

Isaiah 40: 31 Study Notes.

The most Vital verse of 2022 was Isaiah 40: 31. ³¹ **but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.**

It's one of the most well-known passages of the Bible. It's easy to see why it went viral. It's incredibly inspiring. It's all about persistence, determination and endurance in the face of fatigue or opposition, setbacks and difficulties. Put your hope in God and you can make it and not just make it but soar like an eagle, run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint.

However, is that what it's really saying? A little bit of context will help us in understanding this verse. So, let's start with the reigns of David and then Solomon, which constituted what can only be called a golden age for Israel. Then, when Solomon died, his son Rehoboam came to the throne. He was the fourth king in Israel's history.

So, Rehoboam came to the throne. David's grandson, Solomon's son. Unfortunately, in one bad decision everything was lost. The people welcomed him as king. They made only one request. Due to the rapid expansion of the nation, they had been heavily taxed and large numbers of workers had been conscripted for labour. They asked if the new King could show some compassion towards his people. Could he lower taxes and reduce the amount of forced labour.

This was a big moment for the King and he dropped the ball badly. One decision that led Israel down a path of destruction. In fact, he decided to tax them even more! The consequence of that decision was that it split the kingdom. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel revolted and eventually formed the northern kingdom of Israel. Only two tribes would stay under Rehoboam forming the southern kingdom of Judah. This led to ever-increasing levels of political, cultural, and spiritual breakdown in both the north and the south. It ushered in the prophetic era where God would send prophet after prophet to call the people back to spiritual sanity.

Unfortunately, the breakdown was bad so that, the words of the prophets fell on deaf ears. So prophetic calls to repentance became prophetic declarations of doom and a hundred and fifty-year decline was set in motion culminating in exile for both the northern and southern kingdoms. The north fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. and the south to the Babylonians in 586 B.C., with the temple and the holy city of Jerusalem left sacked. The northern kingdom was lost forever. Only a remnant from the Southern Kingdom was able to return from their exile in Babylon to the Promised Land to re-establish the Jewish homeland and wait for the Messiah.

That, in effect, ends the history of the Old Testament. The story of the Bible does not pick up again until the time of the coming of the Messiah Jesus in the New Testament. Isaiah was a prophet during the era of the prophets. A divided kingdom. Exile looming. He was a mouthpiece for God to speak to the people. Isaiah was the great statesman of his day, and a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah – the two tribes that stayed loyal to Rehoboam.

His appointment as a prophet is found in the sixth chapter of Isaiah, a famous passage where Isaiah encountered God encircled by angels chanting holy, holy, holy, and God saying, "Who will I send," and Isaiah replied in Isaiah 6:8; **Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us? "And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"**. During his time as a prophet the ten tribes that constituted the northern kingdom were destroyed by Assyria. Isaiah could sense that the same would be coming for the southern kingdom. While he consistently called people to come back to God, his primary theme was that God was coming to them in the form of the Messiah. Throughout Isaiah, you find some of the key messianic prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus.

Here is a special one, **Isaiah 9: 6-7; ⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.**

The first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah are focused on his prophetic work in the southern Kingdom. However, from chapter forty forward, there's a shift. These are words meant for the future, when the southern kingdom would be invaded and captured by the Babylonians, and the people sent into exile.

These were words God had Isaiah prophesy for that era, decades in the future. It would prove to be a most faith-testing time. Exile meant that the promised land Jerusalem and the Temple were lost. Captured and destroyed, God had words for those people and Isaiah gave them on His behalf. So, with that in mind here, is the fuller context of our viral verse.

²⁷ Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"? ²⁸ Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. ²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. ³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹ but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40: 27-31.

First, that no matter what they might think, no matter what they might feel they should never doubt that God cares. Supported in the New Testament by Peter 5:7; **"Let him (God) have all your worries and cares, for he is always thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you" I Peter 5:7.** God is always thinking about us and watching out for us.

The second thing God wants them to know while in exile is that **He is the God who can act.** He is the God who birthed the cosmos. **1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. Genesis 1: 1-3.**

We serve a God who acts. Then comes the third thing God wants them to know. This is the one that is most easily missed but is really the heart of it all, and it's our viral verse. We have a God who cares and a God who can act. We can have hope in Him! Remember, this was a word from Isaiah to a people in exile.

It was a word for them to get them through that exile. In the midst of them being devastated and decimated, Isaiah speaks to people who have lost hope. The impossible has happened. They were sure, that their nation could not fall! Their temple would never be destroyed. God hasn't forgotten them. They will have to wait with hope.

Sometimes our present circumstances are frequently less than we would like, nevertheless, we continue to look forward in hope. At the beginning of 2024, I encourage you to dream new dreams, make new plans, start new projects. We can hope that there is a future for us all. Even if the present is really challenging.

Hope is not some kind of a drug that numbs us to the present. The opposite is true. Hope allows us to face the present, no matter how difficult our present may be. Hope helps us to see the present with new eyes. Eyes that can see how things can be different. Hope can propel us forward. It's about living in hope that the God who cares and can act will give you the strength that you need now as you move forward. He will give you strength when you're weary. He will give you power when you're weak. That when you genuinely can't walk another step that you will be carried. You are a child of God and he will care for you.