

# ISAIAH

Harry Whittaker

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Harry Whittaker

First Edition. June 1988

Published by:  
Biblia, 130 Hednesford Road, Cannock, Staffordshire, United Kingdom.

Printed by:  
North West Print Ltd., Booth Road, Sale, Cheshire, United Kingdom.

## Historical Summary

For convenience of reference, here is an outline of the main events of Hezekiah's reign which are explicitly described in the histories (Isaiah 36-39; 2 Kings 18-20; 2 Chronicles 29-32) or which are implied in those narratives or mentioned in contemporary archaeological records: Reformation and a great Passover affecting many throughout the twelve tribes of Israel.

Assyrian invasion devastating the entire Land.

Great numbers of Jews taken into captivity.

The king's desperate sickness.

Direction of affairs taken over by unworthy men.

Futile attempts to secure military aid from Egypt.

Jerusalem besieged.

Rough Assyrian challenge to the supremacy of Jehovah.

Hezekiah's recovery.

Egyptian defeat by the Assyrians.

The destruction of the Assyrian army at Jerusalem.

The happy return of the multitude of Jewish captives and refugees.

Unexampled prosperity of the Land in a Year of Jubilee.

The cities of Judah re-built.

A great wave of enthusiasm among surrounding nations for friendship with Israel.

The Babylonian treaty — a grievous lapse, denounced by Isaiah.

The king and his people saved by repentance.

Queen Hephzibah gives birth to an heir to the throne.

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## Abbreviations

LXX: Septuagint (Greek) Version of the OT.

NIV: New International Version

s.w: same word

*Books by H.A.W.*

H.Gt: Hezekiah the Great

T.E: The Time of the End

B.S: Bible Studies

Gospels: Studies in the Gospels

Rev: Revelation: a Biblical approach

J.A.B.P: Jews, Arabs, and Bible prophecy

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## An approximate chronology of Assyrian Kings contemporary with Isaiah

745 — 727 Tiglath-pileser III

727 — 722 Shalmaneser V

722 — 705 Sargon II

705 — 681 Sennacherib

The chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah contemporary with the above is too tricky a minefield for a wise man to venture into, except with much trepidation. It may be taken as highly probable that the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah all involved regencies of indeterminate length. Hezekiah's regnal dates were probably 715 — 687(6), with the siege of Jerusalem in 701.

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## An Explanatory Foreword

Good king Hezekiah is not to be allowed to rest in peace. In an earlier study, "Hezekiah the Great", the exciting story of his reign was put together from three histories, and with occasional aid from outstanding passages in Isaiah.

It is the interdependence of Isaiah's prophecy and the Hezekiah story which this book now seeks to develop at much greater length. I am satisfied, to the point of dogmatism such as I normally decry, that Hezekiah and Isaiah (all 66 chapters) lean on each other considerably. The Hezekiah story serves to explain a vast amount of detail in Isaiah which is otherwise obscure. And Isaiah comes to the rescue magnificently time after time, filling out the picture of Hezekiah's reign.

Readers who are enthusiastic about the Messianic message in Isaiah (and I hope sincerely that they all are) will find the Messianic motif completely neglected in Part 1. But it is hoped that Parts 2 and 3 make some amends, by showing how, over and over again, Hezekiah proves to be as fine a type of Christ as Joseph and David ever were. But — one thing at a time!

It is vitally important to recognize that the basic principle of interpretation of Old Testament prophecy is to look *first* for the appropriate meaning of the message with reference to the period when the prophecy was given; and *then* to extend one's horizon to the first and second advents of Jesus the Messiah, making every possible use of the by-no-means-meagre hints supplied by the New Testament. Far too many students pick and choose between these two approaches according to which strikes them as the easier.

The modernist approach to the Book of Isaiah receives neither sympathy nor support here. It is taken as basic that after the first few chapters the entire book belongs to the time of Hezekiah. Apart from anything else, the shape of the book: 1-35/36-39/40-66 (Prophecy/History/Prophecy) should tell us that those four historical chapters are the clue to what goes before and to what follows.

Ancient Jewish tradition says that in the evil years of Manasseh, a persecuted Isaiah took refuge in a hollow tree and was sawn asunder (Heb. 11:37) when the tree itself was sawn asunder. W.A. Wordsworth has scornfully commented that modern critics quite mesmerised by the misleading mention of Cyrus (44:28) and Babylon (46:1; 47:1) have resumed the persecution, taking pleasure in sawing Isaiah's book asunder and dogmatically assigning 27 chapters (or more) to the post-exilic period. I have yet to find any modernist commentary that can make really worthwhile sense of "deutero-Isaiah" from that hypothesis.

On the other hand, J.W. Thirtle (an early Christadelphian, who should be more respected today than he was in his own time) wrote a very reverent and scholarly book which showed how well Isaiah 40-66 fits the Hezekiah period. He went further than that, suggesting that many of the Psalms belong to that time. His view that the book of Psalms took its final shape in Hezekiah's reign is here received with thankful admiration and agreement. This is specially true of the Song of Degrees (see Geo. Booker on this), and the Asaph and Korah psalms.

It is now possible to go further and see that amazing reign as the greatest period of prophetic activity in pre-Christian history. Let students begin to recognize that besides Isaiah and many Psalms, Joel, Micah, Nahum, Obadiah, Habakkuk and (to some extent) Hosea and Amos all need to be studied against this historical background. The increasing understanding from such an approach will be a fine

additional dividend. And there may be other parts of the Old Testament calling for the same sympathetic approach.

Regarding the Book of Psalms it now becomes more and more evident that even the Psalms of David were, many of them, included in the collection because they were also astonishingly relevant to the complex events of Hezekiah's reign (59 is a good example). But all that is another story.

Those readers who are already familiar with "Hezekiah the Great, and Songs of Degrees" (H.A.W. and G.B.) will find the same ideas coming up here again and again. There is no apology for this, for who can be the loser from reading more, and in greater detail, about this fine man? The repetitions are, of course, inevitable, since so much of the same ground is being covered. Does not Isaiah himself make constant repetition of fundamental ideas, but never *ad nauseum*.

This present volume, then, consists of three sections, which were written at widely spaced intervals; hence the different styles of presentation; present disabilities make a re-write out of question.

Part 1: Hezekiah and Isaiah.

This was done last of all. It is easygoing, and will, I trust, be found informative and even exhilarating at times by its substantial reinforcement of the Bible history with neglected passages out of Isaiah and the Hezekiah Psalms (Psalms have been used sparingly; there is a lot more of the same sort in my Commentary on the Book of Psalms). Even those who have already worked their way through "Hezekiah the Great, and Songs of Degrees" (H.A.W. and G.B.) will come across a fair amount of additional material.

Part 2: Isaiah 1-35

is straight commentary on the text, not verse by verse in a way that often becomes almost unreadable, but taking a paragraph or a chapter at a time, not infrequently twice over. Technicalities have been avoided as much as possible, but even so the going is not easy. Courage, reader! You may not know just how incomprehensible some Isaiah commentaries are! So here (with apologies) is my excuse.

Part 3: is not, as might be expected, Isaiah 36-39, for this has already been covered in "Hezekiah the Great". Instead, then, Part 3 is Isaiah 40-66. In the profundities of this prophecy, commentator and reader are alike right out of their depth. Can anyone honestly claim real clarity of insight here? This is probably the most concentrated Bible Study I have ever attempted. Alas! At the time when this was written I was suffering from an acute attack of footnotes. I ask the reader's indulgence.

I am more blessed with good friends than I deserve to be. The help from some of these:

The assiduous labours of Winifred Taunton have left their mark on every page. Elsie Bramhill typed diligently for many an hour, and never kept me waiting. Arthur and Joan Sheppard cast eagle eyes over every paragraph. Mary Eyre checked hundreds of references without a murmur. Raymond Wiggin persuaded the genius of Michelangelo's impression of Isaiah and his two sons, to grace the front cover of this volume. The back cover shows the Dead Sea Scroll version of Isaiah, chapter 1.

**H.A.W.**

# **ISAIAH**

## **PART ONE**

## 1. A Bad Inheritance

When Hezekiah at last came to full authority over his nation, after being for some years a young co-regent with his decadent father, he knew right well the appalling character of his inheritance.

The reign of Uzziah had been a sustained period of high prosperity. The nation had never had it so good. But affluence has never been a blessing to any nation. So when Ahaz, a weak feckless spiritual pervert, came to the throne, even while the old leprous architect of prosperity was still shut away in his lazar house, decay had already set in throughout the nation. Ahaz, the poor fool, promptly set himself to accelerate the process. Never did the nation have such an eloquent example of spineless politics and dedicated perversity in ungodliness.

### Decay, Apostasy

The early chapters of Isaiah are one sustained reprobation of king and aristocracy. And it may be taken for granted that the common people did their best to emulate the worthy examples now being set them. The nation's Father in heaven shook his head sadly:

"I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: But Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters...they are gone away backward...The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores" (1:2-6).

The leprosy of the old king, such a fine able man in his time, was an apt figure of the rottenness which was now the nation's norm.

Of course, it was in the worship of their God where decay was most evident. They were become "a people of unclean lips" (6:5). What had been a nation well-instructed in godliness was now, in the prophet's parable, a vineyard which brought no satisfaction whatever to its owner:

"He looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes (literally, stinkers!)" (5:2).

There is something almost pathetic about the expostulation of heaven:

"What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done?" (5:4).

The women, "the daughters of Zion" who were intended to be specially consecrated to the service of the temple (see B.S., ch. 10.05) were shameless in their dedication to vanity and beauty culture, and Isaiah tutored in the technicalities by his prophetess wife, hurled at them a searing catalogue of their indulgences in such futility (3:16ff).

Men and women alike, especially in the aristocracy, were brazen in their abandonment:

"They declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not" (3:9).  
"O my people", Isaiah lamented, "they which lead thee cause thee to err" (3:12).

So a sequence of woes, unmatched in their caustic penetration until the days of

## 4 Isaiah Part 1

Jesus (Mt. 23) was unleashed against them:

"Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning (not for worship or diligent usefulness, but), that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine" (5:11,22).

And their self-indulgence is made the more uplifting by an enthusiasm for classical music (very respectable!):

"The harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord" (5:12).

"Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope" (5:18).

— they had public processions in which they proclaimed themselves devotees of the current fashionable deity by drawing through the streets his image enthroned on an imitation of the cherubim-chariot of the Lord. Thus, shameless, as they pulled on a cart rope they declared their sin.

### Moral landslide

With these distortions of heavenly truth, there had come in a cynical perversion of all moral standards. Twenty-seven centuries ahead of modern cleverness, they had become experts in double-speak:

"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (5:20).

There was no penetrating their blithe self-assurance:

"Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" (5:21).

The king himself was a fair sample. In a time of acute national crisis Ahaz was bidden:

"Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth (of the Kidron valley), or in the height (of the temple) above".

Yet the only response the king's non-faith could muster was a pseudo-pious:

"I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord" (7:11,12)

Others, with more blatant cynicism openly challenged the Lord's prophet: "Let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!" (5:19) — as who should say: 'Haven't we been waiting long enough for the doom and destruction you hurl at us? Your prophecies are as slow as the second coming of Christ!'

Not only religious apostasy but also social abuses were rampant: "Woe unto them that join house to house" (5:8)

— the wealthy took pride in the acquisition of impressive estates. And all this at the expense of the poor:

"What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor?" (3:15).

"The Lord looked for judgment (*mishpat*) but behold oppression (*mishpach*); for righteousness (*tz'daqah*), but behold a cry (*tz'aqah*)" (5:7).

"Woe unto them...which justify the wicked for reward (a bribe)...to them that decree unrighteous decrees...to turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless!" (5:23; 10:1,2).

The same element of chicanery came into their religious life:

"They are soothsayers like the Philistines...seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep and that mutter" (2:6; 8:19).

What hope for a nation that wants to be taken in with the spoofery of spiritualism? They were in a parlous condition:

"Hear ye indeed, but understand not: and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (6:9,10).

Hard words, these, but well deserved, it was "a hypocritical nation...the people of my wrath" (10:6).

Hezekiah, what a task lies before you!

## 2. Reformation and a real Passover

When Hezekiah came to the throne as a young man of twenty-five, thanks to the influence of a godly mother or of the even more godly Isaiah, he forthwith set about the task of lifting his temple and people out of the spiritual degradation which had been inevitable during the reign of his decadent father. Never did a son pass a more public vote of no confidence in his father. First, then, a mighty spring-cleaning and re-organisation of the temple, as in 2 Chronicles 30. Isaiah had foretold that this would come about:

"And it shall come to pass that he that is left in Zion (i.e. in the temple), and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem" (Isaiah 4:3).

The gross abuses in religious practice which Ahaz had not only tolerated but actively encouraged were swept away. The pagan altar and its cult imported from Assyria, via Damascus, was got rid of. That altar had been set up directly before the sanctuary entrance, and the former altar of burnt-offering had been shifted to a remote corner of the temple court (2 Kings 16:10-16); and the rock foundation of the original altar (Al Sakrah?), which Ahaz had found an eyesore, had been to some extent disguised by having the brazen laver set up there (for fuller details, see "The Stone of Stumbling", Bible Studies, HAW, ch. 4.09).

### The Davidic tradition re-established

Isaiah foretold that very soon these irreligious innovations would be reprobated and the old familiar pattern of worship re-instituted. The prophet bade his faithful remnant give their loyalty to the worship of Jehovah and to all the appointments which had come down from the time of David:

"Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let *him* be your Fear, and let *him* be your Dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling (like the rock protruding above the level of the rest of the temple area) and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel (faithful and unfaithful alike found something offensive about the situation), for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken" (Isaiah 8:13-15).

