** *This is what the Lord says: “Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord.*

**Hos. 5:13** *“When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his sores, then Ephraim turned to Assyria, and sent to the great king for help. But he is not able to cure you, not able to cure your sores.”*

**Hos 10:13** *But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors.*

**Oba 1:3-4** *“The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, ‘Who can bring me down to the ground?’ Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down.”*

## II. *Isaiah 31:06–09 God's Invitation to Those Who Ignore and Rebel Against Him: A Call to Repent Turn Back to Him*

God extends an invitation to those who ignore and rebel against Him. Note what Isaiah said about the person who rebels: he is gripped by a *deep or great* rebellion. This indicates that God excludes no one from His invitation. He is willing to save from His coming judgment even those who have *greatly rebelled* against Him.

1. What is the invitation God extends? It is to repent, to turn back to the Lord. Since God saves His people from their enemies, all who are in rebellion should repent and return to Him. God's salvation is so wonderful that anyone who does not turn back to the Lord is a fool (Psa. 14:1-7; 53:1-6).

The *evidence* of repentance is obvious. People who truly repent turn away from idolatry and worship the Lord alone. Note the phrase *in that day*, which refers to the latter days of human history when Christ sets up His kingdom on earth. *In that day* all idols will be cast down, false worship will cease, and the Lord alone will be worshipped. Isaiah's message was forceful: since the glorious day of the Lord's exaltation and worship is coming, everyone should renounce idolatry *now*. They should reject all idols and false worship *now*. The Lord is the only living and true God, so He should be the only object of man's worship *now*. There should be a total renunciation of idolatry and false worship and a total recommitment to worship the Lord alone.

2. There is another reason for repenting and turning back to the Lord: He promises to deliver His people from their enemies (vv. 8-9). Although the Jews would suffer the judgment of God's hand, and the Assyrian army would slaughter many of them, God would save a remnant of Jews. Although all the other cities of Judah would be destroyed, God would save Jerusalem. God Himself would destroy the Assyrian army. Its soldiers would not fall by the sword of mere mortals, but by the sword of God (v. 8). When God wielded His sword, the Assyrian army, including its commanders, would panic and flee in terror for their lives. The enemies of God and His people would suffer the consuming fire of God's Holy presence. Note that this is the clear declaration of the LORD. Therefore, because of God's wonderful promise of deliverance, the people should repent and turn back to Him.

**Thought 1.** God calls on all people everywhere to repent. Even if we have ignored and denied the Lord all our lives, the Lord extends an invitation to us: repent and turn back to Him. Repentance is absolutely essential if we are to escape the judgment that is coming upon the earth. If we fail to repent, we will face the terrifying judgment of God. Life is uncertain. No person is guaranteed another day of life. God's Spirit does not always convict and draw people to Him: that is, He will not strive with people continuously, endlessly (Gen. 6:3). Man can reach a point of no return. Therefore, when God's Spirit convicts us of sin and of failing to trust the Lord, we must confess

and repent. We must turn back to Him. If we confess our sins and distrust, He will cleanse us and give us a deep sense of assurance that we have been forgiven. The assurance of His acceptance and favour will flood our souls. God extends His great invitation to every human being: repent and turn back to Him.

**Luke 13:3** *“I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”*

**Acts 2:38** *Peter replied, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

**Acts 17:30** *In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.*

**Ezek 18:31** *Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel?*

**Isa 55:7** *Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. ■*