

The Folly of Trusting to Egypt for Help

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon warns against the folly of trusting in Egypt, emphasizing the importance of faith in God and the consequences of trusting in earthly powers.

Scripture: Isaiah 31:1

Topics: "Reliance on God", "Faith vs. Worldly Trust"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the folly of Israel's reliance on Egypt for help, contrasting their trust in human strength with the divine power of God. He illustrates how Israel, despite being God's chosen people, often turned back to the worldly resources of Egypt, neglecting their relationship with the Holy One of Israel. This historical pattern serves as a warning for the church today, which is also tempted to seek worldly wisdom and support instead of relying on God's guidance and strength. Darby calls for a faith that recognizes God's sovereignty and the futility of trusting in human means, urging believers to remember their identity in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, he reminds us that true safety and help come from God alone, not from the flesh or the world.

Transcript

Isaiah 31:1-3.

"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." Isaiah 31:1-3.

The importance of Israel's history to the church of God, arises from its peculiar character as a nation, in contrast with the other nations of the world by which it was surrounded, and from which its special glory and privilege was to be separate and distinct.

Israel, as a people, was God's elect nation, of whom He says, "This people have I formed for myself, they shall show forth my praise." And, again, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." Hence their obedience or failures come to be most instructive to God's people now, because they exhibit the effect of God's principles, either in subjection to them, with all its happy issues; or in departure from them, with all its calamitous results.

This, it will be admitted, is true of their history generally; while, in one special part of it, the Scripture expressly teaches, that "they were types of us." - "All these things happened to them for ensamples (Greek: "tupoi" types); and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

This is the point of importance in Israel's history, that they were a people in connection with God. Their conduct had its main importance in this respect. It had its bearing on their own national welfare, or the reverse; but it had a much higher importance in relation to God, as it exhibited His character and principles before the nations around. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord."

The nations of the world were the witnesses of the power and policy of man, and they exhibited the ways and principles of man; but Israel should have been a witness before the nations of that truth. "Happy art thou, Î Israel; who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and the sword of thy excellency, and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee."

It is on this ground that Israel and "Egypt" are found, in their national character, so frequently presented in contrast in the Old Testament, just as the church and the world are set in constant opposition in the New. The principles of God had their place in the one, and the principles of man were, working in the other, which necessarily placed them in opposition.

But Israel had another character besides that which was stamped on them by their connection with God. They were men, and they had, naturally, all the feelings and propensities of men. Hence, whenever their faith failed, and they were left to their own unrestrained action, they invariably displayed nothing but human tendencies, and sought for help in the natural resources of men.

It required the knowledge of God, and the recognition of the special relations he sustained towards them, and an active trust in His power and protection - in a word, faith in Him as God, and their God - to enable Israel to walk on God's principles, and to act in character before the nations. In like manner, now, it requires faith on the part of the church of God, in all God's blessed relations toward it, and the sense of His presence, in order to walk with Him, and to exhibit a heavenly character before the world. "They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee"! And what wonders of love and grace are wrapped up in the knowledge of that name! "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

But saints are men, as well as Israel of old, and in that character have been schooled and trained in the world, as Israel was trained in Egypt, and in either case the effect is seen, for the certain result of acting on the principles of the world, is to lose the principles of God. The world is a definite sphere, where the principles of man, under the influence of Satan, "the god of this world," are paramount and in action; while the church is the only sphere in which the principles of God are working. "Egypt" had its wisdom, and policy, and power; but Egypt could be only the oppressor or the corrupter of the people of God. Indeed, there is nothing more affecting in Israel's history, than their constant hankering after Egypt, after all that they had suffered there, and after all that God had done to deliver them from it. It only yields, in infatuation, to that which has been manifested in the history of the church, in its turning from the grace and presence of a divine Comforter and Guide, to the miserable shifts and appliances of "this present evil world."

The earliest mention of Egypt, except in Gen. 10, in the division of nations, is as the place whence Abram, the child of faith, sought help from the famine which pressed upon him, when a sojourner in "the land of promise." And, indeed, it was the land of earthly plenty. The comforts of this life were there in abundance; but we learn, in Abram's sojourn there, what a price must be paid by the believer for its "cattle, and silver,

and gold," and for the favour of its prince! The faith of the patriarch and his altar belonged not to Egypt, but to the land of Canaan, which he had now left behind. Egypt was the land of plenty. It was well watered, and the fruitfulness of its river was proverbial. But it did not drink of the "rain of heaven;" nor did it enjoy the fertilising dews from above. It is coupled with Lot's portion in the plain of Jordan; of which it is said, "it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as thou comest unto Zoar." Still its river bore only "the fatness of the earth;" and in this respect it is contrasted with Israel's portion, as chosen by the Lord. "The land whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot as a garden of herbs: but the land whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven."

