

The Secret of Spiritual Strength

The prophet Isaiah pronounced a woe upon Israel: "*Woe to the rebellious children, saith the LORD...*" (ISA 30:1). The Hebrew word for 'woe' here signifies a deep sorrow and grief. What had God's people done to hurt Him so deeply? And why did He call them rebellious? After all, these weren't heathen; they were His own children. What awful sin did they commit that caused Him to say they were rebellious?

The word Isaiah uses for 'rebellion' in this verse means backsliding, stubbornness, a turning away. What, exactly, were God's people turning away from? And what caused their backsliding?

We find the answer in the next phrase: "*(They) take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit...*" (ISA 30:1). The phrase "cover with a covering" here means they make their own plans. Simply put, God said, "My people no longer consult me. They don't look to me for guidance and counsel. Instead, they lean on the arm of the flesh. And every time they act without seeking me, turning to the world for help, they pile sin upon sin. They've forsaken their trust in the strong arm of the Lord."

Today, we think of rebellion as refusing to obey God's Word and turning to drugs, alcohol, fornication or other gross sins. But the rebellion God refers to here is far more grievous than these things. The Lord's own people were saying, "Let's not bother God with this - we have the wisdom and will to do it on our own."

Yet God's people knew full well they were to trust the Lord in every situation, no matter how insignificant. The Psalms constantly reminded them of this: "*How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God!*

therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings." (PSA 36:7). "*...my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge...*" (PSA 57:1). "*Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.*" (PSA 63:7).

Now God's people were facing a great crisis. The Assyrians had declared war on Judah, and the mighty enemy was approaching fast with thousands of chariots. This was the mother of all crises for Judah. Their situation looked absolutely hopeless.

Yet Judah didn't turn to the Lord in their crisis. They ignored God and leaned instead on their own wits. First, they sent ambassadors to Egypt to ask Pharaoh's army to loan them horses for battle. Then they tried to bribe Egypt to fight the Assyrians for them. In short, they sought strength from the wicked: "*(They) go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt!*" (ISA 30:2).

I wonder why none of Judah's leaders asked, "What did our godly fathers do in such threatening times? After all, we have a great history of deliverance. Where did they seek counsel? How did they find help in time of need?"

They might have recalled David's situation, when the Philistine armies had spread through the valley of Rephaim. David had just been anointed king of Israel, and he didn't know what to do. The

Bible says, "*And David inquired of God, saying, Shall I go up against the Philistines? and wilt thou deliver them into mine hand?*" (1.CHRON 14:10).

David sought the Lord alone for His guidance. He didn't ask the advice of any counselor, even though he had many wise men around him to call upon (and the scriptures say there is wisdom in many counselors). But David went to God in prayer, asking for specific guidance. And the Lord gave it to him: "*...the LORD said unto him, Go up; for I will deliver them into thine hand.*" (1.CHRON 14:10). God blessed David with a great victory, because he inquired of the Lord.

But the Philistines suddenly regrouped. Now they came back at Israel with a fresh army. At this point, David could have reasoned, "The strategy God gave us against this enemy worked the first time. We'll just use the same plan again." But David refused to rely on anything other than a fresh word from God. "*Therefore David inquired again of God; and God said unto him, Go not up after them...*" (1.CHRON 14:14).

I believe no two of God's plans are the same. And the Lord had a new strategy for David here. He instructed him, "*...come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And it shall be, when thou shalt hear a sound of going [rustling] in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt go out to battle: for God is gone forth before thee to smite the*

host of the Philistines." (1.CHRON 14:14-15).

I ask you: what military advisor could have given such advice? And who would have believed such a plan, if they'd heard it? I imagine Israel's captains saying, "David, are you telling me we're supposed to sit around and listen for the wind to blow in some treetops? That's when we're supposed to attack the Philistines, and expect God to give them into our hands? Have you gone crazy?"

Our God has ways that are beyond our human ways. His plans may seem absolutely foolish in the eyes of men. But our Lord works supernaturally through our obedience to His Word by faith: *"David therefore did as God commanded him: and they smote the host of the Philistines from Gibeon even to Gazer."* (1.CHRON 14:16).

King Asa Is a Different Example.

Asa was king when a million-man army of Ethiopians attacked, bringing scores of chariots and horsemen. *"And Asa cried unto the LORD his God, and said, LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude."* (2.CHRON 14:11).