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— that rock platform was literally something to stumble over!

In later years, when the Assyrian grip was tightening on Jerusalem, crude Rabshakeh tried to make propaganda out of Hezekiah's efforts at reformation which, until the time of his illness, were still vigorous:

"If thou say to me, We trust in the Lord our God, is it not he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar?" (Isaiah 36:7).

Rabshakeh had certainly, and perhaps deliberately, got his theology a bit mixed but his words reflect clearly a Hezekiah zealous for a religious change which was well-known beyond the walls of Jerusalem.

When the king found himself struck down with incurable sickness, his chief lament was that he was now prevented from participation in the worship of Jehovah, nor could he lead his people in these wholesome devotions:

"When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me; for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day" (Psalm 42:4).

Here "holy day" describes a feast of the Lord, almost certainly Passover which Hezekiah had revived with such enthusiasm.

Consequently, in a later psalm of trouble he could declare with all honesty (concerning the godly section of the nation, at any rate):

"All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way" (Psalm 44:17,18).

Psalm 132, a Song of Degrees, has a long reminiscence of the intense zeal David had shown for bringing the ark to Zion (v. 1 -10). Hezekiah incorporated this psalm in the psalter because it expressed precisely his own unquenchable eagerness for a similar religious revival in his own time. And as David's fervour brought him a rich divine Promise about a scion of his line who would sit on his throne for ever, so also childless Hezekiah looked wistfully to the day when God would bless him with a son to continue his royal line:

"The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it, Of the fruit of thy body (literally: bowels — virgin birth!) will I set upon thy throne. If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore" (Psalm 132:11,12).

### **Pulling the Twelve Tribes together**

Hezekiah was specially eager to unify the entire nation, north and south, in the worship of Jehovah at Jerusalem and in a devoted observance of the Feasts. In the words of contemporary Hosea: "Turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually" (Hosea 12:6).

His appeal to the northern tribes, only partially successful, was also anticipated in Isaiah's prophecy of light springing up in the Galilean darkness, an area much ravaged by Assyrian inroads:

"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined" (Isaiah 9:2).

This desirable development is most beautifully, if briefly, set out in another Song of Degrees:

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity (the brethren of Israel and Judah who for centuries had kept severely apart)".

This delightful prospect, of North and South coming together in godly fellowship, is likened to "the dew of Hermon (in the far north), and as the dew that descended on the mountains of Zion (the temple), for there the Lord commanded the blessing" which only God's high priest could impart to the people (Psalm 133).

### **A worthy High Priest**

It was appropriate for such a great occasion that the new high priest should be inducted into office. Instead of the timid and sycophantic Urijah (2 Kings 16:11), there was Eliakim the son of Hilkiah (Isaiah 22:20):

"It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that came down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garments".

That copious anointing oil flowed down upon the shoulder ornaments of the high priest (Exodus 28:7-12) and over the twelve stones set in the breastplate and upon all his garments, thus symbolically uniting all the twelve tribes in the blessing of that moving occasion.

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together; whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord" (Psalm 122:1-4).

Bible readers often fail to realise what a sensational development, what a big step forward in godliness, this reformation of Hezekiah's was. Even though it was only partially successful, it proved to be the saving of the nation in the dire times which soon followed. But it was still necessary for the prophets to castigate the hypocrisy and self-indulgence and cynicism which characterised much of the nation. There are plenty of indications of this dichotomy.

## **3. The Temple defiled and cleansed**

It is useful at this stage to enquire how Ahaz managed to avoid serious trouble with the rough aggressive Assyrian empire-builders, whereas his son was called on to endure an irresistible and destructive invasion which was designed to wipe the small kingdom of Judah off the map.

First, then, it needs to be recognized that in the early part of his reign Ahaz came under serious pressure from the alliance which Syria and Israel (the northern kingdom) formed against him. This was their defensive measure against the rising tide of Assyrian power. These two kingdoms did not like the prospect of fighting two wars simultaneously against Assyria in the north-east and Judah in the south. So, since they failed to persuade Ahaz to join in their defensive struggle against Tiglath-pileser III, they decided to remove the southern danger altogether by an invasion of Judah before the Assyrian threat became more urgent (2 Kings 16:6,7; Isaiah 7:1). The nation's defences, which Uzziah had brought to a high pitch of perfection, were now in a sorry state of dilapidation. So, in a panic Ahaz promptly sent to Nineveh, pleading with the Assyrian monarch to come to his rescue:

"I am thy servant and thy son: come up and save me..." (2 Kings 16:7).

The plea was reinforced by a substantial persuader gathered together from the temple and palace treasuries. It was an open acknowledgment that an annual payment

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of tribute to Assyria was deemed preferable to the widespread wreck and ruin which Syrian invasion would inflict on its unprepared neighbour. Also Ahaz reasoned that it was better to continue as semi-independent king of a weakened country rather than lose his throne altogether (Is. 7:6).

### Subservience to Assyria

Tiglath-pileser, seeing here the opportunity of three quick strides towards an invasion of Egypt, was willing enough to oblige.

Very soon Damascus was occupied by his forces. Thither he called his vassal Ahaz that he might dictate to him further conditions for the continuance of the treaty of "friendship". These new terms included the introduction of the worship of Ashur in the temple of Jehovah (2 Kings 16:1 Off), and also the installation in the temple and palace area of a permanent Assyrian garrison:

"Ahaz took away a portion of the house of the Lord, and out of the house of the king and of the princes, and gave it unto the king of Assyria: but he helped him not" (2 Chr. 28:21).

Both politically and religiously Judah was at a desperately low ebb.

But time wrought changes. Ahaz died, and even the mighty Tiglath-pileser proved to be mortal, as also was his successor Shalmanezzer V, who died at the siege of Samaria. Sargon II inherited an empire which included not a few vassal states already restless under Assyrian dominion. So the whole of his reign resolved itself into a series of wars most of which were designed to re-assert his challenged authority.

### Hezekiah and a new spirit

Hezekiah, chafing under the Assyrian presence in Jerusalem and resenting the false worship established in the temple, seized his opportunity:

"He rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not" (2 Kgs. 18:7).

The Assyrian garrison was sent packing, and drastic measures were undertaken to cleanse the temple and to restore its services to the honour of Jehovah.

Of course, this new spirit of independence meant that Judah was also on Sargon's hit list, but its remoteness and relative unimportance politically ensured a period of tolerable tranquillity enabling Hezekiah to push through his reformation. In fact Sargon never did get round to organising the punitive campaign which Hezekiah's bold spirit had "asked for".

The restoration of the temple went ahead vigorously. The Assyrian altar was one of the monstrosities which the reformers smashed to pieces (2 Kgs. 18:4), and Solomon's brazen altar of burnt offering was restored to its rightful place. Also:

"the priests...brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the Lord...and the Levites took it, to carry it out abroad into the brook Kidron" (2 Chr. 29:16),

precisely as Moses had dealt with the abomination of the golden calf (Dt. 9:21). There seems to be a reminiscence of this temple defilement by the Assyrians in one of the Asaph Psalms, all of which clearly belong to the time of Hezekiah:

"Lift up thine eyes unto...all that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary. Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations: they set up their ensigns for signs...now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers (the departing soldiery expressing their contempt and

bad temper?). They have defiled the dwelling place of thy name even to the ground" (Ps. 74:3-7).

### **An end to foreign influence**

In the light of the thesis of this chapter several other Scriptures are seen to take on a more precise meaning:

"The remnant of the house of Israel and such as are escaped of the house of Judah shall *no more* again stay upon him that smote them (as Ahaz had done); but shall stay upon the Lord the Holy One of Israel, in truth" (Is. 10:20).

"...O Jerusalem, the holy city, henceforth there shall *no more* come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean" (52:1).

"Then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no stranger pass through her *any more*" (Joel 3:17).

## **4. Reformation and ensuing decline**

It is a strange phenomenon, surely, that although the reign of Hezekiah began with such a roaring reformation, within a few years the nation was apparently paying for its new-found godliness with as traumatic an experience as any people has ever been called upon to endure. Why this horror of Assyrian invasion? Could not the Almighty be counted on to keep immune from such frightfulness His people who had lately turned to Him again in penitence for their sin and with a zealous renewing of His holy feasts? Then why should their gracious God now appear so completely out of character?

It is possible to make guesses about this enigma, and it is then satisfying to find both of them stamped as correct by the imprimatur of Holy Writ — first, that, in spite of the swing and zeal with which reformation and Passover are described in 2 Chronicles 30,31, in truth the king's appeal that the people "turn again" found a response in the hearts of only a fraction of the nation; also within a few years that reformation lost its momentum in the lives of most of those who had been carried away at first by the earnest quality of the king's appeal and by the enthusiasm and warm fellowship generated at that phenomenal Passover.

### **Short-lived repentance—Therefore...**

Human nature is like that. It is reluctant to be prised out of its spiritual somnolence, in the first place, and having been successfully disturbed it very readily sinks back into its former spiritual lassitude and indifference to religious duty. A plentiful assemblage of prophetic lamentations can be put together from the pages of Isaiah's later chapters (after 14:28; "the year that king Ahaz died"), illuminating the dark corners of this falling away again.

"Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? for they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law. *Therefore* he hath poured upon them the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart" (42:24,25).

Before the rebuke of this renewed indifference was felt in bitter national experience,

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Isaiah spoke the warning in vivid rhetoric:

"The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the Lord hath spoken this word...The land also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof, *because* they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. *Therefore* the curse hath devoured the land, and they that dwell therein are desolate. *Therefore* the inhabitants of the land are burned, and few men left..." (24:3-6).

"Judah hath multiplied fenced cities" — readiness to depend upon military defences rather than the God of their fathers — "but I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof" (Hosea 8:14).

In the contemporary Scriptures the heading "The Burden of Damascus", encourages the reader to contemplate the whole of Isaiah 17 as a prophecy of the downfall of Syria. But more careful examination reveals that this Damascus "burden" fills only the first three verses. Verse 4 makes a fresh start about "the glory of Jacob made thin" and how good beginnings in Judah were now come to a sorry end:

"In that day shall his strong cities be as a forsaken bough...and there shall be desolation, *Because* thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the Rock of thy strength, *therefore*...in the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish (figures for the early reformation Hezekiah brought in): but the harvest shall be a (mere) heap in the day of grief and desperate sorrow" (17:9-11).

In the next chapter a similar figure emphasises the same lugubrious truth about imminent judgment:

"For so the Lord said unto me, I will take my rest, and I will consider in my dwelling place (a deliberate withdrawal of aid from his people)...For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect...he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches. They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth" (18:4-7).

### Spiritual dichotomy

The foregoing are samples only of a fairly copious list. They provide pointed indications that, just as Josiah's comparable reformation was taken seriously by only a godly minority supporting the zeal of the king, later to be followed by deplorable declension, so also in Hezekiah's time. A later chapter will assemble evidence to show that worthy standards of godliness truly were maintained by the king and a fine school of prophets and the disciples they assembled round them. At the most crucial period of the nation's experience there was only a faithful remnant. It was for *their* sake that the deliverance from Assyrian brute force came in such startling fashion, to be followed forthwith by years of unexampled blessing and prosperity.

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## 5. Panic defence measures

No sooner was the Assyrian campaign begun than it became immediately evident that with the exception of the fortresses — the "fenced cities" — there was no hope of withstanding the surge of the invasion. There was no army of an appreciable size to put in the field against these experienced, well-trained, and utterly ruthless warriors. Perhaps a few of the stronger centres of resistance — places like Lachish and Libnah — might hold out. But there was little hope for the rest.

What hope for Jerusalem itself? The shattering earthquake in Uzziah's reign had brought many of his elaborate fortifications (2 Chr. 26:9) to ruin, and in the reign of feckless Ahaz there had been neither the will nor the resources to restore them — and in any case the presence of an Assyrian garrison through most of his reign had effectively discouraged any activity which might make Jerusalem difficult to capture, if occasion for such an operation should arise.

But now the present crisis made it imperative that drastic last minute efforts be made to save the holy city from the devastation of war.

A special conference of cabinet and army "top brass" decided on intensive measures (2 Chr. 32:3-5). Water supply for the city in time of siege was all-important. It was almost equally urgent to ensure that the enemy, when he came, would find himself without access to water supplies for men and animals. So Hezekiah

"took counsel.. .to stop the waters of the fountains which were without the city: and they did help him" (2 Chr. 32:3).

Also, an additional wall ("another wall without"; 2 Chr. 32:5) was built on the southern side of the city to effectively enclose within the defences the new reservoir at Siloam. This pool was to be the main water supply for the inhabitants when they found themselves besieged.

### **Water supply**

Two other measures reinforced this forward-looking scheme. Uzziah's great earthquake had brought about such a mighty rock-fall in the vicinity of the Virgin's Fountain in the Kidron valley (Jos. Ant. 9.10.4) that now the complete sealing up of that spring was a practical proposition, thus denying to any besieging army the best local supply of drinking water outside the city wall.

More than this, those waters were now diverted inside the city by the driving of a superbly-engineered underground rock tunnel. Thus the external waters of the Kidron were brought through the hill to the pool of Siloam. All this was done at breakneck speed without the aid of bulldozers or power-driven tools:

"There was gathered much people together (Hezekiah readily commanded the unanimity of the people), who stopped the fountains, and the brook (Kidron) that ran through the midst of the land, (Hezekiah) saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water?" (2 Chr. 32:4)

"All my springs are IN thee (Jerusalem)" (Ps. 87:7).

"There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High" (Ps. 46:4; the rest of the psalm is about the destruction of Sennacherib's army).

"Ye gathered together the waters of the lower pool" (Is. 22:9).