Accordingly, in after times, when their moral corruption was hastening on the sorrows of the Babylonish captivity, the Lord, by His prophet Jeremiah, expostulates with them thus: - "The children of Noph and Tahapanes have broken the crown of thy head. Hast thou not procured this unto thyself in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God when He led thee by the way? And now what hast thou to do with Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? Or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?" Israel (had they known how to value it) had their own, "fountain of living waters;" and ought never to have been indebted to the streams of Egypt, or the nations around them.

As to Egypt, Joseph's history may indeed cast a halo of glory over it; - as even the world itself will be changed in its character when the humbled One comes to take His power;* still its real character is to be found only in the hard and bitter bondage of Israel. For how often is that word repeated in the books of Moses, "Remember ye were bondmen in Egypt!" And their redemption is thus characterised in Deuteronomy 4:20, "The Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto Him a people of inheritance as it is this day."

* So, in God's prophetic purposes, there is another destination for Egypt, when Israel under Messiah becomes the head of the Gentiles, and "they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord to Jerusalem." This is presented in Isa. 19 "And the land of Judah shall be a terror unto Egypt; every one that maketh mention thereof shall be afraid in himself, because of the counsel of the Lord of hosts, which he hath determined against it" (ver. 17). "In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord, in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord" (ver. 19). "And the Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation" (ver. 20). "In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land; whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt, my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance" (ver. 24, 25). The whole chapter is one of the deepest interest in connection with the millennial glory and blessing of the earth.

It required the plagues of Egypt, and the blood of the Passover, to put God's captive people and their oppressors, into their true relative position towards each other. And accordingly, God's relation to Israel, in redemption, is thus expressed, "I am the Lord thy God that brought thee out of Egypt;" while the confession that was connected with the offering of "the basket of first fruits" was designed to be the constant memorial of this. "Thou shalt speak and say before the Lord thy God, A Syrian ready to perish, was my father; and he went down to Egypt to sojourn there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous; and the Egyptians evil entreated, us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage; and when we cried unto the Lord God of our fathers, the Lord heard our voice, and looked upon

our affliction, and our labour, and our oppression; and the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs and with wonders; and He hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land that floweth with milk and honey." (Deut. 26.)

Still, almost as soon as ever they had reached the wilderness (the place of earthly destitution, and of heavenly supply), Egypt assumes another character in their eyes than the land of their oppression, and the place of God's judgment. "The children of Israel said unto them [Moses and Aaron] would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh-pots, and when we did eat bread to the full." And they were not ashamed to say, "it was well with us in Egypt!" The reason of all this is obvious and instructive. To walk with God in a wilderness requires faith, and that spirit of dependence which nothing but faith can give. But to be satisfied with the supplies of Egypt is a thing which is perfectly understood by sense. Thus, whenever the necessities of their condition demanded the exercise of faith - and faith was not there, they, "in their hearts, turned back again into Egypt." And on one occasion, they said, "were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt." Nor was this all: their religion was corrupted by Egypt. The worship of "the calf" was Egyptian idolatry; though. Israel knew that the Lord had said, "I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment; I am the Lord." But, alas! Israel had learned to commit fornication in Egypt; and they practised the lesson in the wilderness, and ever after. For when the Lord presents before them their course, in the days of Ezekiel, in the parable of the two lewd women, He says, "they committed whoredoms in Egypt; they committed whoredoms in their youth." The infidelities of Judah and Israel were multiplied in their after history; but it was only a fruit of their not having left their whoredoms brought from Egypt.* On their entrance to the land under the leadership of Joshua, this is noticed though in grace, by the Lord. After the people were circumcised anew, "the Lord said unto Joshua, this day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day." And nothing but the power of circumcision can keep the heart of the saint separate from the world now; for if the flesh be allowed, the world at once has an open door.

* The father of the man that blasphemed the name of the Lord in the camp of Israel was an Egyptian (Lev. 24). Hagar also, Abram's bondmaid, was an Egyptian.

But, in another form, Egypt still was Israel's snare, after their settlement in the land. Outward weakness was the designed characteristic of Israel's polity by Jehovah; that the people might know that "they got not the land in possession by their own sword; neither did their own arm (at any time) save them; but Thy right hand and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou hadst a favour toward them." And the song should have been ever heard in their midst, "Thou art my King, O God; command deliverances for Jacob. Through Thee will we push down our enemies; through Thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us. For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save Him. But Thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us. In God we boast all the day long, and praise Thy name for ever."