In essence, Asa was crying, "Lord, we put our trust in you." Here was a godly king who *"...did that which was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God..."* (2.CHRON 14:2). Indeed, Asa *"...commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment."* (2.CHRON 14:4).

When the crisis came, Asa went straight to God in prayer. He didn't have to gather a committee to spend days scheming and planning. He had many wise people at his disposal - soldiers, politicians, strategists, counselors - but he sought God first. Asa prayed, "Lord, what should I do?" God responded by giving Asa a word, and by delivering Judah miraculously, *"So the LORD smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah..."* (2.CHRON 14:12).

Then another crisis arose. I believe this trial was meant as a test of Asa's faith. According to scripture, *"...Israel came up against Judah..."*

(2.CHRON 16:1), capturing the city of Ramah. But Asa didn't turn to God again, as David had done. Instead, he formed his own plan. He reasoned, "That million-man force from Ethiopia was a different matter. I needed God then. But this army from Israel is no big deal. I can handle it on my own."

How did Asa attempt to solve his problem? He tried bribing Syria to come against Israel. Asa even took gold and silver from the temple treasury and from his own accounts to use as bribe money. Then he dispatched ambassadors to persuade Syria's king, Benhadad, to break his peace accord with Israel and attack them.

The plan seemed to work. Syria moved against Israel, the Israelites abandoned Ramah, and Asa retook the city. Asa's self-conceived plan, which had ignored God completely, appeared successful. And the king congratulated himself for his cleverness.

But the Lord was grieved. He told Asa, *"...because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. Were not the Ethiopians... a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars."* (2.CHRON 16:7-9).

God was saying, in short, "Asa, at one time you relied only on me. And because of your trust, I delivered a great army into your hand. But now you've relied on your own wits and on the Syrians. You know this was not my way. And I will not allow it. You've acted foolishly, Asa. And from now on, you'll have not peace, but wars."

Many of us are like Asa. We receive a great deliverance from God, and we thank Him with loud praises. We promise, "Lord, from now on, I won't go anywhere or do anything until I inquire of you. I'm going to pray about everything." But then another crisis arises, and suddenly things are different. We think we can rely on our old plans and successes. So we end up taking matters into our own hands. The Lord may allow our self-made plans to work momentarily. But

eventually, we end up in total confusion.

You may object, "God has given me a good mind, and I'm supposed to use it. He wants me to figure things out." Yes, but only after receiving His direction in prayer. We can never obtain the mind of God by relying on our own reasoning. The apostle Paul tells us the carnal mind can't understand the spiritual mind (see ROM 8:5-7).

Let's say you're single, and you've been praying for God to bring a spouse into your life. That's a good thing. But over time you've grown impatient with the Lord's timetable. You've waited on God, but the right person still hasn't come along. So you set your sights on a certain person, and suddenly you're scheming to trap him. You may get your spouse. But, like Asa, you'll most likely get war, with no peace. You'll pay a heavy cost you hadn't counted on, such as anger, misunderstanding and confusion.

Worse, you'll grieve the Lord. You'll hear His woe to you: *"Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion."* (ISA 30:3). He'll say, "You trusted in the arm of flesh, even though I warned you that doing so is foolish. Now you're going to pay a price for not fully relying on me in all things. You'll end up in sorrow and confusion."

God Told Isaiah to Write Down His Grief Over Judah's Rebellion.

"Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever:" (ISA 30:8). God was saying, in essence, "I want every generation, from now to the end of time, to know my deep sorrow over this kind of rebellion. Write it down, Isaiah, so that all people, at all times, will understand my grief when they trust in some worldly provision and not in me."

The rebellion that God describes here is an act of defiance, a resistance to His total rule and authority in our lives. It's a refusal to seek His mind in all things. This includes not just the big things of life, but the small things: family matters, hurts, personal worries.

And it encompasses every aspect of our being - the spiritual, the physical, the mental, everything. Rebellion against God's rule means saying, "I can do this by myself. I don't need to bother God." But God wants to be bothered.

Simply put, if you're not seeking the Lord for all your guidance - if you're not crying out to Him for direction, if you're not trusting in His faithfulness, if you're trying to make things happen on your own - you're in rebellion. God declares, *"I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts;"* (ISA 65:2).

In light of God's warning, ask yourself: is it possible you're in rebellion against God, in spite of your devotion, worship and righteous walk? You may pray, fast and faithfully attend church. But could there be this kind of rebellion in your life? Could it be the reason you're facing confusion or warfare in your home, your family, your job?