"Ye made also a ditch (NIV: reservoir) between the two walls for the water of the old pool: but ye (the rulers) have not looked unto the maker thereof (as Hezekiah himself did)" (Is. 22:11). Compare Isaiah's later words:

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, even he that hath no money" (55:1).

### **The city wall**

There was also massive repair work of the city wall, various segments of which were in a sorry state. Also, for general effectiveness, its overall height was increased,

"The breaches of the city of David were many" (Is. 22:9).

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But the threat from the north grew more serious; and there was much to be done. So, to save time and the considerable labour in the fashioning of well-trimmed building blocks, ancient and less desirable structures in the oldest part of the city were demolished, and their materials re-used for defence work. Thus, 27 centuries ago, the policy was: Guns instead of butter.

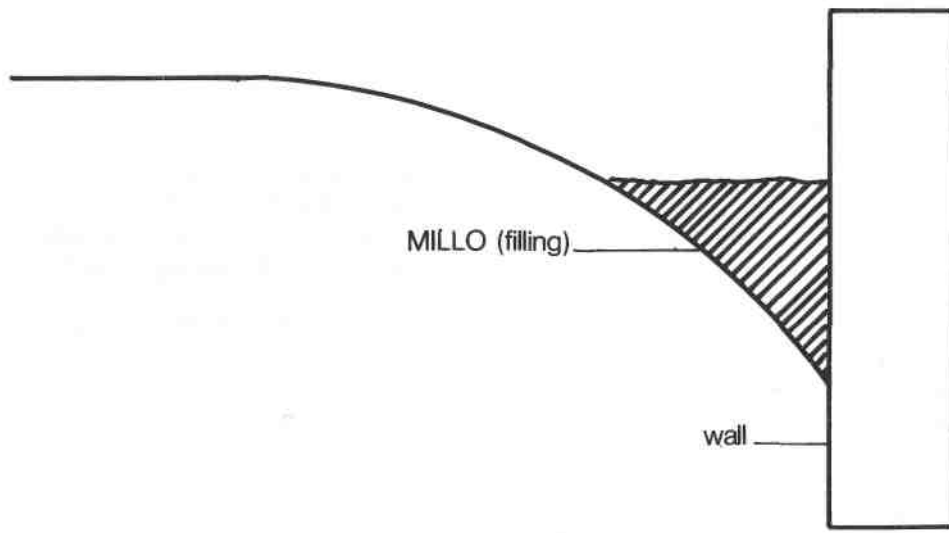
"Ye numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses ye broke down to fortify the wall" (Is. 22:10).

Indeed, the patching up of the city wall was so hastily done as to be almost useless:

"This iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant" (Is. 30:13).

And no doubt the Assyrian KGB reported such occurrences, to the amusement and satisfaction of their superiors. However:

"he (the king) strengthened himself (Hebrew: *hezeklahed* himself), and built up all the wall that was broken, and raised it up to (beside?) the towers...and he hezekiahed in the city of David the Millo (the filling), and made darts and shields in abundance" (2 Chr. 32:5).



As the last phrase here indicates, there was also a frantic beating of ploughshares into swords and pruninghooks into spears (as Joel 3:10 also indicates). The national armoury was found to be woefully inadequate for the present emergency — that Assyrian garrison had seen to that!

"Thou didst look in that day to the armour of the House of the Forest (of Lebanon)" (Is. 22:8; cp. 2 Chr. 9:15,16).

### Courageous leadership

Alas, the people generally were more disposed to put confidence in their desperate, but inadequate, preparations for war than in the protecting care of the God of their fathers. The exhortations of faithful Hezekiah had relatively little effect: "Who is he among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire (for the beating of ploughshares into swords), that compass yourselves about with sparks:

walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand: ye shall lie down in sorrow" (Is. 50:10,11).

Earlier, a political measure of a different character was attempted, apparently with good success:

"He (Hezekiah) smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza, and the borders thereof" (2 Kgs. 18:8).

Ashkelon was given a new king, — one Sidqa (i.e. Tzadiq, the righteous one — the name has a distinctly Hebrew flavour). And Padi, the king of Ekron, a friend of Assyria, was taken off to Jerusalem as a prisoner, and a Jewish nominee was installed in his place.

However, one of the first strokes of Sennacherib's campaign was to overrun the Philistine land and to restore to their cities men who could be depended upon. Sidqa and all his officers were sent off in slavery, and an exchange of prisoners got Padi out of his "iron fetters" and back on the throne in Ekron (Taylor prism). Meantime, the best army that could be mustered was brought together in "the 'street' of the gate of the city" (the temple court), there to be exhorted by their king:

"Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him (a tremendous contribution of fighting men from all the various peoples now dominated by the Assyrian empire): for there be more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh: but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves on the words of Hezekiah" (2 Chr. 32:7,8).

### **A poor-spirited populace**

Those last words were true only for the faithful remnant who knew the power of faith. But amongst a big segment of the population there was only consternation and panic:

"I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me because of the (imminent) spoiling of the daughter of my people. For it is a day of trouble and of treading down, and of perplexity by the Lord God of hosts in the valley of vision (even the prophets were at a loss), breaking down the walls, and crying to the mountains (i.e. to gods worshipped in the high places)...thy choicest valleys shall be full of chariots, and the horsemen shall set themselves in array at the gate. And he (Sennacherib) discovered the covering of Judah (NIV: the defences of Judah are stripped away — a reference to the 'fenced cities' which the Assyrians captured and burned)...And in that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to girding with sackcloth" (22:4-12).

Here Joel came in with his exhortation to the chicken-hearted:

"Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach (the reproach of Rabshakeh), that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God? — (which is precisely what Rabshakeh did say; see chapter 22)".

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## 6. Hezekiah's sickness

In "Hezekiah the Great" ch,10, it has been shown that the King was struck down by the onset and rapid progress of some virulent disease, which the Bible calls leprosy: and that this desperate experience happened just when the Assyrian invasion was nearing its most critical phase.

All at once the nation found itself bereft of godly leadership. The prospect, already bleak, now verged on hopelessness.

"Now, why dost thou (Zion) cry out aloud? is there no king in thee? is thy counsellor perished?" (Mic. 4:9).

"There is none to guide her (Zion) among all the sons whom she hath brought forth: neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath brought up" (Is. 51:18).

In the earlier volume referred to, the details of the king's suffering, of his prayer for restoration, and of the sign given him and the dramatic recovery with which he was blessed are all considered in detail. The present chapter sets out to show that even if Isaiah, chapter 38, had been lost, it would still be possible to infer from other Scriptures the main truth about the king's malady. A copious sequence of passages is clearly relevant to this crisis. In one place after another the words take on fuller meaning in the light of this royal affliction.

### The stricken king

"The days of his youth (God's anointed) hast thou shortened: thou hast covered him with shame" (Ps. 89:45).

"My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass" (Ps. 102:11; cp. also Ps. 130).

These words give added point to the sign granted to Hezekiah. The shadow on the sun-dial went back. No longer were his days "as a shadow that declineth." Hezekiah, reared in godliness by a godly mother, was most distressed because his disease and its uncleanness cut him off from the temple and from the worship of his God:

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God (the God of the living creatures; Is. 37:16): when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat night and day, while they (such as Rabshakeh; Is. 36,37) continually say unto me, Where is thy God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me..." (Ps. 42:1-4).

"My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh (mind and body) crieth out for the living God (yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself), even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God" (Ps. 84:2,3).

There is more than one vivid picture of the extreme of suffering this righteous king was called on to endure:

"Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto thee. Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me: in the day when I call, answer me speedily. For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth. My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread. By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin. I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an

owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop" (Ps. 102:1-7; the next verse speaks of Rabshakeh's campaign of reviling). "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Is. 53:2; the next chapter will show that the whole of this familiar Scripture has its basis in the suffering of Hezekiah).

### A personal problem of suffering

The grim experience of so godly a man became a mysterious problem to himself and to his people, until in due time it became clear (to those with some spiritual insight) that the sins of the nation were being laid on their leader:

"As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped...verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning...When I thought to know (i.e. understand) this, it was too painful for me; until I went to the sanctuary of God (2 Kgs. 19:1,14-19); then understood I their end...Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins (literal suffering?). So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee: thou hast holden (*hezekiah-ed*) me by my right hand" (Ps. 73:2,13-23).

It seemed as though his life was shattered — like a flickering candle, with no prospect of revival. But no!:

"He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. He, a bruised reed, shall not break, and a smoking flax he shall not quench" (Is. 42:2,3).

And so it turned out. There was an incredible recovery.

But until this happened the righteous king's affliction presented a paradox and enigma past all understanding:

"Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant? Seeing many things, but thou observest not: opening the ears, but he heareth not. The Lord is well pleased, for his (Hezekiah's) righteousness' sake: he (the king) will magnify the law, and make it honourable" (Is. 42:19-21).

## 7. "He bore the sin of many"

The great Passover of Hezekiah's reign came about with such sudden eagerness on the part of many of the nation that in various ways the precise religious forms of the feast could not be adhered to. For instance:

"There were many in the congregation that were not sanctified: therefore the Levites (instead of the heads of the households involved; Ex. 12:6) had charge of the killing of the passovers for every one that was not clean ... For a multitude of the people...had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah (and not the high priest!) prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. *And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people*" (2 Chr. 30:17-20)

The verb here, used four times of the healing of leprosy (Lev. 13:18,37; 14:3,48), is specially significant, for it strongly implies that infraction of the Passover law had brought on the people an outbreak of "plague" (cp. Num. 14:37; 16:48; 25:8,9; and note Ex. 12:13). Presumably God had to act in this situation in order to make

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clear to those coming to Jerusalem that their long-standing disloyalty was to be seen as an intensely serious matter not to be lightly mended by an incomplete reformation. Specially it is to be observed that it was through Hezekiah that the people were spared.

### Bearing the sins of the nation

The thesis of this chapter is to suggest that later, if not on the occasion of this early Passover, Hezekiah himself became the sacrificial victim covering not only the people's infringement of divine commandment, but also the continuing unfaithfulness of most of the nation.

The great Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12 has been shown by Thirtle with great skill ("OT. Problems") to be based on the personal experience of Hezekiah. Here are some of the outstanding details which are readily seen to be appropriate, in a primary reference, to Hezekiah:

#### Verse

- 13 My servant...exalted, extolled, very high.
- 14 His visage so marred more than any man, and his form than the sons of men (the king's leprosy).
- 15 So shall he *sprinkle* many nations (a neat allusion to the need for the leper to be himself sprinkled with the blood of the prescribed offering); sw. Lev. 14:7,16,27.
- 2 A root (Hezekiah) out of a dry ground (worthless Ahaz? apostate nation?)...no form nor comeliness, no beauty that we should desire him.
- 4 Stricken, smitten *of God*, and afflicted (here 'smitten' is the usual word for the stroke of leprosy).
- 8 Who shall declare his generation? (Hezekiah apparently dying without having a son to succeed him; note Is. 38:19).
- 10 When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin (a guilt offering, as in the cleansing of a leper; Lev. 14:12,14), he shall see his seed (Manasseh born after his father's recovery), he shall prolong his days (the extra fifteen years).
- 12 I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong (massive Assyrian plunder, and added prosperity).

If this primary identification be accepted, then what is to be done with the *twelve* assertions in this Scripture that

"he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace (with God) was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed...the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all...for the transgression of my people was he stricken...etc.

### A foreshadowing of Christ

In a truly remarkable fashion this Scripture emphasises that Hezekiah's contemporaries were being encouraged to see their good king as their deliverer in more senses than one. The extremely detailed foreshadowing of Christ is highly important (see "Hezekiah" HAW, ch.22). This further aspect of an impressive parallel now

serves to complete the picture. It is all the more forceful because, earlier, Isaiah has vividly described the spiritual decay of the nation in terms of an incurable leprosy:

"From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it: but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment" (1:6).

So Hezekiah "bore their iniquities...and made intercession for the transgressors" although "he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth". Is this why Isaiah instructed:

"Let them take a lump of figs, and lay it for a plaster upon the boil" (38:21)? —

the figs being intended as a symbol of national Israel (cp. Lk. 13:6; Mk. 11:13). Not that figs cure any "boil" or leprosy, but that in this way the prophet sought to teach the close association between the suffering of the king and the unworthiness of the nation.

Isaiah 49:1-9 is another impressive Messianic prophecy which, like all the others in Isaiah, has its roots in Hezekiah as the great prototype. Full exposition of this has been attempted elsewhere, but in the present context verse 8 is specially significant:

"I will give (appoint) thee for a covenant of the people".

Hezekiah fulfilled this when he called the tribes to Zion to renew Passover observance. But there can be no covenant without a sacrifice offered, and accordingly Hezekiah himself was so designated:

"Thou shalt die and not live."

As the representative of the nation, he is constantly referred to here and in Isaiah's other prophecies as "Israel". (Another prophecy of suffering which invites attention from the same point of view is Isaiah 50:4-10.)

In two other places in earlier Isaiah Hezekiah is spoken of as the saviour of his people:

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that his (the Assyrian) burden shall be taken from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy (Israel's) neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing (Hezekiah as regent along with his father)" (10:27).

"They (the Jewish captives and refugees in Egypt at the time of the Assyrian invasion) shall cry unto the Lord because of the (Egyptian) oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, even a great one, and he shall deliver them" (19:20).

Precisely how this came about will be shown in chapter 33. Micah, in his denunciation of the nation's waywardness, uses language appropriate to the king's suffering:

"Therefore also will I make thee sick (s.w. Is. 38:1; 53:10) in smiting thee, in making thee desolate, because of thy sins" (6:13).

The sickness was Hezekiah's, as numbered with the transgressors, but the sins were not his.

