

“Their Strength is to Sit Still . . . In Repentance and Rest Shall Ye be Saved; in Quietness and in Confidence Shall be Your Strength” (Isa. 30:7,15)

Victor Ludlow provides the following historical introduction to Isaiah 30-31:

King Hezekiah's rule over Judah was constantly threatened by the Assyrian Empire. After the Assyrians, under Sargon II, had conquered the northern kingdom, Israel, and deported her leading citizens to the far northeastern Assyrian territories, Judah remained one of the few independent countries in the western Fertile Crescent. Sargon II attempted to encircle Judah with his armies as he had established dominion over the coastal states Phoenicia and Philistia and had forced Egypt to open trade relations with her.

King Hezekiah knew that any offensive action by Judah would immediately bring the Assyrian army upon his country. However, after Sargon II's death in 705 BC, a number of political conditions seemed to favor a move away from Assyrian domination:

1. With Sargon's death on the Hittite battlefield of Tabal (now part of southern Turkey) internal dissension and questions over the power of his successor encouraged numerous vassal states to revolt against Assyrian power and taxation.
2. Egypt seemed to be growing more powerful as the Nubian pharaoh, Shabako, developed the twenty-fifth (or Ethiopian) dynasty into a strong threat against Assyrian expansion in the west.
3. In the east, Babylon showed signs of resurgent power, as a new leader, Merodach-baladan, received support from neighboring states.
4. Closer to Judah, other states were exerting increased independence.

Taking advantage of these circumstances, Judah joined a coalition of states in Philistia and Phoenicia in their rebellion against Assyria. She also entered into a treaty with Egypt, with the Egyptians promising military aid against any Assyrian attack.

Isaiah strongly opposed this whole series of events as they developed from 705 to 701 BC and renounced Judah's reliance upon Egyptian power. He desired the people to seek counsel and strength from the Lord instead of turning to Egypt, the land of their former bondage and affliction. Isaiah prophesied that, because the Judeans rejected the prophets and relied upon the power of men, Judah would fall along with her guardian, Egypt, and her inhabitants would be scattered until the Lord's judgments upon them were complete (*Isaiah, Prophet, Seer and Poet*, pp 278-79).

Judah should have known better. The precedent had been set, time and again, throughout Israel's history. When they relied upon the Lord, He protected them and helped to fight their battles. They hadn't had to lift a finger in their own defense against the Egyptians at the time of their deliverance under Moses. The Lord protected them by opening a path through the Sea, and then drowned the Egyptians when they followed after them. They recited the details of this story yearly at their Passover feasts, yet they did not believe that the Lord would deliver them from the Assyrians.

Their favorite king, David, had shown them the pattern of faith when he stood up to Goliath, and proclaimed: "Thou comest to me with a sword, and a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel" (1 Sam. 17:45-46). This, again, was an oft-repeated story, but the worldly sophistication that had come with their rise as a nation had weakened their faith. As they had once stated to the prophet Samuel, they wanted to "be like all the [other] nations" (1 Sam. 8:19-20), and now, they had, indeed, achieved that status. They were seeking alliances, counting chariots, sending bribes, and turning everywhere for help except to God.

Isaiah's prophecies in chapters 30-31 take little interpretation. The opening verses are clear:

Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord,
that take counsel, but not of me;
and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit,
that they may add sin to sin (Isa. 30:1).

Where do we turn for help when trouble is upon us? Do we run to and fro, here and there, seeking solutions from the many counselors who offer relief in short-term panaceas? Unfortunately, there are many who succumb to false prophets, who often urge their adherents to "unburden" themselves of their covenants and commitments to God and family in the urgent need to "save themselves" in their lifeboats of self-interest and shame.

Isaiah prophesied that Judah would find only shame and confusion in relying upon Egypt; that shame went in both directions, for neither Judah or Egypt could profit one another (Isa. 30:3-6). "Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit," Isaiah warned (Isa. 31:3). How could Judah have forgotten that God had once brought them out of Egyptian bondage, and freed them from Egyptian ties? Why reverse all that had been accomplished, including the witness that the God of Israel was not like any other god? But, Israel's people, who should have led the way in faith, crumpled before the threatened onslaught, and they failed to be the witness that they could have been to the world.

We will discuss in a few weeks the miracle that took place because King Hezekiah heeded Isaiah's counsel, and turned to the Lord, but this week's chapters focus on events leading up to the siege of Jerusalem.

The people, as a whole, did not want to listen to their prophets, and rely on the Lord. They wanted to hear "smooth things," and "deceitful" words. They told the prophets to get out of the way, and to "cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us" (Isa. 30:9-11). We see that kind of attitude today, when people wish to live according to their own desires, and don't want to

be told of a Judeo-Christian God who has given commandments to follow. "Sin" is no longer a legitimate word; people walk after their own light, and applaud others for doing the same.

One of the world's most respected spiritual teachers, Deepak Chopra, wrote:

Sin isn't a fact of human nature. It's an idea. As such, it has proved very useful to religious and political elites. . . . Getting past the idea of sin is difficult when the myth is fostered that God hates sinners and favors the righteous. Who wouldn't want to be on the winning team, where all the power and money lie, not to mention the grand prize of salvation? It would benefit the world as a whole if every society could move past the toxic idea of sin to a new idea. There's no lack of alternatives ("What Comes Next After Sin?" Huffington Post, 7/23/2009).

