

It is Thursday morning ... again ... and I greet you in the blessed name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and bring this Devotional to you. When you notice that the Scripture text is Isaiah 40:31 you may be tempted to say, "Well, he already posted one on that verse." That is true ... but I am convinced I could write at least a half dozen Devotional on that powerful verse. It is my "life verse," and I cherish the fact that the Lord has used it to teach me many truths. So, here it is again. God bless you as you read and pray.

GRASSHOPPERS and EAGLES

A Devotional prepared by Dr. Robert L. Morris

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"But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles;
They shall run and not be weary;
They shall walk and not faint."

(Isaiah 40:31; NKJV)

On April 27, 2020 I posted a Devotional based on this monumental verse of Scripture ... my life verse. I noted then, and repeat it here, that the Authorized, or King James Version of the Bible, and now the New King James Version, translates the first phrase as above: "But those who wait on the LORD ..." The Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) translates the first phrase of that verse: "But those who trust in the LORD ..." The Today's New International Version (TNIV) puts it this way: "But those who hope in the LORD ..." Because I began reading and memorizing Scripture in the "King James Version era," I have used that translation of this verse through the years and it has sustained and helped me in my walk with God. But "wait ...," "trust ...," or "hope ..." It probably doesn't make a lot of difference. Put them together and a tremendous concept emerges. Wait, that is, spend time with the Lord, at the same time anchor your Trust in Him and then cast your vision on God's tomorrows where hope blossoms into reality. "Hope" in the Biblical sense is not some "leap in the dark." In it there is no sense of "uncertainty," but rather a quality of life that has its foundation anchored firmly in the Person of Jesus Christ, and possesses the full assurance that God will fulfill His purposes in the lives of His people. Waiting! Trusting! Hoping! This is the doorway through which God's strengthening grace enters.

Whereas Isaiah 40:31 is my life verse, implanted deeply into my heart and mind by the Holy Spirit many years ago, I return to it often. And now, once again I turn to this magnificent verse of Scripture, and prepare an additional Devotional. To this Devotional I add the concept of contrast between the mighty eagle and the grasshopper as presented in the Scriptures.

Eagles! Grasshoppers! What a contrast! Interestingly, the Book or Prophecy of Isaiah is divided into two sections: Chapters 1-39 and 40-66 ... just like the whole Bible. The Old Testament has 39 Books and the New Testament has 27 Books. These total 66 Books. Chapters 1-39 of Isaiah focus on prophesying the Messiah, while chapters 40-66 focus on presenting the Messiah. The 40th chapter of the Book of Isaiah is the beginning of this second section of Isaiah. Praise be to the Lord, for it begins in verse one with "Comfort, yes comfort My people!" Says your God." The 40th chapter is a masterpiece of showing us great and eternal truth about God, and our relationship to Him as He defines it.

Many are the beautiful word pictures presented by the Prophet in this 40th chapter. He predicts the coming of John the Baptist, by saying "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD.'" (v 3) Notice how he speaks about our humanity: "All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever." (vv 6b-8) Isaiah focuses clearly on the greatness of God by using contrasts. "To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?" (v 18) Isaiah asks and answers a most serious question: "Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not considered the foundations of the earth? God is enthroned above the circle of the earth; its inhabitants are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like thin cloth and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He reduces princes to nothing and makes the judges of the earth to be irrational." (vv 21-

23; HCSB) After some additional contrasting and informative statements about God, the Prophet makes what is perhaps the most profound statement in Scripture identifying the people who know and obey God. And that is verse 31. It is the key verse for this Devotional.

Since Isaiah was gifted in the use of metaphors and similes, one wonders if he purposefully chose contrasting grasshoppers with eagles, or if any small insect or rodent would do for his literary purposes. It is evident from this Spirit-inspired record that the former is accurate. It seems that in one respect, grasshoppers have been given a bad rap. In Aesop's fables for example, they are made to appear lazy, ignoring the coming winter, and the result is that they have to beg for food and shelter.

Grasshoppers are a part of God's creation, numbering at least 18,000 different varieties, featuring many different colors and sizes. Both size and color have something to do with their survival and protection against predators. In reality there are times when there seems to be a plethora of grasshoppers, to the extent that they literally destroy crops and various plants. There have been occasions when grasshoppers appeared like a plague, eating everything in sight, from corn to alfalfa to garden vegetables. Everything seemed to be a part of the diet of the insatiable herbivores. At the same time, they are not to be disregarded nor thought to be unimportant.

But then the Prophet changes his imagery. He alters our focus, and we suddenly see the mighty eagle, sitting high in a tree growing in the crags of a stony mountain, or perhaps in a brilliantly blue sky, soaring high on the updrafts of a gentle wind. How God intends us to understand this comparison is important.

Grasshoppers like eagles have eyes, but they have five eyes! A part of their adaptability to their surroundings and the prevailing predatorial setting in which they live is somehow related to their vision. They can see in a wide panoramic dimension, hide in the grass that nearly matches their body color, and wait until they sense the danger is past. Yet, living in an environment with an abundance of predators who seem to like grasshoppers for a meal results in many being lost.