### **Witness of the Psalms**

The psalms of this Hezekiah period repeat this theme even more pointedly.

"The land and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved (in the Assyrian invasion): it is / (the king) that bear up the pillars of it" (Ps. 75:3) —

that is, taking upon himself what was due to his people.

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Psalm 80 has a picture of well-earned judgment, and then a remarkable prayer comparable to that of Moses (Ex. 32:11 -14,31,32):

"Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand (i.e. let it fall in judgment on *him*), upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself" (80:17).

This reading is confirmed by an eloquent passage in Psalm 102:

"I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, because of thine indignation (against the nation, as already seen) and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up (deservedly), and hast cast me down (very undeservedly)" (102:9,10; cp. 89:50).

Long years later Gethsemane was to witness the restless reluctance of One who knew right well that a heavy burden and unearned retribution for sin was being laid upon him, the Innocent. Hezekiah foreshadowed all this, and knew it.

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## 8. Regency

As the Assyrian forces came nearer and nearer to Jerusalem, panic set in throughout the population of the holy city. It was evident that the state's meagre military resources were as good as useless in the face of Sennacherib's experienced and numerous armies (three separate forces, at least).

### A fresh policy

So a desperate last-minute attempt was made to buy the enemy off:

"Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended; return from me: that which thou puttest on me will I bear (this was near to being total surrender). And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. And Hezekiah (note the omission here of 'king of Judah') gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house. And at that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord...and gave it to the king of Assyria" (2 Kgs. 18:14-16).

There are details here so startlingly at variance with known facts and with the character of Hezekiah as to call for re-interpretation.

In the first place it is impossible to reconcile this craven submission by the king with the defiant spirit of faith and courage which he showed at this very time.

In everything else that is recorded about Hezekiah, even during the time of his only lapse in Isaiah 39, there is no sign of any flagging of faith in Jehovah. Instead, first and last, there was a strong confidence that his God would bring him through. Indeed, so dominant was this burning zeal for the Lord, even when disaster threatened, that the king was able to inspire his people with a similar faith:

"And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah" (2 Chr. 32:6-8 — see the entire passage)

There is stark contradiction here between - on the one hand - these words and the consistent portrayal of the king's extraordinary faith, and - on the other hand - the craven submission evident in the earlier passage quoted here. This strange feature of the record seems hardly to have been recognized, or, if noted, it has not been given adequate explanation.

The interpretation mentioned briefly in "Hezekiah the Great", ch.8, can now be more fully

documented in this and the following chapter.

### **Faithless politicians**

An impressive sequence of chapters in Isaiah, (e.g. Is. 30:1; 31:2), and elsewhere, makes it fairly evident that at the time of the king's sickness control of the nation's affairs passed into the hands of the princes of Judah, who immediately proceeded to disregard Hezekiah's fine exhortation (2 Chr. 32:7), instead substituting a typical political policy of appeasement. As this and succeeding chapters will show, they tried to buy off the invader. Even if this show of weakness brought them respite only for a while, it would (so they reasoned) surely give them time to consolidate an alliance with Egypt and so gain salvation from the threat of war and devastation.

"Because ye have said: We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement (by paying heavy tribute to Sennacherib), when the overflowing scourge (of the Assyrian army) shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge (was this being openly said in Jerusalem?), and under falsehood have we hid ourselves...your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand (for Sennacherib had his spies in Jerusalem; see ch.22); when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye (the rulers of Judah) shall be trodden down by it" (Isaiah 28:15,18).

With the king laid aside, it was left to Isaiah to continue his witness to the true source of strength:

"For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel (6:1-3); In returning (to Him) and rest (in Him) shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence (in Him) shall be your strength — and ye would not" (30:15).

There were evidently drastic efforts being made to throttle the testimony of Isaiah and his colleagues:

"They say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things (the kind of message we want to hear), prophecy deceits: get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us" (30:10,11).

These were the men ("heads of the house of Jacob and princes of the house of Israel") whom Micah had earlier apostrophized for their casual indifference to social evils and a true reliance upon God (see Micah 3). Their secret scheming was now reprobated as godless.

"Woe to them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, 'Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?' Surely your turning of things upside down (the reversal of the policy already referred to; 2 Kgs. 18:14) shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not?" (Is. 29:15,16).

All their scheming would come to nothing:

"They hatch cockatrice' eggs, and weave the spiders web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper. Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity: wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way to peace they know not, and there is no judgment in their goings" (59:5-8).

The stricken king was lightly spoken of, and his policy of faith in God was treated with contempt:

"When we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him...He hid as it were his face from us (an allusion to the commandment concerning lepers;

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Lev. 13:45); he was despised, and we esteemed him not...we have turned every one to his own way" (53:2,3,5).

However, their plans for saving the nation, and their own skins, were futile:

"I said unto the fools, deal not foolishly: and to the wicked, Lift not up the horn (of your own authority)...speak not with a stiff neck. For promotion cometh not from the east (Arab allies joined the enemy; see ch. 21:13-17), nor from the west (the Philistines also were about to be overrun by the Assyrians), nor from the south (any treaty with Egypt will prove useless; see ch.14). But God is the judge..." (Ps. 75:4-7).

Help from the north was, of course, out of question, for in that quarter lay the enemy, powerful and (as it proved) inexorable.

It may even be inferred that national policy was being influenced by luxury-loving empty-headed women at the court in Jerusalem (Is. 32:9-11). Affairs truly were in a parlous state. The change from prosperity and godliness to panicky improvisation and cynical political manoeuvring had come with a rush, and all because of Hezekiah's illness and the simultaneous threat of Assyrian invasion.

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## 9. Shebna

Among the group of worthless men who took over the administration of affairs when Hezekiah fell sick was a certain Shebna who seems to have been a Cardinal Wolsey two thousand years before his time.

This man apparently took to himself, by some unscrupulous means, the most influential offices of state. He became the treasurer, the chancellor of the exchequer; and to this he added full authority over the temple — "Shebna, which is over the House" (Is. 22:15).

To this man the pomp and circumstance of high office were meat and drink. He loved to be seen in Jerusalem in "the chariots of his glory", and the entire city knew that even in this time of threat and insecurity he had diverted valuable man-power to the excavation and preparation of a special tomb, as impressive as any of the sepulchres of the kings of Judah, to proclaim to all generations following, the greatness of the man buried there (22:16).

"What (right) hast thou here? and whom hast thou here? (i.e. what royal connection?) that thou hast hewed thee out...a sepulchre on high, that graveth an habitation for himself in a rock?"

### High aspirations

This presumptuous political and social climber comes in for reprobation elsewhere also:

"Wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others. Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish" (Ps. 49:10-12).

No amount of effort to leave a reputation and a name behind him could alter the fact that death is a great leveller:

"Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall be their shepherd...their

beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling...Be not thou afraid when one is made rich when the glory of his house is increased (cf. the shame of thy Lord's House; Is. 22:18); for when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him" (Ps. 49:14-17).

The next Psalm has a strong expostulation against the doings of "the wicked one" (*this wicked man?*):

"What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee...Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit..." (50:16-19).

W.A. Wordsworth has suggested that the fierce denunciation of "the drunkards of Ephraim" (Is. 28:1) was aimed primarily at Shebna. The context (especially v. 14,15) is certainly appropriate to such a reading.

But why "drunkards of *Ephraim*"? In any case, the phrase has to be taken in a figurative sense, for no men of Ephraim (the northern kingdom) "ruled this people which is in Jerusalem" (28:14,15). So it is probably used as a term of reproach against men who, like the apostates of Israel, had chosen to disregard the way of Jehovah.

And the penalty for this disloyalty is set out in one of Hezekiah's Songs of Degrees:

"As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth (to captivity) with the workers of iniquity" (Ps. 125:5).

### **His fate foretold**

More explicitly and more vigorously, Isaiah pronounced this judgment on Shebna to his face:

"Behold, the Lord will cast thee away with the casting away of a mighty man (the name Shebna suggests 'captivity'), and covering he will cover thee (as in a tomb). Spinning he will spin thee a spinning like a quoit into a large land: there thou shalt die, and there shall be the chariots of thy glory, thou shame of thy Lord's House" (Is. 22:17,18).

How did it come about? In a later chapter it will be shown that when the siege of Jerusalem was about to begin, a number of the rulers (including Shebna?) sought at the last moment to escape by "fleeing upon horses" (the chariot's of Shebna's glory?), and were pursued and captured by Assyrian cavalry. Thus this proud upstart met his end in a miserable captivity in a far-off land.

### **Another Shebna?**

There remains a problem.

When the Assyrians were actually at the gates of Jerusalem, Eliakim and Shebna and Joah were sent out as an official deputation to discuss terms with Rabshakeh, Sennacherib's official representative. They met him near the entrance to Hezekiah's conduit, and soon returned, having made no progress at all (Is. 36:2,3). Whereupon, Hezekiah, now marvellously recovered, sent Shebna and Eliakim to Isaiah to implore him that he "lift up his prayer for the remnant that is left" (37:2-4). The problem is this:

Psychologically it is not possible to believe that one who had received such a trouncing from Isaiah as Shebna had lately done would now be employed by Hezekiah for such highly important negotiations. It is hardly conceivable that after Isaiah's denunciation Shebna would still continue in high office as "the scribe"

(Secretary of State). Much less can it be imagined that Shebna, exposed as a poltroon by Isaiah, the king's friend, would be used to beseech the prophet to use his most earnest prayers on behalf of the faithful remnant. Is there any reason why there should not have been two separate Shebnas? — besides the one who was pompous, arrogant, self-important and godless, there was another, Shebna the scribe, who was fully in sympathy with Hezekiah's godly outlook and who was accordingly used along with Eliakim the high priest to enlist the powerful prayers of Isaiah, priest and prophet, on behalf of a city now on the edge of despair.

This seems to be the most likely resolution of what appears to be flat contradiction in the character of Isaiah's Shebna. And if Shebna was a title of office — meaning "sit thou here" (at the king's side, in order to act as secretary) — such a duplication of names would be natural enough.

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## 10. The Invasion

During the reign of Ahaz the pathetic the prophet Isaiah must have earned for himself a worse reputation than that which Jeremiah built up for himself in later days, for repeatedly and in the most graphic language he foretold the inevitability of invasion as a well-deserved judgment from the Lord. Even if the prophet had not troubled to specify who the invader would be, it would have made little difference, for in those days everyone in the Levant knew and feared the fierce empire-building Assyrians. So identification was an easy guess — hardly a guess.

### The wrath of God

Certainly the nation was left in no doubt that their God was angry and that retribution was on the way. Time and again Isaiah came back to this theme, and not just in occasional brief allusions, as when he foretold:

"cities wasted and without inhabitant, and houses without men, and the land utterly desolate" (6:11).

but also in sustained prognostications of calamity and wretchedness in powerful language of vivid literary quality. Consider this as an example:

"...therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched out his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and the carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets...behold, they shall come with speed swiftly: none shall be weary or stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep: neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoe be broken: whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent, their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind: their roaring shall be like a lion, they shall roar like young lions: yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry it away safe, and none shall deliver it. And in that day they shall roar...like the roaring of the sea: and if one look to the land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof" (5:25-30).

It is interesting to note that part of this prophecy took on a modified fulfilment, for whilst it is true that the Assyrians "laid hold of the prey, and carried it away safe", their captives were marvellously delivered, thanks to the staunch faithfulness of Hezekiah (see ch.33).

"Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts is the land darkened and the people shall be as the fuel of fire" (9:19).

This emphasis on darkness is very striking (cp. also 8:21,22). Perhaps it is the prophet's way of warning his people of fire as one of the great horrors of war — the burning of crops and homesteads, the sky being constantly covered with a pall of smoke.

### The horrors of invasion

Joel, a contemporary prophet, comes very near to matching the vigour and gloom of Isaiah's words as he describes the same catastrophic retribution (attempts to pin Joel's prophecies on to any other period than that of Isaiah only result in a great loss of vigour in the interpretation):

"A nation is come up upon my land, strong and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion. He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white...the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men" (1:6,7,12).

"The day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand: a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness (cp. Isaiah!)...a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like...a fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness: yea, and nothing shall escape them" (2:1-3).

Even whilst Ahaz was on the throne, Isaiah was specific that the inevitable disaster would be brought by none other than his friends, the Assyrians:

"O Assyria, the rod of mine anger and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey (Maher-shalal-hash-baz!) and to tread them down like the mire of the streets" (Is. 10:5,6).

"The Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many (Assyria's western boundary *then* was the northern Euphrates; Nineveh's river was the Tigris), even the king of Assyria and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks...he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel" (8:7,8).

And matters would be made worse, not better, by the appearance of a vast army of Judah's allies, the Egyptians. (It will be noted that in his eagerness to make the outcome perfectly plain, in these passages the prophet had no objection to mixing his metaphors!)

"The Lord shall bring upon thee...days that have not come (Jl. 2:2) from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah...the Lord shall hiss for the fly (mosquito — innumerable, but with only nuisance value) that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee (hornet) that is in the land of Assyria...the Lord shall shave with a razor that is hired (Ahaz had "hired" Assyria to "shave" his enemies!)...where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, it shall even be for briars and thorns" (7:17,18,20,23).

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The Hezekiah psalms also have some vivid and even horrifying pictures of what this invasion meant.

Psalms 83 has a quite pathetic plea for help — and it is addressed to the God who had already told them plainly that the Assyrian was "the rod of His anger"; and it was He who had sent these invaders "against a hypocritical nation". See, then, what changes bitter tribulation can work in God's chosen race! — and will yet work once again in the near future.

"Keep not thou silence, O God...For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people...They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance" (Ps. 83:1-4).