I pose the same question to ministers. When God looks on you, does He say, "My child, at times you still do your work of ministry without seeking me. I want to be involved in everything, from the hairs of your head to the soles of your feet. If you don't 'ask at my mouth' or trust in the shadow of my wings, you are in rebellion."

Our Lord wants to be our keeper. *"Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is thy keeper..."* (PSALM 121:4-5). The Hebrew word for 'keeper' here means guard, protector, director, guide. Our Lord is a vigilant, protective father who takes great joy in keeping and preserving His children.

In fact, in Exodus God revealed Himself to Israel by a new name: Jealous. *"For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."* (EX 34:14). Notice that this name was revealed in the context of a warning: *"Thou shalt worship no other god."* At the time, most Israelites went to "high places," or idolatrous altars, to find direction. They gave the Lord mere lip service when it came to seeking Him for guidance.

This was idol worship, plain and simple. Only God can know the future. And whenever a person turns to something besides God for guidance, he worships that object. This is true of any reliance on astrologers, horoscopes or reading the stars. Whatever you depend on for help, you worship. You make it into a god.

Our Lord is absolutely jealous over His keeping power. And we scorn Him whenever we don't turn to Him alone for help. God slew King Saul for this very sin of rebellion: *"So Saul died of his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; and enquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him."* (1.CHRON 10:13-14). God's Word makes it clear: Saul's transgression was in seeking counsel from another instead of inquiring of the Lord. And God slew him for it.

We Come Now to the Secret of Spiritual Power.

Isaiah listed the awful consequences of Judah's refusal to trust God as their keeper: "Your rebellion will cause you to close your ears to God's Word. You'll no longer hear the prophets' warnings. Instead, you'll clamor for a 'smooth' gospel, deceitful preaching that justifies your rebellion. And because you despise all correction, you'll turn from the path of holiness." (see ISA 30:9-10).

Finally, Isaiah declared that God would break down all their self-protective walls: *"This iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall... whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant. And he shall break it as the breaking of the potters' vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare."* (ISA 30:13-14). God was saying, "I'm going to break into pieces every false thing you've trusted in. Your plans are going to collapse."

But then Isaiah revealed God's compassionate heart toward His people. He urged Judah, "You don't have to live in confusion anymore. And you don't have to endure this sudden breaking. God has provided a way out for us." *"For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and*

rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." (ISA 30:15).

Here, in short, is God's secret to spiritual strength: *"Quietness and confidence shall be your strength."* The word for 'quietness' in Hebrew means repose. And repose means calm, relaxed, free from all anxiety; to be still; to lie down with support underneath.

Not many Christians today have this kind of quietness and confidence. Multitudes of believers are involved in a frenzy of activity, rushing madly to obtain wealth, possessions, pleasures. Even in the ministry, God's servants run about worrying, fearing, looking for answers in conferences, seminars, best-selling books. Everyone wants guidance, solutions, something to calm their spirit. Yet they seek it in every source except the Lord. They don't realize God has already spoken a word for them, through Isaiah: if they don't turn to Him as their source, their striving will end in sorrow and confusion.

Isaiah describes what God's righteousness is supposed to accomplish in us: *"The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."* (ISA 32:17). If we're truly walking in righteousness, our lives will bear the fruit of a calm spirit, quietness of heart and peace with God.

Peter speaks of *"...the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."* (1.PET 3:4). Such a spirit has nothing to do with temperament or personality. After all, some people are naturally inclined to be calm and shy, while others are simply morbid. No, the meek, quiet spirit Peter refers to can only be implanted in us by the Holy Spirit. And He gives it to everyone who fully trusts the Lord in all things.

Yet, as Isaiah looked around, he saw God's people fleeing to Egypt for help, trusting in men, relying on horses and chariots. The prophet warned, *"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..."* (ISA 31:3).

Ambassadors were coming and going. Leaders were holding emergency strategy meetings. Everyone was in a panic, wailing, "What can we do? The Assyrians are going to wipe us out."

But Isaiah assured them, "It doesn't have to be this way. Return from your backsliding. Repent of your rebellion of trusting in others. Turn to the Lord, and He'll cover you with a blanket of peace. He'll give you quietness and rest in the midst of everything you're facing."

**The Holy Spirit Gives Us
Strength When We Release All
Our Needs Into God's Hands
and Trust in His Might.**

Ruth is an example of this kind of trust. After her husband died, Ruth lived with her mother-in-law, Naomi, who was quite elderly. Naomi was concerned about Ruth's welfare and wanted to ensure her daughter-in-law's future. So she advised Ruth to lie down at the feet of the wealthy Boaz and ask him to fulfill his obligation to her as her kinsman.