The great tragedy in this viewpoint is the elimination for a need of a Savior, as all are considered "good" and "on their own path," which they believe will inevitably lead to growth and enlightenment. It is pleasing to hear, but completely invalidates the Plan of Salvation, wherein the Savior and His Atonement are the necessary bridge to salvation.

Deepak Chopra suggests an alternative to the way people have pictured God. He calls his alternative "God 2.0" and writes the following:

The primary difficulty with God isn't belief - more than 80% of US responders tell pollsters that they believe God exists. The problem is that God is irrelevant, providing few if any practical benefits in daily life. In an age of faith the circumstances were in God's favor. When people got sick or died, had a run of bad luck, committed immoral acts, received unexpected rewards, or couldn't have children - the list of situations was endless - God was invoked to explain why. In one way or another, the deity was interwoven into the fabric of daily life.

In a new book, *The Future of God*, my pivotal argument is that God only has a future if he (or she) becomes useful once more. We can think of this as God 2.0. Such a shift would have to happen on a level different from faith. Modern secular society isn't going to reverse history and return to prescientific ways. A new avenue has to open, and it has. . . .

. . . God, as traditionally conceived, is woven into our problems. The deity has always been a reflection of human identity. In fact, most believers who were born into the Judeo-Christian tradition envision God as a human being writ large, with emotions, whims, and judgments familiar in everyday life, only on a cosmic scale. Seeing a benevolent God when times are good and a vengeful or indifferent God when times are bad has been the norm. We will continue to use God as a mirror, no doubt, but the reflection must change if God is to prove useful.

A new conception of God might look something like the following:

- * God would represent the essence of being human, which is conscious awareness.
- * We would seek God by going deep into our own awareness.
- * We would begin to center ourselves in a more evolved state of awareness.
- * The existence of consciousness as the pre-created state of the universe would become consonant with the existence of God.

These themes are already quite strong in certain minds, including scientific minds, and the trend is upward. No one can predict that God will actually be redefined and become a useful part of how we live and think. But the possibility is open and the potential is limitless. Once we envision an enlightened future for ourselves, God acquires a future at the same moment. Believe it or not, God 2.0 could be indispensable ten years from now, for all the reasons just outlined (Huffington Post, “Will God 2.0 Be Indispensable in Ten Years?”, 12/08/2014).

Deepak’s teachings about the nature of God are not isolated, and they are highly regarded by society. The new age of spirituality promotes the idea that “God is in us,” which translates quickly to “we are God.” None of these ideas are new, but they are quickly becoming the accepted basis of belief today. Unless we know doctrine, we can easily be misled by statements that are close to truth, yet nonetheless, counterfeit in nature. Thankfully, we have the truths restored through the First Vision to anchor our faith in a true and living God and to attest to His attributes as an exalted human being.

Joseph Smith taught:

Let us here observe that three things are necessary for any rational and intelligent being to exercise faith in God unto life and salvation. First, the idea that he actually exists; Secondly, a *correct* idea of his character, perfections, and attributes; Thirdly, an actual knowledge that the course of life which one is pursuing is according to His will (Lectures on Faith, Lecture Three).

When a society wants God “to get out of the way,” as they did in Isaiah’s day, or in our own, they are ripe for calamity. Where do people go, if they don’t want to take God’s directives?

It is relying on the arm of flesh - whether our own or another’s - that the scriptures repeatedly warn us about. In today’s spiritual new age, one relies upon oneself to create the rules of life, which will bring about the same disastrous results as Judah turning to Egypt for help from Assyria.

The Lord has counseled:

The weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh” (D&C 1:19).

The more humble and helpless we feel, the stronger our position is in obtaining the help of the Lord. The acknowledgement of our own vulnerability or weakness is essential in our coming unto Jesus, and “yoking up” with Him (see Matt. 11:28-30).

Isaiah compared Judah’s refusal to rely on the Lord and His prophets to a breach in the wall, ready to break into pieces, and allow the conquerors to enter into their city (Isa. 30:13-14). This is a powerful metaphor that is applicable to the spiritual walls of strength that are built around our souls by our commitment to our covenants, and our willingness to listen to, and heed, our prophets. Do we have any cracks that need repairing?

The Lord counseled His people through Isaiah: “Their strength is to sit still . . . “ and again, “In returning (repenting) and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength” (Isa. 30:7,15). These words could be carved into the doorposts of our homes, and provide the creed by which we live. How might things change in our lives if we followed this counsel? This image produces a complete contrast to all the running around Judah (and we) did to try to ensure their (our) safety! What is produced in quietly sitting still, repenting, and turning our hearts and ears to a focused listening for the counsel of the Lord?

We have the opportunity to quietly sit and listen to the counsel of the Lord in the upcoming General Conference. In doing so, we will be equipped for the storms of our day. Our leaders are prophets, seers and revelators, who will tell us what we need to prepare against, and how to do so. The Lord waits to bless us as we come unto Him, humbly seeking His will.