Grasshoppers like eagles, have wings, and can use their wings in "leaping" many times their body length to avoid a predator or to relocate to a new meal. One of the Bible's pictures of the grasshopper is found in the Book of Numbers. The Israelites were in the Wilderness of Paran. Just to the Northeast was Kadesh Barnea, familiar to all who recall the disobedience of the Israelites in failing to enter the Land of Promise. Moses had sent the twelve spies to view the land of Promise. Upon return their report was as follows:

"We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.

Nevertheless, the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan. ... The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight." (Numbers 13:27-29; 32-33; NKJV)

This reference has two possibilities: (1) the actual size of the descendants of Anak, and (2) the sheer numbers of the people, for indeed, grasshoppers like the locusts come in vast numbers. It may well be, since it fits into the other passages of Scripture referring to grasshoppers, that the second possibility is the more accurate.

In the Prophecy of Nahum, God refers to the swarming hordes of Assyrians but ultimately their final demise: "Your commanders are like swarming locusts, and your generals like great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges on a cold day; when the sun rises they flee away, and the place where they are is not known." (Nahum 3:17)

Now we move to the Isaian reference to grasshoppers. God says of the earth, "its inhabitants are like grasshoppers." (Isaiah 40:22) They have wings for flying at least short distances and eyes to behold their surroundings in many dimensions, and they come in huge hordes. These are abilities inherent in the grasshoppers, but at the same time they are the focus of serious limitations. Noting the simile used in Scripture, they represent humankind on this planet. When God made us in His image, breathed into us the breath of life, and we became living souls, we were endowed with the moral attributes of God, and to a

significant extent, the natural attributes of God, even though the latter with significant limitations. After the fall of man into sin, those limitations were greatly magnified.

Now consider the eagle in contrast to the grasshopper! The simile is present as found in verse 31. Eagles have tremendous abilities! Eagles have eyes that can see their prey from great heights, and wings that span 6 to 8 feet, hanging the mighty bird on the updraft currents of air, and soaring so high that it is difficult to even see them. Those mighty wings carry them on the winds of the heavens at about 60 miles an hour and they can drop into a dive of at least 100 miles an hour, hitting their target prey exactly on time. There is a Hebrew word of great importance here. It is נֶשֶׁר - "nesher" meaning "to tear with the beak." This is a powerful element in our description of the eagle.

There are other characteristics of the eagles. For one, they mate for life, and when one slips away in death, the remaining eagle usually finds a new mate ... for life. Another that I discovered in some of my reading, is that they build their nests high above the plains, on great mountain crags and high in the branches of mighty trees. Together the male and the female provide for and care for the rearing of their young. From that high home, they teach their young the ways of the eagle, and when it is time for the young eagle to leave the nest and learn to fly and soar and catch prey, they literally tear apart some of the comfort of the nest in order to get the young eagle to want to leave the nest and learn to fly. The young eagle is still unstable, unable to soar like the mature eagle. But nudged from the security of the nest, the young eagle must learn to depend on the parents in order to avoid a disastrous crash to the rocks below. It has been written by some, that the young eagle flaps his wings, trying desperately but somewhat faultingly to fly like the parent eagle. Some ornithologists suggest that the parent gently soars beneath the young, and carries it to safety. That picture has not been proven by scientific examination; in fact it is strongly denied by some naturalists. Yet when reading Deuteronomy 32:11, noting that "As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings," one has cause to wonder if perhaps Moses did indeed observe this practice in the natural world. Further, it is interesting that in using the simile of the eagle carrying its young on its wings, the Scripture records the LORD God saying to His people Israel: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Exodus 19:4-6a)

There are several "eagle-pictures" in Scripture. This study does not allow the time to research and exegete all those "eagle passages." Please allow me to refer to one special to me. In the Song of Moses we read how the Lord cares for His own: "As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the LORD alone led him, and there was no foreign god with him." (Deuteronomy 32:11, 12; NKJV) I like the TNIV translation also: "He shielded him and cared for him ... like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them aloft. The LORD alone led him; no foreign god was with him." The Song of Moses comprises 43 verses in the 32nd chapter of Deuteronomy.

There are many other Biblical references to the eagle. They show us how to soar in the heights of triumphant living, for soaring like the eagles is God's will for His people. We learn about vision to behold the magnificence of His creation, to observe the prevalent dangers of unrighteousness in this world, and to find nourishment for sustaining our spiritual lives. (See Hosea 8:1; Amos 7:1; Obadiah 4; Habakkuk 1:8; Psalm 103:5; Daniel 7:4; 2 Samuel 1:23; Proverbs 30:17; Jeremiah 4:13; Lamentations 4:19; Matthew 24:28; Luke 17:37 for other examples and uses of the imagery of the eagle to teach eternal truth.)

Yes! The people who wait on God, who rest confidently on His promises, who place their trust in and reliance on Him will rise on the updrafts of eternal truth, soar above the mundane of this world, see the world like others do not and cannot see it, ever aware of danger and the need to avoid it. Read again Isaiah 40:31. It is my life verse. It will nourish and direct us. We will soar like eagles!