And so the people suffered. How they suffered!

"Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter" (44:22).

### — and for vengeance

There was never an hour when some fresh horror story did not reach the ears of the tense populace in Jerusalem, so that in their prayers they were constrained to ask for a most bitter vengeance:

"O daughter of Babylon (Sennacherib had lately conquered Babylon and was mighty proud of having added "King of Babylon" to his long list of titles), O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed, happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth *thy* little ones against the stones" (137:8,9).

It was an excruciating time:

"The ploughers ploughed upon my back; they made long their furrows...Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion" (1 29:3,5).

Isaiah did not confine himself to prophecies of what would, or might, happen. When it came, he described it in terms of unexampled hardship and suffering. It was:

"a vexation only to understand the report, For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself (the regions and towns where the dogs of war had not yet penetrated were becoming fewer and fewer, and packed with refugees), and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it (the means of protection were already painfully inadequate)" (28:19,20).

"The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth...the land mourneth and languisheth" (33:8,9).

All attempts to cope with the situation came to grief. There was only intense frustration. If their God did not have pity on them, then all was hopelessness.

"The palmerworm...the locust...the cankerworm ... the caterpillar" (Joel 1:4) —

these masses of plundering, fierce, cruel, irresistible Assyrian troops seemed to be everywhere, and everywhere gleefully set on spreading havoc and ruin, on torture, suffering and death.

Isaiah even quoted his own prophecy (10:22; 28:22), to prove himself a true prophet. It was his "I told you so, but you took no notice".

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## 11. The Land Desolated

There was never a war which was conducted on gentlemanly principles, with considerate regard for the property and well-being of the ordinary people being overrun. In the Apocalypse the red horse of war has to be accompanied by (not, followed by) the black horse of famine and the deathly horse of pestilence.

### Plundered and derelict

So also in Hezekiah's day. The Assyrians, and their allies well-instructed by Assyrian example, were experts in the inculcation of misery and terror through the thoroughness of rapine and havoc in which they delighted:

"The land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness...Before their face the people shall be much pained; all faces gather blackness" (Joel 2:3,6).

"Beat your breasts (NIV) for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine. Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briars; yea, upon all the houses of joy (luxurious villas?) in the joyous city: because the palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and the towers shall be as dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks (Is. 32:12-14).

It was the delight of the uncouth invader to let in the wilderness. This power-drunk Assyrian was

"the man that made the land to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners (to let them go back to the homeland whence they had been marched away)" (Is. 14:16,17).

The blitzkrieg of these pitiless warriors brought nothing but misery to all classes of the people:

"The dark places of the land are full of the habitations of cruelty" (Ps. 74:20).

### Fortresses captured

A prime objective of the campaign was the utter destruction of Hezekiah's "fenced cities" — forty-six of them, says Sennacherib's boastful inscription. In those times a walled city was a difficult obstacle in the path of any invader. Yet the Assyrians seem to have captured these fortresses in rapid succession. How was this achieved? When Lachish showed strong resistance, its capture became the outstanding military operation of the year. The dramatic bas-reliefs of this siege, now in the British Museum, make this very evident. Then why such rapid and devastating success elsewhere? Was there a complete collapse of morale in Israel's forces? Or had the Assyrians somehow organized a very efficient fifth column?

"The defenced city is desolate, and the habitation forsaken, and left like a wilderness.. .for it is a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them" (Is. 27:10,11).

Micah had foretold

"I (the Lord) will cut off the cities of thy land, and throw down all thy strongholds" (5:11).

Indeed, this prophet went further than that. He particularised in a long list of

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shattered fortresses, making grim untranslatable puns on one name after another (1:10-15):

"Tell it not in Gath (Tell-town);  
weep tears in Tear-town.  
In Beth Ophrah (Dust-town) roll in the dust.  
Fare forth stripped, O Fair-town (Shaphir).  
Those who live in Exile (Zaanán) will not come out.  
Beth Ezel is in mourning (here the pun has got lost);  
its protection is taken from you.  
Those who live in Maroth (Great Bitterness) writhe in pain, awaiting relief...  
Harness your steeds and away, O Horsetown (Lachish),  
O source of Zion's sin (there is clear archaeological evidence of a vigorous idolatry at Lachish)...  
Israel's kings are ever balked at Balktown (Ashbib).  
I will bring a conqueror against you who live in Mareshah (Conquest).  
He who is the glory of Israel will come to Adullam (i.e. as a refugee;  
Mic. 1:10-15 — this translation has been helped out by NIV and Moffat).

The acute misery of this period may be inferred from the sharp contrast in Isaiah's glowing picture of coming prosperity:

"Surely I will no more give thy com to be meat for thine enemies: and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou hast laboured" (Is. 62:8).

### One prophecy unfulfilled

But there remains one, just one, outstanding passage about spoliation and plunder which did not find fulfilment in Hezekiah's time:

"Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful House (this must be the temple), where our fathers praised thee, is burned with fire, and all our pleasant things are laid waste" (Is. 64:10,11).

Since the Babylonian-captivity reference of Isaiah 40-66 is *quite* inadmissible as Book 3 of this commentary will show, one is left with these alternative readings of this passage: either as an expression of what the Assyrian invader asserted that he would do, or else as a prophetic declaration of intended judgment on Jerusalem, which intention was changed for the sake of righteous Hezekiah and his faithful remnant (for copious examples of this principle in operation, see "Revelation", HAW, p.259ff). Certainly this solitary passage and a badly misunderstood allusion to Cyrus (44:28) must not be allowed to distract the understanding of such a wonderful book as "Deutero" Isaiah from its proper reference.

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## 12. Captivity

The captivities of the Jews best known to most Bible students are these three: that of the Northern Kingdom, by Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II; that of Judah, by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon; and that by Titus in A.D. 70. The figures available regarding these are, respectively, 27,290 (Sargon's display inscription), 4,600 (Jeremiah 52), and 97,000 (Josephus Wars 6.9.3 — and Josephus has a reputation for exaggerating the numbers he reports).

### **Swept away to slavery**

It comes, then, as something of a shock to read in Sennacherib's inscription that his Judaeian campaign yielded 200,150 prisoners sent back to Nineveh and especially to Babylon (Mic. 4:10; Ps. 137) as a replacement population for those he had lately deported from that city. So far as available figures go, this is quite the most massive deportation in all Jewish history (until Hitler came on the scene). Yet there is no specific documentation of it in the OT. histories.

However, other contemporary OT. writings are found to make plenty of allusions to this important aspect of the trauma of the Assyrian invasion. The picture fills out quite vividly.

But first, Sennacherib's own description of this phase of his highly successful (sic!) campaign:

"I made to come out from them 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, innumerable horses, mules, donkeys, camels, large and small cattle, and counted them as the spoils of war" (Taylor prism).

Before it happened Isaiah foretold this grim experience:

"Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge; and their honourable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst" (5:13).

"until...the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking (i.e. a flight of refugees) in the midst of the land" (6:1 2).

### **Refugees**

Vast numbers of these pathetic and terror-stricken people found their way to Egypt:

"In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan (i.e. Hebrew)" (19:18) —

and even there they encountered oppression (1 9:20).

As already intimated, most of those taken prisoner were marched off to Babylon.

What sort of wastage rate was there during the almost endless torment of this long trek?

"Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth...in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon" (Mic. 4:10).

"By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion...they that carried us away captive required of us a song (male and female musicians Hezekiah sent me later to Nineveh, my lordly city — Taylor Prism); and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (Ps. 137:1-4).

Sennacherib's mention of Nineveh does not exclude the Bible's reference to Babylon, it supplements it.

"My people is taken away for nought; they that rule over them make them to howl (Hebrew: *y'hililu* a deliberate parody of the Hallelujah, the Lord's song)" (Is. 52:5).

### **A tragic theme**

All the contemporary prophets reflect in their own wretchedness this captivity of

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their people:

"Lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve" (Am. 9:9; this is not about the northern kingdom; see v.11).

"Make thee bald, and poll thee for thy delicate children...for they are gone into captivity from thee" (Mic. 1:16).

"Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat: and hast scattered us among the heathen. Thou sellest thy people for nought, and dost not increase thy wealth by their price" (Ps. 44:11,12). See also Obad. 11,12; Joel 3:1-7; Mic. 7:12 RV, 13).

In some of the Hezekiah psalms the sufferings of the helpless captives are pictured in a most moving fashion:

"Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee: according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die" (79:11).

Yet for those of the faithful remnant who were so ruthlessly snatched away from their homes (such as Isaiah's son Shear-Jashub, "a remnant shall return"), the hope of seeing once again the land of their fathers was not lost:

"Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise" (Ps. 106:47).

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## 13. Double Dealing

In an earlier chapter (ch.8) there was mentioned the pusillanimous policy of appeasement by which it was sought to evade the ghastly horrors of further Assyrian invasion.

The simple explanation of that shameful attempt to buy off the Assyrians by the payment of massive Danegelt, as Tyre had already done, is that this policy, which Isaiah (and therefore Hezekiah) never ceased to deplore, was a scheme formulated by the princes who took over the regency (ch.8) during the period of the king's disability. Later (in ch.14) it will be seen that other aspects of Judah's war policy chime in with this reading of the situation. The government had fallen into wrong hands. The Taylor Prism gives Sennacherib's own account of this humiliation of the power of Judah, and how "peace" was bought:

"I made to come out from them (and here is inserted a catalogue of all kinds of valuable and rare articles); also his (Hezekiah's) daughters, concubines, male and female musicians (from the temple choir and orchestra: Ps. 137:1,2) he sent to me later to Nineveh".

The "daughters" referred to here were probably Hezekiah's sisters. Or it may be that there is here a misunderstanding of Isaiah's phrase about "the spoiling of the daughter of my people" (22:4). Also, the word "later" suggests that it was deliberately contrived that the hostages and wealth now handed over should arrive belatedly in Nineveh, after the great Assyrian debacle at Jerusalem, as an attempted cover-up of the military disaster in Judaea. But of course the truth was bound to come out sooner or later.

### A "Munich" agreement

Back in Jerusalem there was intense jubilation that the invader had been bought

off. No doubt that sinister phrase "Peace with honour", so popular in London in the appeasement days of September 1938, was used by officials taking unearned credit to themselves when they broke the news of this treaty of disgrace. Delirious cheering broke out spontaneously, and almost the entire city gave itself over to celebration, dancing in the streets, and much drinking. There was smug satisfaction on the part of the politicians and much mutual congratulation spoken with sighs of relief. In his bitter indignation the prophet saw to it that the entire city felt the sharp edge of his tongue:

"What aileth thee now, that thou art wholly gone up to the housetops (their equivalent of parties in the streets!). Thou that art full of stirs, a tumultuous city, a joyous city: thy slain men are not slain with the sword, nor dead in battle" (22:1,2) —

instead they were dead drunk, celebrating their "Peace with honour". In more ways than one the entire population seemed to have lost its sense of balance.

"The Lord God of hosts hath called to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth (all the appropriate tokens of shame and disaster): and behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die (and not today, as we feared!). And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts: Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord God of hosts" (22:12-14).

### **Sennacherib's gloating**

Whilst the citizens of Jerusalem were taking pride and delight in their humiliation and ignominy, Sennacherib was making sure that his radio propaganda told more than the truth:

"I laid waste the wide district of Judah, and made the overbearing and proud Hezekiah (sic!), its king, bow submissively at my feet" (Bull Inscription).

Pure invention, Sennacherib! Hezekiah was a desperately sick man at this time, and in any case would rather have died than submit before a crude conqueror like yourself. But back in Nineveh the report sounded well!

"I overthrew the wide district of Judah. I imposed my yoke-ropes on Hezekiah its king" (Nineveh Slab Inscription).

This too sounded well in the Assyrian capital. And in that far-off city who was to know (until the grim truth came out later) just how elastic the "facts" were. In both Nineveh and Jerusalem, in this time of ruthless war, truth was the greatest casualty. But now and then Sennacherib did come nearer to telling the truth:

"He (Hezekiah) sent a personal messenger to deliver the tribute and make a slavish obeisance" (Taylor Prism).

"The officials, nobles, and people of Ekron who had thrown Padi their king into iron fetters (Hezekiah had been behind this; 2 Kgs. 18:8), as one loyal to the treaty and obligations of Assyria, had given him up to Hezekiah the Jew, as an enemy...I caused Padi their king (evidently a friend of Assyria) *to come out of Jerusalem*, and sat him on the throne as lord over them (in Ekron)" (Taylor Prism).

Evidently the freeing of this Padi was one of the conditions insisted on in the peace treaty.

### **Treacherous dealing**

Regarding the main clauses of that treaty, neither side had any intention of

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honourable fulfilment. Those statesmen in Jerusalem "made lies their refuge" and cynically said so openly. And Sennacherib took all the treasure and other fine gifts without any intention of easing his threat against Jerusalem.

"The treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth" (Is. 21:2).

The first of Hezekiah's Songs of Degrees apostrophizes the enemy's "lying lips" and "deceitful tongue":

"What shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue?...My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war" (Ps. 120:3,6,7).

The threat hanging over Jerusalem was as sinister as ever. The Assyrian army still came on.

"Woe to thee that spoilest, and thou wast not spoiled; and dealest treacherously, and they dealt not treacherously with thee (but soon they did, for this was their intention from the start!). When thou hast ceased to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled: and when thou hast made an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee" (Is. 33:1 RV).

In desperation a deputation was sent out to parley with the enemy — Eliakim, the new high priest, and Shebna, secretary of state, and Joah (Joel?), in charge of state archives. They achieved exactly nothing, and returned with their robes rent. It was "a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness".

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## 14. Salvation from Egypt?

