

ISAIAH 51: ISRAEL'S FEAR

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In Isaiah 51:12-13, God spoke these words to the children of Israel: “I, even I, am he that comforteth you: *who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?*” It has always been a temptation for the Lord’s people to fear men instead of God. Isaiah chapter 51 is an excellent reminder for us to remember who it is that we should fear.

The fury of Israel’s oppressor

In the context of Isaiah chapter 51, the time of Israel’s fear of men and lack of faith in God in this particular case would be during the Babylonian destruction and captivity. God said that Israel had “feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy” (Isa 51:13). God said, “Where is the fury of the oppressor? The captive exile hastens that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail” (Isa 51:13-14). At that time, Jerusalem’s situation would be dire. God said, “Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury; thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out. There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she has brought forth; neither is there any that takes her by the hand of all the sons that she has brought up. These two things are come unto thee; who shall be sorry for thee? desolation, and destruction, and the famine, and the sword: by whom shall I comfort thee? Thy sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as a wild bull in a net: they are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of thy God. Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine” (Isa 51:17-21).

God’s powerful arm

But God gave Israel encouragement, reminding them of why they should not fear men and forget Him, even during these most terrible

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(continued)

of times. God's arm is called to awaken and be strong, the same arm that had cut their enemies from "the ancient days," including the deliverance from Egyptian bondage (Isa 51:9-10). God's arm would return His redeemed with singing unto Zion, "and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away. I, even I, am he that comforts you" (Isa 51:11-12). The blessings foretold in these verses might well extend beyond the return of the captives from Babylon to the redemption and everlasting joy and comfort that would ultimately be realized in the New Testament. God again reminds Israel of who He is, what He had done for Israel before, and what He would do again. "But I am the Lord thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The Lord of hosts is his name. And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people" (Isa 51:15-16). "Thus saith thy Lord the Lord, and thy God that pleads the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again: but I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over: and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over" (Isa 51:22-23). God would certainly deliver Israel from Babylon and would punish their former captors. Therefore, Israel should not fear men nor forget God their Maker and Deliverer, an important lesson for Christians to remember today. In Luke 12:4-5, Christ says, "*And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.*" And Hebrews 13:5-6 similarly says, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: *for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me*" (see also Ezek 34:28-29; Matt 10:28; Rom 8:32-39; 2 Tim 1:7).