

A.B. Simpson:

"In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength; and you would not." (Is. 30: 15.)

The historical setting of this chapter furnishes the key to its spiritual meaning. In the days of Isaiah two great empires were contending for the control of the world, Assyria on the east and Egypt on the west. When they met in conflict, the battleground was frequently the Mediterranean coast, and the small states in that region were the chief sufferers in the clash of arms, and were often ground to powder between the two millstones as they came together. The result of all this was a constant diplomacy on the part of these small states, aiming to combine against their formidable oppressors and to join forces with one or the other as it might seem most politic.

The kingdom of Judah had suffered much from these alliances. God does not love human politics and His prophets ever protested against these compromises with the arm of flesh.

At this time the Jewish' politicians were advocating an Egyptian alliance against the increasing power of Assyria, whose invading armies loomed large in the vision and the fears of the people. Isaiah used all the energy and force of his glowing tongue to prevent this move which was both bad politics and bad religion. So far he had failed and already the ambassadors of the court had gone down to Egypt to arrange for an alliance with Pharaoh. The prophet was commanded to hold this up to ridicule and say that Egypt should help in vain. To give more emphasis to his warnings, he had a great sign made and wrote upon it in the public view as a sort of epigrammatic caricature of Egypt, "Blusterer that stands still and does nothing." He told them that the Egyptians would fail them and that the compromise would only bring them into deeper trouble. All this really came to pass. Pharaoh had more than he could do to take care of himself. An Ethiopian invasion came down from the upper Nile, defeated the armies and burned the king alive, and the ambassadors of Judah returned humiliated and disappointed. Meanwhile, the Assyrians, provoked by all this temporizing, as soon as they got through with their eastern troubles, swept down upon the Mediterranean coast and were soon encamped about Jerusalem. All that Isaiah' had prophesied had come to pass.

How vividly these texts stand out in the light of history. "For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; in returning and rest shall you be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength, and you would not, but you said, No; for we will flee upon horses." They refused to take counsel of God and quietly rest and trust in Him, and they said that they would turn to the cavalry of Egypt. With bitter sarcasm the prophet answers, "We will flee upon horses; therefore shall you flee: and, we will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue be swift. One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall you flee; until you be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain and as an ensign upon a hill." (Is. 30: 16, 17.) The help of Egypt was to fail them and the Assyrians to pursue them until they had learned no longer to lean upon the arm of flesh.

But in their distress, God would not forsake them. Beleaguered and besieged by a cruel enemy, His presence would still be with them, comforting, teaching, guiding, cleansing, and at last delivering them. "Therefore will the Lord wait," he says, "that He may be gracious to you; therefore will He be exalted that He may have mercy upon you." (Is. 30: 18). How tenderly will He comfort them in the hour of their distress. "He will be very gracious unto you at the voice of your cry; when He shall hear it He will answer you." (Is. 30: 19.) He will not keep back the suffering. "The Lord will give you the bread of adversity and the waters of affliction," that is, the scant fare of a besieged garrison, but He will make all this the means of deepest teaching, for he adds, "Your teachers shall not be removed into a corner any more, but your eyes shall see your teachers." (Is. 30: 20.) And so near will He come to them that they will learn to know His voice and follow His direction now instead of their own fleshly counsel and self-sufficient wisdom. "Your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, This is the way; walk you in it when you turn to the right hand and when you turn to the left." (Is. 30: 21.) Better still, their trials shall bring cleansing and righteousness. They shall throw away their idols and dishonor their images of silver and gold and their sorrows shall be a purifying fire as God intended. Then when all this shall have been accomplished, will come their deliverance.

The picture that follows is one of a beleaguered city set free and a land oppressed with invading armies once more bearing its harvests and covered with its waving orchards and feeding flocks in large pastures and undisturbed tranquility. Instead of scant supplies of water, rivers and streams of waters shall flow from hill and valley. Instead of darkness and gloom, "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be as the light of seven days in the day when the Lord binds up the breach of His people and heals the stroke of their wound." (Is. 30: 26.)

Then follows the sublime description of the tempest of wrath and judgment with which God shall come down against their enemies like the lightning flash and the devouring fire; like the overflowing flood; like the lion defending its young from the foe; like the mother bird fluttering over her nest and guarding her young, and out of the terror of the scene rises at length the joyful sound of praise from a happy and redeemed people, "You shall have a song as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept and gladness of heart as when one goes with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the mighty One of Israel; and the Lord shall cause His glorious voice to be heard and shall show the lightning down of His arm; for through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be beaten down which smote with a rod." (Is. 30: 29-31.)

Isaiah has told us in a later chapter how all this came to pass, and how in the very height of his pride, as the Assyrian with scorn and blasphemy demanded the surrender of the city, the angel of the Lord came forth and in a single night, by one touch of his awful wing, smote down to death a whole army of 185,000 men. And in the book of Psalms we have the record of the songs they sang. The forty-sixth Psalm no doubt celebrates this great deliverance. "Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations He has made in the earth. He makes wars to cease unto the end of the earth. He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in sunder; He burns the chariot in the fire. Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." (Ps. 46: 8-11.)