It was for this intent that they were forbidden to multiply horses, and that three times a year their coats were to be left entirely unguarded; while all their males were brought together in solemn assembly, to Jerusalem, before the Lord. But Egypt was celebrated for its horses and chariots; and this is noticed in the Lord's prohibition to the king, "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." Their redemption from Egypt and all its power should have been

final; nor should any thing have tempted them to return. But, in the reign of Solomon, we find that horses were one chief article of commerce with Egypt. In 1 Kings, 10:28, 29, it is recorded that Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt: - "And a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for an hundred and fifty." While in the days of Isaiah, the Lord complains, amongst other tokens of departure from himself, that "their land also is full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots." But in the following chapter of the book of Kings, there is opened a still further effect of Solomon's affinity with Egypt. This wisest of men was corrupted by it. "King Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh. For it came to pass when Solomon was old that his wives turned away his heart after other gods." How near is the neighbourhood, and how subtle the connection of "the flesh," the world, and the devil! And how instructive is the lesson, that as to Israel, the first enemy that invaded their land after the death of Solomon was Shishak king of Egypt! "It came to pass in the fifth year of King Rehoboam that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem; and he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house: he even took away all: and he took away all the shields of silver and gold which Solomon had made." What force do these historical notices give to that statute of the kingdom (already partly quoted) "he shall not multiply wives to himself that his heart turn not away; neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold!" And how full is the illustration of a part of the passage which is the subject of the present comment, "Yet he also is wise and will bring evil, and will not call back his words!"

There may be the silver and the gold, and the "tapestry, and carved work, and fine linen of Egypt" - but it is Egypt still! There may be its wisdom, and policy, and power; its horses and chariots - but still the word of the Lord remains in all its force, "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses and trust in chariots because they are many; and on horsemen because they are very strong; now the Egyptians are men and not God; and their horses flesh and not spirit." And as a ground of trust to Israel, Egypt's character is most accurately given by a heathen man. "Now behold thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it; so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust on him." And this judgment is entirely confirmed by the Lord, through Ezekiel, who says, "And all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I am the Lord, because they have been a staff of reed, to the house of Israel. When they took hold of thee by the hand, thou didst break and rend all their shoulder: and when they leaned upon thee, thou brakest, and madest all their loins to be at a stand." Nor should this instructive warning to Israel be allowed to lapse while the saint has this significant note of divine wisdom concerning the world through which he is passing, that it is "the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified!" Heaven-bestowed names and titles are more unchanging, and more significant, than our careless hearts are wont to conceive. But finally, as to Egypt, when God speaks of it in all its glory, he speaks of it only as "the tabernacles of Ham!" He smote all the first-born of Egypt: the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham!" And it may be said, that the example of Moses gives the only proper action of faith towards it. "By faith Moses forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath, of the king." He esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."

All this recorded testimony to Israel about Egypt gives especial pungency to the denunciation of the prophet; -

"Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and slay 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! Yet he also is wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back his words: but will arise

against the house of the evildoers, and against the help of them that work iniquity. 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" (Isaiah, 31:1-3).

The special and instructive contrasts here, are "Men" and "God" and "flesh" and "spirit." Man with his horses, and chariots, and horsemen presenting an array of strength, resistless in the estimation of the natural mind; but "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." How deep is this infatuation of a people whose privilege and strength is thus presented to the eye of faith, that they should look to Egypt or horses and chariots as their strength!

"There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew. Happy art thou, Æ Israel: who is like unto thee, Æ people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places." (Deuteronomy, 33:26-29).

This was Israel's folly, to turn from God and his Spirit to trust in Egypt and in an arm of flesh, because they walked as men. But what is this to the church's folly that is associated with her head in heaven, and is blessed with the ever-abiding presence of the Holy Ghost on earth; and has God for her, and the infinite treasures of his grace as her resource; and Eternal glory before her; when she is found turning to seek the world's friendship, and practically trusts in the flesh and in carnal wisdom for her guidance and help! The Lord teach our hearts more the force of that word, "If ye then be risen with Christ!" And lead us to beware of following the course of "Demas," of whom the apostle says, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." "If God be for us who can be against us." There is nothing more certain than this, that every degree of confidence that is reposed in man by a saint or in himself, is so much of his trust withdrawn from "the living God." "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God." But faith alone can use those weapons; and when faith fails, there is always the practical turning to the world and its strength and wisdom for help. This only is the right position of our souls, "to have the sentence of death in ourselves; that we should not trust in ourselves; but in God that raiseth the dead." And again let it be said; "if God be for us who can be against us!" "There is no king saved by the multitude of a host; a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. A horse is a vain thing for safety; neither shall he deliver any by his great strength our soul waiteth for the Lord; he is our help and our shield."

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