There was, doubtless, a great surge of bitter feeling in Jerusalem when it was realised how deceitful Sennacherib had been in his dealings with the Jewish deputation. What had been dressed up as "positively his final demand" (an immense once-for-all payment of tribute, together with important hostages as a guarantee of good faith) was now seen to be a cynical exercise in duplicity. But of course this tough Assyrian could afford to behave in this way, for he had no Jehovah of high morality to answer to; and were not all the cards in this game of poker stacked in his favour?

More than this, his KGB spies in Jerusalem kept him well informed of cabinet decisions there. He knew in good time that the princes of Judah were as two-faced as himself. Pretending to a deep satisfaction with their binding agreement (sic!) just signed, they were already full of a secret plan to bring in the aid of Egypt's Pharaoh and his massive Ethiopian army.

From the earliest days of the Assyrian threat, even whilst Ahaz was still alive, this idea had been the bulwark of these princes of Judah. When the worst comes to the worst, the almost innumerable manpower of Egypt and Ethiopia will come to our rescue. So they thought!

### **An evil policy exposed**

Isaiah knew that they thought thus, and he spoke out boldly against the folly and

forlorn fatuity of such empty optimism:

"The Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying, Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid (cp. 2 Chr. 32:7). Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself: and let *him* be your fear, and let *him* be your dread" (8:11-13).

But it made no difference. These politicians were set on buying help from Egypt. So Isaiah was much more explicit:

"Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots (from Egypt), because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!...Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not Spirit (as is the cherubim chariot of the Lord; Ez. 1:12)" (31:1,3).

And still it made no difference! Not only a persuasive deputation, but also an impressive cavalcade of horses and camels and asses, loaded with expensive delectable gifts to bewitch the heart of Pharaoh. All this was prepared in secret, and sent off by the remote southern route, to deceive friend and foe alike that this was a normal mercantile caravan bound for Sheba, maybe, but certainly not for Egypt. And *that* made no difference. The prophet of the Lord saw through the scheme at once, and with his public scornful "burden of the beasts of the Negeb" (an incisive double meaning here) he exposed their political chicanery:

"They will carry their riches upon the shoulders of young asses, and their treasures upon the bunches of camels, to a people that shall not profit them. For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose: therefore have I cried concerning this, Their strength is to sit still" (30:6,7).

This faithlessness was a blatant sin which could not go unrebuked. Nor would it go unpunished:

"Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord...that walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth (contrast 'Pharaoh' which in Hebrew reads very much like 'Bad Mouth'): to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt! Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt (a deliberate contrast with God's pillar of cloud and fire; Ex. 14:19,20) your confusion. For his (Pharaoh's) princes are at Zoan, and his ambassadors have come to Hanes (to meet the delegation from Jerusalem). They were all ashamed of a people that could not profit them..." (30:1-5 RV).

What a vexation it must have been to Isaiah's political opponents to know that their best-laid schemes were known and broadcast by him, in one public diatribe after another.

### **Assyrian propaganda**

And the Assyrians knew as well. They turned the news into contemptuous propaganda to weaken yet further the morale of the people in the city. One of Rabshakeh's earliest efforts had this as his target:

"Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt (Hezekiah did not so trust, but his craven statesmen certainly did!); whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust in him" (36:6).

Hezekiah in his sickness was himself "a bruised reed" (42:3), yet he did not break because throughout this wearing crisis his trust was firmly in Jehovah (26:3).

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When Rabshakeh was attempting another, later, propaganda onslaught on the besieged people,

"He heard say concerning Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia, He is come forth to make war with thee" (37:9).

Rahab, whose strength was to sit still, had at last bestirred herself, but only because an invasion of Egypt itself was feared. And apparently the very size of this Egyptian thrust into Judaea caused Assyrian concern, for this time Rabshakeh was careful to make no mention of Egypt in the course of his next loud-mouthed onslaught on Jewish confidence. Perhaps he was operating on the well-tryed principle of never telling the enemy anything that might give him a grain of comfort. Isaiah had already foretold Egyptian failure in this campaign:

"Woe to the land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia: that sendeth ambassadors by the sea (meaning, the Nile; 19:5), even in vessels of bulrushes" (18:1,2) —

and in the next chapter there is a highly poetic description of the entire economy of Egypt coming to a standstill (19:1-10).

"Surely the princes of Zoan are fools, the counsel of the wise counsellors of Pharaoh is become brutish" (19:11).

### The battle of El-tekeh

Sennacherib's own description of his defeat of the Egyptians reads like this:

"On account of the offence they (the Jews) had committed, their heart took fright and they implored help from the kings of Egypt, bowmen, chariots of the kings of Ethiopia, an innumerable host; and indeed they came to help them. In the plain of Eltekeh (10 miles north-west of Jerusalem), their battle array being drawn up over against me, they prepared their weapons. Depending on the help of Ashur my lord (the god of Assyria) I clashed and effected their defeat. Amid the battle, my own hands captured alive the Egyptian charioteers and princes, together with charioteers belonging to the Ethiopian king" (Taylor Prism).

Perhaps it was this victory to which Isaiah alluded:

"I gave Egypt for thy (Jerusalem's) ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee" (43:3).

The Egyptians suffered, but for the sake of Hezekiah and his faithful ones, Jerusalem went scot-free. Whether Sennacherib did actually thrust on into Egypt is uncertain, but in the Eltekeh victory would be fulfilled Isaiah's earlier prophecy:

"Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and a wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia; so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered to the shame of Egypt" (20:3,4).

Meantime, the campaign against Lachish, Libnah, and Jerusalem went on.

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## 15. Hezekiah's Prayers

King Hezekiah, laid aside and racked with pain by a killing disease, turned to his God with a prayer of intense importunity (Is. 38:9ff). That prayer, and all its moving details, has already been carefully reviewed in "Hezekiah the Great" ch. 12. But when Hezekiah recovered, one of his first resolves was: "Therefore we will sing my songs (*n'ginothai*) to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord" (Is. 38:20) which he was again free to frequent when cleansed from his foul disease (38:22).

That plural "songs" indicates that the king was not content that one psalm only should celebrate his astonishing recovery. Today it is well recognized that besides Isaiah 38 the fifteen Songs of Degrees were compiled or composed to commemorate the marvellous double deliverance (38:5,6) by which that first intense prayer was answered.

### Self-revealing Psalms

What is less clearly recognized is that the king's psychology and his unflagging devotion to his God are even more evident in certain of the 'Asaph' and 'Sons of Korah' psalms, some of which could well have been written by Hezekiah himself (see "Psalms", HAW).

"Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry; for my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength...Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Thou hast put away my acquaintance far from me: thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth (how this verse describes the 'side-effects' of his leprosy!). Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: Lord, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee. Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee? Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" (Ps. 88:2-12 — verses 10-12 echo Isaiah 38:18,19; compare 77:1-10).

Even in the moments of greatest despair, hope was not lost entirely:

"Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work (i.e. the reward for it) with my God" (Is. 49:4).

There was even remonstrance that God should be, apparently, so indifferent to the suffering and the cry of His devoted servant:

"I will say unto God my Rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy" (Ps. 42:9).

At the back of this constant pleading was an intense eagerness to join once again in the worship of Jehovah in the temple:

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God (the God of the living creatures): when shall I come and appear before God?...for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday (Hezekiah's renewal of Passover observance). Why art thou cast down, O my soul?"

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and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance" (Ps. 42:1-5) - "the health of my countenance" (v.11).

Psalm 102 has a most poignant description of the stricken king's sufferings:

"My days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth. My heart is smitten, and withered like grass: so that I forget to eat my bread. By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin. I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert...I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping...for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down. My days are like a shadow that declineth: and I am withered like grass" (102:3-11).

"He weakened my strength in the way; he shortened my days. I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days" (102:23,24).

### The Faith of King and Prophet

Never was despair complete. Always there were flickerings of hope that God would come to the rescue:

"Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications...My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning" (130:1,2,6).

Then Isaiah, already wending his way from the palace in wretchedness as intense as the king's own grief, was turned back to the royal presence by a further word of inspiration which transformed the entire situation:

"Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria" (2 Kgs. 20:5,6).

This pronouncement, and its open sign — a cake of figs — immediately took Hezekiah into a new world. Here was promised restoration not only for the king but also for his nation. There was no hesitation in believing the promise fully, only eagerness for its fulfilment:

"O send out thy light (the promised appearance of the Shekinah Glory of the Lord) and thy truth (the ensuing fulfilment of the Davidic promise — a continuing seed sitting on David's throne): let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill (the assurance that 'on the third day he would go up to the house of the Lord'), even to thy great dwelling place (the Hebrew has an intensive plural here)" (Ps. 43:3).

And in complete faith Isaiah prophesied to the nation, and especially to Shebna the mercenary careerist, that very speedily the king would be once again in full control of the nation's affairs.

"I (the Lord) will clothe him with thy robe (Shebna's), and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand, and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder: so he shall open and none shall shut; and he shall shut and none shall open. And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place: and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house (i.e. the house of David). And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue (Hezekiah's begetting of children)" (Is. 22:21-24; see later commentary on this).

This reading rescues a magnificent prophecy from the expository obscurity in which it has

been shrouded for centuries.

From the first moment of prophetic reassurance Hezekiah believed very firmly that it would so come to pass:

"God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me (in the temple, on the third day)" (Ps. 49:1 5).

"I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more" (71:14). "Thou hast holden my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and after Glory thou shalt receive me (Heb)...My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever...It is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works" (73:23-28).

## 16. Hezekiah, healed and thankful

The promise of recovery had come to Hezekiah. The prophet had returned to the presence of the stricken king with this heartening message. Without hesitation Hezekiah believed that it would be even as it was told him. He even began to celebrate in advance his impending cure. According to divine instruction a cake of figs was laid "on the boil". And still nothing happened.

### A sign from heaven

However Isaiah, as confident as Hezekiah himself, now on God's behalf offered a sign: Shall the shadow on the staircase sun-dial going up to the temple go forward or back ten steps?

Unlike his foolish father, (Is. 7:11,12), Hezekiah did not refuse the sign, but instead, swinging to the other extreme he chose the more faith-testing token. But suppose it didn't happen? — this phenomenon was unique in that generation, except for the one earlier experience of Isaiah himself (ch.6). The supposition was absurd. Hezekiah knew for sure that it would happen. And of course it did — but only through the importunity of the faithful prophet:

"Isaiah the prophet *cried unto the Lord*, and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward by which it had gone down on the dial of Ahaz (the faithless)" (2 Kgs. 20:11).

Isaiah had promised: "Thine eyes shall see the King (the Lord of hosts) in his beauty (the Shekinah Glory)" (33:17), and the king looking out of his window saw for himself, and rejoiced in this fantastic sign as a guarantee of a double wonder promised to him — not only the healing of the unclean creeping horror now gripping him but also the deliverance of the holy city from the unclean horde now creeping irresistibly across the countryside.

When at last the Glory of the Lord was revealed, and all flesh saw it together (see "Hezekiah the Great" ch.11) the excitement of the afflicted king was intense.

"I shall not die but live (contrast Is. 38:1), and declare the works of the Lord.

The Lord hath chastened me sore, but he hath not given me over unto death.

Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord" (Ps. 118:17-19).

### Joyful and thankful

And once he was recovered, Hezekiah bore glad witness concerning

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all that God had done for him:

"Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul. I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. But verily God hath heard me: he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me" (Ps. 66:16-20).

And blessed be the memory of such a man who, through the worst of such a hardship, lived so close to such a God:

"I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live. The sorrows of death compassed me...I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul" (Ps. 116:1-4).

With the king's recovery there came a drastic reversion to the more wholesome standards of government which the nation had known in the earlier years of his reign:

"The Lord is exalted; for he dwelleth on high: he hath filled Zion with judgment and righteousness. And wisdom and knowledge (of God) shall be the stability of thy (Hezekiah's) times, and the strength of (Jerusalem's) salvation: the fear of the Lord is his treasure" (Is. 33:5,6),

of more value in his sight than all the tribute so lavishly and futilely paid out to Sennacherib.

"One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob (the Supplanter); and another shall subscribe himself with his hand, unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel"

(44:5) — possible allusions to Eliakim the high priest and Shebna and Joah the recorder with his name changed to Joel.

With the more wholesome government and more godly policies now brought back, men in Jerusalem would think of the earlier prophecy, so Messianic in flavour, which Isaiah had published at the time of the king's bar-mitzvah:

"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins." (Is. 11:1-5).

And in later days Isaiah, looking back with awe and wonder at all that had befallen Hezekiah and his city and his people, saw the divine shaping of all these events as a marvellous foreshadowing of a greater redemption to be brought through God's promised Messiah:

"He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge (by their knowing of him?) shall my righteous Servant justify many: for he shall bear their iniquities, Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong" (53:10-12).

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## 17. Panic in Jerusalem

Whilst Hezekiah was yet a sick man, and whilst not only he but also Isaiah and his faithful remnant were agonizing with intense wrestlings of soul for an evidence of God's healing mercy, most of Jerusalem's citizens were paralysed with panic, for now it seemed that nothing could save the city.

One of the Assyrian armies was drawing ominously nearer. All the smooth words which earlier had made the people almost delirious with relief and reassurance were now, with what bitterness, recognized as just so much diplomatic claptrap, not worth the paper they had been so impressively written on. The equally false backstairs bargaining with Pharaoh which had earlier given promise of relief was now exposed as so much futility. True, there was word of a massive army of Ethiopians on the move; but, alas, they moved more slowly than any of Egypt's sleepy crocodiles. So Jerusalem was left to its own resources. And it had none — no faith in the God of their fathers (had he not denounced them by His prophets and cast them off?), no hope that their erstwhile wonderful king would recover and save them, no confidence in the interim government which had lately specialised in making such a mess of things, no trust in the makeshift defences which had been hastily improvised, and no reason at all to believe that the pathetically small and demoralised army would be of any use at all when it was needed. Apparently there was a mass exodus by those who should have been stalwart to defend the city; so says a Sennacherib inscription:

"As for Hezekiah, the awful splendour of my lordship overwhelmed him, and the irregular and regular troops which he had brought in to strengthen Jerusalem, his royal city, fell away" (Taylor Prism; Is. 21:13-17 suggests that these "irregulars" were Arab mercenary soldiers).