That evening, after the day's winnowing was finished, Boaz lay down "...at the end of the heap of corn:..." (RUTH 3:7) and pulled a blanket over him. The next morning, he woke up startled, finding a woman lying at his feet. (There was nothing immoral about Ruth's presence there; this was a common custom of the day.)

Ruth said to him, "*Spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.*" (RUTH 3:9). She was saying, in essence, "Will you take on the obligation of a relative for me? Will you provide for me?" In short, she was asking, "Will you marry me?"

Now, this was no manipulative scheme. Ruth and Naomi had done everything in divine order. We can be sure of this, because Christ's lineage came through Ruth. When Ruth returned home early that morning, Naomi asked her. "*Who art thou, my daughter?*" (RUTH 3:16). She was asking, in other words, "Should I call you 'engaged Ruth'? Or are you still widowed Ruth?"

Ruth told Naomi all that had happened. Now listen to her godly mother-in-law's advice: "...*Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how*

the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day." (RUTH 3:18). Naomi had prayed about the matter, seeking God's direction and God had given her counsel. He had reminded her of the law of the kinsman-redeemer (which was a type and foreshadowing of Christ). So Naomi was confident that she and Ruth had done their part. Now it was time to sit still and trust God to perform what He had promised. She was saying, "It's all in the Lord's hands now, Ruth. Just relax and be calm. God will move supernaturally for you, so you don't have to worry, fret or manipulate anything. Let quietness and confidence be your strength. God won't let Boaz rest until he puts a ring on your finger."

A calm and peace settled over Naomi's house. Nobody was in a frenzy, biting fingernails and wondering, "Will God do it? When will it happen?" These two faithful women could relax, sing and praise the Lord for His goodness.

What about your home? Is your house a calm, peaceful abode? Or is it a place of doubt, questioning, anxiety, restlessness? Do you run here and there, fretting, "How am I going to pay the bills?" When trouble comes, do you seek God diligently before any other source? Then do you obey everything He tells you to do? Finally, are you still, restful, trusting Him for the result? If so, your home should be one of calm and peace.

**Isaiah Lists The Good Things
That Come to Those Who Wait
on the Lord in All Ways.**

"Blessed are all they that wait for him... thou shalt weep no more: he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry... And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand and when ye turn to the left... Ye shall have a song, as in the night... and gladness of heart..." (ISA 30:18-19,21,29). Isaiah was saying, "If you'll just wait on the Lord - if you'll cry out to Him again, and return to trusting Him - He'll do for you everything I've said and more."

God can merely speak a word, and the enemy will falter before us: "*For through the voice of the LORD*

shall the Assyrian be beaten down." (ISA 30:31). Beloved, there is no matter our Father can't solve, no battle He can't win for us, with a mere word from His lips. Isaiah says "...*the breath of the LORD...*" will consume everything in our way (see ISA 30:33).

Yet, this process of trusting God in all things isn't easy. Recently, in prayer, I sought the Lord about a situation concerning our church building here in New York City. It was possible we might have a company build a fifty-story hotel on top of our building. (The problem has to do with what's called "air rights" in the city - that is, the space above existing buildings, which constitutes potential building space. We do not own the air rights above our building - it was too expensive for us to buy - so we cannot legally stop this company. Space is at a premium in Manhattan, so even the air space above buildings can be sold as real estate.)

I'd prayed that not a brick of our building would be removed. I told God, "I trust you about this, Father. I have sought you about it, and I will be at peace about it." Here is how He answered me: "David, I'm amazed that you can trust me with your real estate, finances and other material things. Yet you still won't trust me with your physical well-being."

I'd been very aware that I'm about to turn seventy soon. And I'd been overly concerned about what would happen to my family after I'm gone. Now the Lord's convicting words hit me like a thunderbolt. I'd put every material concern into His hands, but not the eternal concerns. I realized, "Lord, you want me to trust you with everything, don't you?"

Yes, dear saint, He wants it all - your health, your family, your future. He wants you to entrust Him with every matter. And He wants you to live in quietness, confidence and rest. So, go to your secret closet and get alone with the Lord. Bring everything to Him. He has promised, "You'll hear My Word behind you, telling you which way to go. This is the way - now walk in it."

By David Wilkerson
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