All this has a personal meaning for our individual lives. The story of ancient Israel is reenacted in Christian experience still and the lessons of this precious chapter are among the richest and most practical that many of us have ever learned.

I. Our trials.

We too are placed in circumstances of difficulty and danger, even as they, but these are not accidents, but divine ordeals intended to test our spiritual character and bring God into our lives. There are no accidents for the children of God, but all things come through a divine plan and a divine permission, and if rightly met "all things work together for good to them that love God."

How are we using our trials? Do we become vessels for Him to fill with His larger blessing, or do we let them come in vain and shed the bitter tears of sorrow and find no fruit in compensation?

II. The danger of trusting in the arm of flesh.

For us, as well as for them, there is still the danger of going down to Egypt and looking to men instead of God for help. Egypt for us represents the world with its resources, its compromises, its empty promises of aid. God is very jealous of His people's confidence. He may use second causes as His means and instruments but He always wants us to look to Him as the great first Cause and commit our way to His hands and then leave Him to deliver with or without the help of man.

III. Quietness and confidence.

This is the attitude in which we should meet every trouble. "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." This is true even in the plane of human reason. It is the man that keeps a cool head and holds himself in tranquil self-command that carries his vessel through the stream and his army through the forlorn hope. It is true in spiritual emergencies. "He that believes shall not make haste." The first thing to do when trouble comes is to be calm and look to God before we think a thought or take a step in our own wisdom. Confidence will bring quietness. It is unbelief that makes us restless and leads us to rush to the first expedient that comes to our mind instead of waiting upon the Lord to show us the way and interpose with His help.

IV. The restlessness and recklessness of unbelief.

"And you would not but you said we will fly upon horses." And so God sometimes lets us have our way. We refuse to leave ourselves in His hand. We rush hither and thither in our great excitement and like them we find that they that pursue are swift. Our expedients fail. Our resources prove unsatisfactory. Our friends are powerless and at last our condition is worse than at the first.

V. God waiting.

Meanwhile God withdraws and waits until we get through our restlessness and are ready for His help. He does

not leave us in our emergency but He lets us alone to learn our lesson and come to the place where He can really help us and we will let Him. There is nothing more touching than God's waiting love. When Israel refused to follow Him into the land of promise and went back for forty years to their wretched wandering, God did not leave them to wander alone, but "in all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them and He bore and carried them all the days of old." The way was hard, but it was not the way He chose for them. They had gone, in spite of Him, back to the wilderness, but lovingly He went with them and cheered them and sustained them through all the trials of the way until another generation had been born that could understand Him better and follow Him in the path of safety and obedience. So still He comes with us through the weary, wasted years that we have brought upon ourselves. It might have been all so different. He had a better way for us, but we chose our own and He went with us through it, and even in our folly and our wandering His promise is still true, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Beloved, is He waiting thus for you? Have you refused to take the better things He meant for you, and have you kept Him waiting until you have learned by experience your folly and your sin and are ready at last to let Him give you what He meant for you at first?

And while He waits, He comforts, teaches, guides and sanctifies. He uses our very blunders to show us our folly and bring us to wisdom and righteousness. He turns the curse into a blessing. He teaches us through our troubles and at last He becomes so real to us that we too shall "hear a word behind us saying: This is the way, walk you in it when you turn to the right hand and when you turn to the left."

"Your eyes shall see your teachers." By our teachers God means the trials, the experiences, the providences that have come to us through our failure and disobedience. We are so apt to think when things cross our inclination that what we need is that somebody else or something else be made right when the truth is that it is ourselves who need to be made right, and until we are right God cannot readjust the things of which we complain. Indeed, they are His file designed to polish and smooth our roughness.

A lady went to Mr. Andrew Murray requesting him to speak to her husband about some matters that were greatly grieving her in his conduct toward her and his family. After listening to her complaint, Mr. Murray declined to speak to her husband, but said he would like to talk to her about her own life. She was much surprised when he insisted that the trouble was with her rather than with her husband, and that her first duty was to get her lesson, her blessing, her quietness and peace of mind with the victory over all these things, and when that was accomplished all the rest would easily come about. At first she was offended, but after reflection and prayer she found he was right and she went to God in humiliation and prayer for her own soul and obtained the quietness and confidence which she needed, and a few weeks later she came back to tell her counselor how God had changed all these things in her life and made them so different that everything was harmonious and happy.

Beloved, the question is not what is the matter with somebody else, but what is the matter with me? The promise to the tried one is, "I will be with him in trouble," and then comes the next promise, "I will deliver him," but we must first have Him with us in victory and then we shall have His deliverance. "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved," is the first stage. "God shall help her and that right early," is the consummation. Let us learn the first lesson, and when we are able to stand unmoved, then we shall soon find God's providence working for our deliverance and relief.

It is possible to go through the most trying conditions unmoved. It is possible to find amid the storms of sorrow a quietness and stillness which we never knew, when all was calm without, and it is this which glorifies God as no mere outward condition of circumstances could ever do.

"There is a peace that comes after sorrow,
Of hope surrendered, not of hope fulfilled,
That looks not out upon a bright tomorrow,
But on a tempest which His hand has stilled."