The Lord also promised that He would wait for Judah, and for Israel. He waits for their return (repentance) and their turning their hearts towards Him:

And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you,
and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you:
for the Lord is a God of judgment (justice): blessed are all they that wait for him.

For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem:
thou shalt weep no more:
he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry;
when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.

And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction,
yet shall not thy teachers (Teacher) be removed into a corner any more,
but thine eyes shall see thy teachers (Teacher).

The Lord does not remove Himself from His children, rather, His children remove themselves from Him. He promises that there will be a day when His children will see their false gods for what they are, and cast them away (Isa.30:22; 31:7) and return to Him. Because they rejected the Bread of Life and the Living Water, His people have had the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, but when they turn their hearts to Him, He will be gracious and merciful; He will show Himself unto them, and respond to their cries.

In chapter 31, the Lord promises that if His people will return to Him, He will “come down to fight for mount Zion,” and “defend Jerusalem” (Isa. 31:4-5), and indeed, we will see that He does do just that when King Hezekiah leads his people in turning their defense over to the Lord (Isa. 36-37). How do things change in our own lives when we wait, or trust, in the Lord to defend or fight for us, rather than urgently seeking to do that for ourselves?

Elder Richard G. Scott taught:

The spiritual flame in some is easily quenched by the world around them. Yet others live so as to be strengthened and nurtured by the Lord. They not only overcome the temptations of the world, but their unquenchable spirit enriches the lives of others around them (April 1989 Conference, “Trust in the Lord”).

The people of Judah wanted to silence their prophets, and wanted the Lord to “cease from before them.” They wanted to conduct the war with Assyria “their way,” and they were certain that their worldly logic would prevail. They forgot their sacred history, or at least, they set it aside, relying on their own wisdom. President Joseph F. Smith gave the following counsel during his day (World War I), which could have so easily applied for Hezekiah and his people, or for the people of the world today:

“For years it has been held that peace comes only by preparation for war; the present conflict should prove that peace comes only by preparing for peace, through training the people in righteousness and justice, and selecting rulers who respect the righteous will of the people . . . there is only one thing that can bring peace into the world. It is the adoption of the gospel of Jesus Christ, rightly understood, obeyed and practiced by rulers and people alike” (*Improvement Era*, Sept. 1914, pp. 1074-75).

President Smith has given the key: It *is* the adoption of the gospel of Jesus Christ, rightly understood, obeyed and practiced that will bring peace to the world and its inhabitants. This is our sacred commission as Latter-day Saints, and as “the gentiles” that Isaiah saw in so many of his visions. It is our role to teach of Christ and of His restored gospel. But we must also follow President Smith’s counsel in “rightly understanding, obeying and practicing” the precious truths we have been given. We cannot become distracted by the noise and tumult around us, but must remember the Lord’s counsel to be still, to be quiet, and to listen for His word.

The Doctrine and Covenants Institute Student Manual states:

The Saints are now living in the “last days” (D&C 86:4). This is a period of wickedness and tribulations, of calamity and great distress (see Moses 7:60–61; D&C 1:17; Luke 21:25), but it is also a period of restoration, in which the Lord is bringing to pass a restitution of the powers and blessings of all former times (see D&C 121:27–31; D&C 128:18; Moses 7:62; Acts 3:21). In this day and age, the Lord’s work will triumph, and it will eventually fill the whole earth (see D&C 84:97–102; Daniel 2:28–44; Moses 7:62-65).

This generation stands at the end of the sixth “day” of the earth’s history (see D&C 77:6-7, 12; Abraham 3:4; 2 Peter 3:8). Now is the “Saturday evening” of time preceding the great millennial Sabbath of the earth (see McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:485–86; Smith, *Teachings*, p. 13). It is for this generation to prepare the way for the Second Coming of the Lord. Modern Saints must obey the principles of the gospel and know the signs of the times, so that they may endure the trials and difficulties of this dispensation, recognize the signs of His coming, and be prepared to receive Him as His own people when He comes. The Doctrine and Covenants clarifies prophecies of the past concerning the last days, and it gives many additional prophecies by which the Saints can recognize the time of the Lord’s coming, that it might not “overtake [them] as a thief” (1 Thessalonians 5:4). It not only teaches how to recognize the imminence of the Lord’s coming, but it also makes very clear what one must do to be prepared to receive the Lord when He comes (pp 397-405).

Looking ahead to the Millennium, Isaiah sees that “in that day” the earth will produce abundantly, “rivers and streams of water” will flow “upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill” and the healing light of the Savior will beam upon His people, and He will “heal the

stroke of their wound” (Isa. 30:23-26). The “glorious voice” of the Lord will be heard once more, and His people will sing a holy song of joy (Isa. 30:29-30).

May we keep our hearts “settled” upon the glorious view that Isaiah and others have provided for us of the Millennial Day when the Lord will dwell amongst His people, and all shall be “quiet” and “at rest,” and may that view bring peace to our hearts and stillness to our souls as we seek the counsel of the Lord day by day.