### Desperation

Now in the city there seemed to be only consternation and hopelessness:

"O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thine anger smoke (like the burning villages round about) against the sheep of thy pasture?" (Ps. 74:1).

"Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God. For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones. They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel be no more in remembrance" (Ps. 83:1-4).

And Isaiah apostrophized Jerusalem as having "drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury: thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out. There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth; (Hezekiah laid aside, and his cabinet demoralised)...Behold, I have taken out, of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury: thou shalt no more drink it again" (Is. 51:17,18,22).

But just now the holy city seemed destined to be "cast down into destruction... utterly consumed with terrors" (Ps. 73:18,19). The sun and moon (of Israel) were darkened, and the stars had withdrawn their shining (Joel 3:15).

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### Flight a futility

Now amongst many in Jerusalem, and especially in the hearts of those who until Hezekiah's recovery had held the reins of government there was panic. They fled from the doomed city like rats from a sinking ship:

"For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning (to Me) and rest (in Me) shall ye be saved: in quietness and in confidence (in Me) shall be your strength; and ye would not. But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift. One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ten thousand flee: till ye (in the city) be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on a hill" (Is. 30:15-17, with LXX emendation).

These attempts at flight mostly ended in worse calamity. The fugitives fell into the hands of hostile cavalry and archers:

"All thy rulers are fled together, they are bound by the archers: all that are found in thee are bound together, which have fled from far. Therefore said I, Look away from me; I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people" (22:3,4).

The few who did avoid capture found themselves miserable and helpless in the great empty spaces of the Negeb:

"He poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness, where there is no way" (Ps. 107:40; contrast v.41 about the renewed blessing on Hezekiah).

At this crucial time, faith in the God of Israel was infallibly sorting out the people of Israel into sheep and goats.

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## 18. The faithful remnant

From the days of Israel in the wilderness, right up to the present day (and in the New Israel also) there has always been a dichotomy. It was so, very markedly, in the days of Hezekiah, even at the time when the enemy was at the gates — a faithful few put their trust in the God of their fathers and in the unflinching propagation of truth by His prophets, whilst the majority either followed a religion of formality or relied on the scheming of politicians.

It was for the sake of the former group, and in spite of the latter, that such an amazing divine salvation was wrought in those days of desperate fear and taut nerves and fervent prayer.

In all the Old Testament no prophet gave so much prominence to the faithful remnant as did Isaiah. This rather pathetic unpowerful minority believed the assurances which reached them from "the valley of vision" and, in the face of an accumulation of frightening circumstances, they held on with tenacious loyalty. Through the evil days of Ahaz these never lost heart. Isaiah's encouragement was constantly being renewed to them (1:9; 3:10; 6:13; 8:16; 10:20-23).

### Isaiah's leadership

Then, at the time of Hezekiah's reformation, his heartening words were scarcely

needed. For a while an extraordinary surge of godliness carried great numbers of the people along. But, as in the reformation headed by John the Baptist, in the souls of the majority the enthusiasm was short-lived, so that when at last the threatened Assyrian invasion materialised it was only among his faithful remnant that Isaiah found a steadfast faith. These had his unflagging care:

"The Lord hath founded Zion (he declared staunchly), and the poor of his people shall trust in it (Him?)" (14:32).

He foretold that in the evil days when the entire land seemed to be reduced to a wilderness, there would always be the few whose faith was unquenchable:

"Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the Lord God of Israel. At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel. And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall respect that which his fingers have made, either the groves, or the images" (1 7:6-8).

### **His prayers for the faithful**

Isaiah was not only the mouthpiece of the Lord to these faithful ones, but also in very moving terms he was their spokesman in prayer before God:

"O Lord, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee: be thou their (our?) arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble" (33:2). "Lord, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them" (26:16).

These faithful ones were encouraged to think of themselves as the true seed of Abraham:

"Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. (These figures of speech are now interpreted): Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone (a very small faithful remnant!), and blessed him, and increased him" (51:1,2).

There is here an implicit promise that as God brought Abraham through many vicissitudes, so also these would be preserved and blessed.

"Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law: fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings" (51:7).

It is not clear whether the allusion here is to the biting Assyrian propaganda of Rabshakeh, or to the supercilious criticism of the worldly priests and aristos in Jerusalem.

### **The scorners**

Regarding these latter Isaiah had one sustained passage of searing sarcasm. He called them "the drunkards of Ephraim" because their apostasy was every bit as bad as that of the northern kingdom:

"They also have erred through wine...the priest and the (false) prophet have erred through strong drink..." (28:7).

Then follows their drunken mockery of the earnest disciples Isaiah had gathered round him:

"Whom shall he teach knowledge, and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts (they are no better

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than mindless children!). For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept..." (28:9,10).

Here the NIV is very effective in its repetitious simplicity:

"Do and do, do and do,  
rule on rule, rule on rule,  
a little here, a little there"

And, indeed, this drunken mimicry of Isaiah's insistent instruction of his followers was not only cleverly done but also accurate, for right through his prophecy the message is expressed in parallelism, every single detail being said at least twice. Very well, then, says Isaiah in sardonic response to their ridicule, that is how you shall receive the word of the Lord:

"For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people to whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear" (28:11,12).

This remarkable passage is often read as having reference to the Assyrian invaders, as though saying: 'If you won't listen to the word which I bring you from the Lord, instead He will instruct you through the uncouth ill-understood bullying of these brutal warriors.'

But much more probably the context (and also the apostle Paul's use of this scripture in 1 Cor. 14:21) suggests a different reference — to those of Isaiah's faithful remnant who had come from the northern tribes (as also the disciples of Jesus came from Galilee) to keep Passover in Jerusalem. These with their northern dialect and lack of education would repeat Isaiah's insistent message now so drunkenly parodied:

"Tzav latzav, tsav latzav,  
Qav laqav, qav laqav  
Z'ir sham, z'ir sham"

Thus these simple-minded devout folk would bear witness to "the rest" and "the refreshing" which God was offering in these war-torn times. And the outcome was in every way appropriate. For those who scorned the message sought refuge in flight into the wilderness and instead found capture, torture, and death (Chapter 17). But these faithful ones, whose piety had brought them to Jerusalem to honour the Lord for His ancient Passover salvation now found their own salvation in the only place which proved immune to Assyrian assault. (Other "faithful remnant" passages: Isaiah 24:13-16; 25:4; 26:2,3,7,8; 30:15; 50:10; 59:20; 65:8,9; 66:5).

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## 19. Safety assured in Jerusalem

Before ever Jerusalem came under direct threat from the Assyrians, Hezekiah was assured that his capital would be inviolate. When Isaiah brought the message of the king's imminent restoration to health, it was also revealed that:

"I (the Lord) will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city" (Is. 38:6).

It was after this (so 37:14 indicates) that Sennacherib sent his boastful manifesto to Jerusalem, and Hezekiah, distressed by the fierce confidence of it, sought reassurance from his God, and got it through His prophet in words of warm comfort:

"Out of Jerusalem shall go forth (to their homes) a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion...He (the king of Assyria) shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it...For I will

defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake" (37:32-35).

In point of fact Jerusalem was invested (36:2), the siege did begin (see ch.20), but the aggressive military steps needful for the capture of the city were never initiated.

### **The city of God is safe**

Certain of Isaiah's prophecies as events moved to their crisis show very clearly that this man of God was making constant witness to the beleaguered people that God would not allow His holy city to fall into pagan hands:

"The people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more: he will be very gracious unto thee (the king) at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee. And though the Lord give you (the people) the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers (Isaiah and his fellow-prophets? or — intensive plural — Hezekiah, the outstanding teacher) be removed into a corner any more" (30:19,20).

In another place (31:4,5) Isaiah has the graphic simile of Jerusalem and the besieging forces being likened to a lion (Ariel, the lion of God; 29:1) roaring against the confederacy of shepherds who want to see it destroyed:

"He will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so shall the Lord of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion." "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly...he shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him: his waters shall be sure" (33:15,16).

Joel, a fellow-prophet, speaking of "the great and terrible day of the Lord" was at least as explicit:

"In mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said (through Isaiah), and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call" (Joel 2:32).

But the most vivid passages of this character come in some of the Hezekiah psalms, although it is difficult to be sure whether some of these are inspired anticipations or jubilant God-glorifying celebrations of a deliverance, that has already taken place:

"He (the Lord) hath strengthened the bars of thy gates: he hath blessed thy children within thee" (Ps. 147:13).

"As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people" (125:2).

"God is in the midst of her; God shall help her, and that right early" (46:5).

"Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time is come" (102:13; here *mo'ed* describes a feast of the Lord, in this case, Passover — see chapter 25 — when deliverance came, and judgment on the oppressors).

"Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole Land is Zion, on the sides of the north (not only the temple in its north-eastern corner, but also the Assyrians coming from the north and encamping on mount Scopus), the city of the great King (Jehovah, not Sennacherib). God is known in her palaces for a refuge" (48:2,3).

The Messianic anticipations in these passages is very easy to discern.

Well might Isaiah speak of "the Lord thy Redeemer" as one who

"confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers; that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, ye shall be built" (Is. 44:26).

It is to be noted that there is no promise here of Jerusalem being re-built, for in Isaiah's day the city went unscathed.

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## 20. Jerusalem invested

The situation seemed hopeless. The city was surrounded by hostile armies. True, no attack had been made as yet (nor was it; Is. 37:33), but all supplies were cut off, the uncertain Egyptian ally showed little sign of being an efficient rescuer, and within the walls — until Hezekiah's marvellous recovery and resumption of leadership — there were divided counsels.

From early on, Isaiah had anticipated that the Assyrian campaign would develop in this way. He described

"the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge (a bothy) in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city" (1:8).

With a different figure of speech the idea was repeated. Assyrian power will be like the great river Euphrates overflowing its banks in spring time:

"He shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck" (8:8).

The metaphor describes a man almost drowned, with only his head (the city of Jerusalem) out of the water.

As the evil days drew nearer and the horror intensified, the picture was painted in yet more stark colours:

"A day of trouble and of treading down and of perplexity by the Lord God of hosts in the valley of vision (even the prophets were puzzled — or is this describing the Kidron valley full of soldiers?)...Thy choicest valleys shall be full of chariots, and the horsemen (of Assyria) shall set themselves in array at the gate" (22:5,7).

The watchman, looking out across the countryside saw only signs of devastation and impending calamity for the isolated capital:

"I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem (the fine country houses with which the aristocracy had indulged themselves)" (Amos 2:5).

There was no sign of help at all:

"Promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south" (Ps. 75:6).

Aid from the north was, of course, clean out of question, for the Assyrians came from that point of the compass.

Sennacherib's own Bull Inscription represents Jerusalem's prospects as hopeless:

"Hezekiah himself I shut up like a caged bird within Jerusalem his royal city. I put watch posts strictly round it, and turned back to his disaster any who went out of its city gate."

On this Winton Thomas comments: " 'Watch posts' indicates a close blockade rather than a military assault on the city."

All the prophetic pictures have the same element of misery about them:

"Her wound is incurable; for it is come unto Judah; he (the Assyrian) is come unto the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem" (Mic. 1:9).

"Now also many nations (see Isaiah 21) are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion" (4:11)

— the rapist gloating over his victim!

But in describing the parlous plight of the holy city, Isaiah remains the master of them all:

"These two things are come unto thee...desolation and destruction, and the famine and the sword (but why does he say two, and then enumerate four?); by whom shall I comfort thee? Thy sons have fainted...they are full of the fury of the Lord" (51:19,20).

"I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee (contrast 37:30). And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust...as of one that hath a familiar spirit" (29:3,4).

Jerusalem as good as dead!

## 21. "All nations"

Empire builders have always been good at persuading or dragooning conquered peoples into enlisting in their armies to help on the good work of making further conquests. In the first century A.D. when Titus came against Jerusalem with five Roman legions (out of 26 spread across the empire), he approximately doubled the size of his army by pulling in additional contingents of fighting men from nearly all the nations round Judaea.

Sennacherib had also thought of this idea long centuries before, and accordingly it was only occasionally that the prophets referred to the invaders as "the Assyrians". More often they employed the comprehensive description: "all nations". Long before the invasion came, Isaiah knew that it would have this character:

"And he (the Lord) will lift up an ensign to *the nations* from far, and will hiss (whistle!) for them...and in that day they shall roar against them (the people of God) like the roaring of the sea; and if one look unto the Land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof" (Is. 5:26,30).

When the invasion was in full spate, the prophet still used the same terminology:

"and the multitude of *all the nations* that fight against Ariel...shall be as a dream of a night vision (like a nightmare)" (29:7).

"The breath of the Lord, as an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity" (30:28).

So also Micah:

"Now also *many nations* are gathered against thee (Zion), that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion" (Mic. 4:11).

The Hezekiah psalms also:

"*All nations* compassed me about: but in the name of the Lord will I destroy - them"

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(Ps. 118:10).

"He (the Lord) shall subdue the people under us, and *the nations* under our feet" (47:3).

"Pour out thy wrath upon the Gentiles...and upon *the kingdoms* that have not called upon thy name" (79:6).

