

Isaiah 31:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD!

Analysis

Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help hoy hayordim Mitsrayim le'ezrah)—the seventh woe pronounces judgment on those יבד (yarad, going down) to מצריהם (Mitsrayim, Egypt) for עזקה (ezrah, help). **And stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many** על-סוסים (שענו בטהחו)—they (sha'an, lean upon, rely) on horses and בטה (batach, trust) in rekhev, chariots). **But they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD!** ולא שעו (sha'ah, look to, regard) God or קרש (darash, seek).

Egypt's horses and chariots represented ancient superpower military technology—the tanks and fighter jets of the ancient world. Judah, threatened by Assyria, sought Egyptian alliance rather than relying on Yahweh. The sin isn't seeking protection but the misplaced trust: horses instead of God, human alliances instead of divine covenant. Deuteronomy 17:16 explicitly forbade kings multiplying horses or returning to Egypt. Psalm 20:7 contrasts: 'Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.'

Historical Context

In the late 8th century BC, Assyria dominated the Near East. Egypt, though weakened, still projected military strength. When Assyria threatened Judah, King Hezekiah's advisors advocated an Egyptian alliance (Isaiah 30:1-7). Egypt's cavalry was renowned, tempting small nations to seek protection. But Egypt repeatedly proved an unreliable ally—'a bruised reed' that pierces the hand (Isaiah 36:6).

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What modern equivalents of 'horses and chariots' tempt you to trust in human strength rather than God?
2. How does seeking legitimate help become sinful when it displaces trust in God?
3. What does it practically mean to 'seek the LORD' instead of defaulting to worldly solutions?

Interlinear Text

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|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|----------|-----------------|
| וְשֹׁאַלְתָּהּ | נָאָתָה | סֹסֶם | עַל | נִשְׁעַן | נָאָתָה | סֹסֶם | עַל |
| Woe | to them that go down | to Egypt | for help | H5921 | on horses | and stay | |
| H1945 | H3381 | H4714 | H5833 | | H5483 | | H8172 |
| וְתַrustּ | בְּכָבְדָלָה | עַל | בְּכָבְדָלָה | וְתַrustּ | בְּכָבְדָלָה | עַל | בְּכָבְדָלָה |
| and trust | H5921 | in chariots | H3588 | because they are many | H7227 | | and in horsemen |
| H982 | | H7393 | | | | | H6571 |
| וְזֹאת | עֲצָמָה | מִאָתָה | וְלֹא | שָׁעָר | עַל | | |
| H3588 | strong | because they are very | H3808 | but they look | H5921 | | |
| H6105 | | H3966 | | H8159 | | | |
| וְלֹא | יְהִי הָאָתָה | וְלֹא | לְבָדָשׁ | וְלֹא | לְבָדָשׁ | | |
| not unto the Holy One | of Israel | H853 | the LORD | H3808 | neither seek | | |
| H6918 | H3478 | | H3068 | | H1875 | | |

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 20:7 (Faith): Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.

Jeremiah 17:5 (Faith): Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD.

Deuteronomy 17:16 (References Lord): But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way.

Jeremiah 2:13 (Parallel theme): For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

Daniel 9:13 (References Lord): As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth.

Isaiah 36:9 (Faith): How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?

Isaiah 30:16 (Parallel theme): But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift.

Isaiah 36:6 (Faith): Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust in him.

Isaiah 9:13 (References Lord): For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the LORD of hosts.

Ezekiel 17:15 (References Egypt): But he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people. Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such things? or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered?

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