### Elam and Media

Sargon and Sennacherib had lately re-asserted Assyrian dominance over Elam and Media, the latter especially, so of course contingents from these remote nations were drafted into the invading army:

"The treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth (this is Isaiah's triple description of the vileness of Assyrian invasion; 24:16; 33:1).

Go up, O Elam: besiege, O Media; all the sighing thereof (i.e. of the besieged) have I made to cease" (Is. 21:2 cp. 22:6).

### Edom and Moab

But outstanding among these Jew-hating allies of Sennacherib were the Edomites. These men of Esau never lost an opportunity of working off old scores against the people of God. Their rancorous hatred of Jerusalem has already been quoted:

"Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof" (Ps. 137:7).

The vigour of the prophetic language about Edom is hardly to be matched anywhere else:

"For three transgressions of Edom and for four I will not turn away the punishment thereof: because he did pursue his brother (Israel) with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually and he kept his wrath for ever" (Am. 1:11).

Obadiah's short prophecy — all of it about Edom — has marvellously similar language:

"For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever...Thou shouldst not have looked on their affliction in the day of their calamity..." (Obad. 10,13).

No wonder, then, that these prophets also have powerful passages of retribution one day to be brought home to these bitter, hate-filled neighbours (see v. 18). Regarding Moab, there seems at first to have been friendly sympathy on the part of the people of Judah as the inevitable Assyrian invasion of that country was contemplated (Isaiah 15,16), even to the extent of encouraging Moabite refugees to flee for safety to Jerusalem where the prophets at any rate were confident that there would be immunity from Assyrian hammer-blows:

"Let the outcasts of Moab dwell with thee (the daughter of Zion; v.1 )...and in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David" (Is. 16:4,5 LXX and other versions, following a re-pointed Hebrew text).

But this comradely attitude changed dramatically:

"For in this mountain shall the hand of the Lord rest, and Moab shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill...and he shall bring down their pride together with the spoils of their hands" (Is. 25:10,11; cp. Am. 2:1-3).

It may be surmised that when Moab was overrun the men of that nation were not unwilling to buy easier terms by enrolling in Sennacherib's army now invading Judah. Hence this

prophetic repudiation.

There were others also who changed sides. In the course of one of Rabshakeh's "leaflet raids" aimed at undermining morale in Jerusalem, this magnificently confident challenge was issued:

"Now therefore give pledges, I pray thee, to my master, the king of Assyria, and I will give thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them" (Is. 36:8) —

meaning: "I'm willing to make a bet with you, Hezekiah, that you can't find two thousand men to defend your city; your situation is as hopeless as that! (By contrast, Solomon had had 12,000 horsemen and 40,000 stalls for horses; 1 Kgs. 4:26).

### Desertions

As will be seen in the next two chapters, Rabshakeh was well supplied with inside information. His spies operated very efficiently inside Jerusalem. So it was known that before the siege of Jerusalem began there had been wholesale desertions from Hezekiah's already pathetically feeble army:

"As for Hezekiah, the awful splendour of my lordship overwhelmed him (the king's sickness?), and the irregular and regular troops which he had brought in to strengthen Jerusalem, his royal city, took leave..." (Taylor Prism).

In effect, Isaiah's "burden upon Arabia" says the same thing:

"They fled from the drawn sword, and from the bent bow, and from the grievousness of war. For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Within a year, according to the years of an hireling (mercenary troops!), and all the glory of Kedar shall fail: and the residue of the number of archers, the mighty men of the children of Kedar, shall be diminished: for the Lord God of Israel hath spoken it" (Is. 21:13-17).

Kedar was in the northern part of the Arabian desert, perhaps even another name for the Ammonites — hence Amos 1:13-15. These too joined the enemy. And so also — it may be inferred — did Tyre, for until the days of Alexander the Great four hundred years later it was the settled policy of Tyre and Sidon not to fight invaders but to make friends with them, buying them off with lavish payments out of the wealth of their burgeoning overseas trade (Amos 1:9,10; Joel 3:4-8).

### Philistia

The case with the Philistines was different. Their land was early overrun by the Assyrians, and their cities captured. Their pro-Jerusalem government (the result of 2 Kgs. 18:8) was dealt with in the brutal fashion typical of Assyrian methods, and forthwith Philistia came in on the side of the Nazis (Taylor Prism). All of these details are brought together in a shattering catalogue of nations now confederate against Jehovah and His holy city:

"They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel be no more in remembrance" —

and the list which follows nominates practically all the nations round the Holy Land.

Scarcely one is missing:

"Edom, the Ishmaelites, Moab, the Hagarenes (Gen. 16:3), Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, the Philistines, Tyre — and Assur (Assyria) is joined with them" (Ps. 83:4-8).

All nations against Jerusalem to battle — what a prospect!

## 22. Rabshakeh

Jerusalem was "Straitly shut up". The siege had begun. On mount Scopus, called by Josephus "the camp of the Assyrians", the enemy had established his main headquarters. Sennacherib was not there in person to direct operations. He was set on the reduction of Lachish and Libnah, the only defenced cities besides Jerusalem which had not yet capitulated. These were specially important because, once taken, the Assyrian could march on Egypt knowing that his rear was secure; his communications with the homeland would not be under threat.

Also, the massive army of Pharaoh Sabataka, the Ethiopian, was slowly making its way northward. This was the only threatening enemy Sennacherib had left. He must be ready to intercept and destroy it.

Prominent in the control of this army now encamped against Jerusalem was Rabshakeh, a renegade Jew (see H.Gt. p.54). He was now entrusted with the task of talking Jerusalem into submission. It has to be admitted that he went to the work with an efficiency which commands admiration.

### Rabshakeh in action

He chose to approach the city defences near the Gihon spring "by the conduit of the upper pool" the very place where the heart of Ahaz had trembled at the prospect of invasion from Syria and Israel (Is. 7:3), the very place also where the inspired prophecy had been made of the birth of a godly Immanuel, son of Ahaz (7:13,14).

Here, at Gihon, Rabshakeh could make careful observation as to the availability of water supply for the men and horses of his army; he could also observe what was the result of the recent frantic engineering to bring the waters of the Kidron brook within the city walls.

A delegation from Hezekiah met Rabshakeh there, hoping, though with precious little optimism, to coax some reality into the terms of the treaty which had earlier been signed with Sennacherib.

These endeavours were roughly brushed aside. Rabshakeh had no intention at all of indulging in quiet diplomacy. Instead he

"cried with a loud voice in the Jew's speech unto the people of Jerusalem that were on the wall, to affright them, and to trouble them" (2 Chr. 32:18).

He was interested in propaganda, not peace-making. The great powers of the twentieth century were not the inventors of psychological warfare. Nearly three thousand years ago the Assyrians were expert at it!

In vain this deputation of three pleaded for quiet negotiations, to be conducted in the Syrian language. Why should Rabshakeh talk pleasantly when he knew that morale in Jerusalem was near to breaking point? So he hammered away in as uncouth and bullying a manner as he could muster — and it came easily.

### Fear — and silence

Within the city Isaiah was doing what he could to allay the rising panic:

"Fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings...Who art thou that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die (at the appointed time the Assyrians did die!), and of the son of man which shall be made as grass...thou hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?" (51:7,12,13),

emulating Moses, he exhorted: "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord" (Ex. 14:13).

And, all that Hezekiah could do to counteract the blast of demoralising scorn which Rabshakeh's rough powerful voice hurled at the dense throng of citizens who lined the walls was to circulate an instruction:

"Answer him not." (36:21).

It says much for the power of the king's personality that he could so impose his will on the people in a time when his authority must have been tested to the limit. So Rabshakeh got no immediate response to his highly capable endeavours:

"They held their peace, and answered him not a word" —

which reaction must have puzzled Rabshakeh not a little.

With the complete lack of scruple essential to every worldly propagandist, he did not hesitate to indulge in self-contradiction. Any method was worth trying if only it weakened the hands of Jerusalem's men of war and undermined the spirit of resistance in the minds of the common people.

He switched to painting a rosy picture of the alluring advantages to be gained by quiet capitulation. They would soon find themselves re-settled in a land of surpassing fruitfulness and prosperity, so much better than the struggle of winning a livelihood from the rocky terrain of Judaea.

There was such sweet reasonableness about the ballyhoo he presented: 'After all, is not your present situation quite hopeless? Is it likely that the God Hezekiah teaches you to worship will be able to come to your aid? Consider the sorry fate of all the other peoples who prayed to their gods for rescue from the might of Sennacherib. What help did their superstition bring them? Are you who worship Jehovah likely to see your God get to work on this hopeless situation?' This Rabshakeh was a clever unscrupulous knave.

### **Inside knowledge**

There was a fine effective subtlety also about the way in which he wove into his logomachy a clever series of implications that his spies had him well-informed about the state of affairs inside the city.

He knew that Hezekiah was exhorting his people to put their confidence in Jehovah (Is. 36:4,5; 2 Chr. 32:8). He knew that there had been a treaty signed with Egypt, a political expedient that was sure to prove futile, more harm than good (36:6). He knew that Hezekiah had put through sweeping religious changes and had reinstated Solomon's altar of burnt-offering which Ahaz had taken out of the way (36:7). He knew that there had been wholesale desertions from the Judaeans army (36:8; 21:15). He knew of Isaiah's reassuring message that Jerusalem would remain inviolate (37:6). And he knew — the unkindest cut of all! — the prophecies which interpreted this Assyrian invasion as Jehovah's discipline of His wayward people (8:7; 10:5,6). How penetrating must that proud challenge have been in the ears of the people: "And am I now come up without Jehovah against this land to destroy it? Of course not! Jehovah said unto me, Go up against this land, and destroy it" (36:10). Sennacherib was the rod of His anger.

How could the Assyrian, outside the walls, know of these things? And the spirit of the people quailed before this casual demonstration of omniscience, even though it involved a crass contradiction of the hyper-confident assertions already made (36:4,5). But it was ever thus. In time of war the first and most horrid casualty is *truth*.

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## 23. Rabshakeh versus Jehovah

Rabshakeh, that Jewish renegade, knew right well that the strength of Jerusalem lay not in the impregnable character of its walls, lately botched up in the recent frantic defence measures, but in Hezekiah, whose shattered health was now marvellously restored, and in his amazing ability to command the loyalty and confidence of the people. Even more impregnable was Hezekiah's faith in Jehovah. Every yard of the city's walls was built solidly into *that* foundation.

To undermine that confidence of the people in their king and to intensify the hopeless bewilderment which but a little while ago had brought them near to surrender — these were the objectives which the uncouth Rabshakeh set himself.

"Let not Hezekiah deceive you (but of course be sure to listen to *me* and believe every deceitful word of the advice / give you!), for he shall not be able to deliver you...Hearken not to Hezekiah...Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, Jehovah will deliver us" (Is. 36:14,16,18).

The repetition went on ceaselessly, blackening the king's character and all the time probing how best to drive a wedge between king and people. It is noteworthy that not once in these harangues nor in the various Sennacherib inscriptions was Hezekiah given his proper title. All other kings who came under the Assyrian heel were correctly denominated, but the Taylor Prism has only a curt contemptuous "Hezekiah the Jew". His stubborn refusal to capitulate rankled in Assyrian bosoms.

"Now therefore let not Hezekiah deceive you nor persuade you on this manner, neither yet believe him" (2 Chr. 32:15)

— but they did, or were too awed by his sterling faith in God to fly in the face of it. Specially in the Hezekiah psalms does the bitterness of this experience show. Although "the people answered him never a word", the power of Rabshakeh's propaganda bit deep:

"Thou (Jehovah) makest us to be a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us" (literally round about the walls) (Ps. 44:13).

Hezekiah himself felt all this very keenly:

"Mine enemies reproach me all the day, and they that are mad against me are sworn against me" (Ps. 102:8).

"As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me: while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?" (Ps. 42:10; cp. also 89:50,51).

### **Sennacherib's religious hatred**

But was it Hezekiah or was it the God he worshipped who was the vexing hindrance in the way of Assyrian imperialism? Sennacherib hated the very name Jehovah. Was it not still talked about in Nineveh how a prophet from paltry Israel had fearlessly proclaimed throughout that impressive capital:

"Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown"?

And the amazing report, that this fellow with the yellow shrivelled skin had come to Nineveh from the bowels of the ocean with a tale to tell such as had never been heard, and that story had left its mark on king and people alike. Life in that vast city had been transformed at the behest of Israel's God — and thus the threat was removed, for Jehovah was not only powerful, He was kind. But Sennacherib, a devout worshipper of Ashur, the national god of his country, writhed every time he heard mention of this Jehovah who had brought his mighty people to their knees in prayer. Before ever he came to the throne the resolution had crystallised out in his mind that one day he would make Jehovah and His prophet pay for that

Assyrian humiliation.

And now the time was come, yet forty days — nay, less than that — and Jerusalem shall be overthrown *and* its matchless temple *and* its Jehovah. Soon the account would be squared.

Meantime, let Sennacherib's minions rub in the truth that this Jehovah — He who is, and was, and is to come — was already shown to be powerless and, more than that, now no longer a God to take account of: "He who was" — only that! With this majestic theme to broadcast, the Voice of Assyria went on the air, blasting its message into every home in Jerusalem, and even into the temple itself!

### **War against Jehovah**

Hezekiah's faith was exposed as a futile superstition:

"Let not Hezekiah make you trust in Jehovah, saying, Jehovah will surely deliver us" (Is. 36:15).

"Let not thy God, in whom thou trustest, deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria" (37:10).

"If thou say unto me, We trust in Jehovah our God; is it not he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and said to Judah and to Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar?" (36:7).

The twist in that last challenge was cleverly put over. True, Hezekiah's reformation had destroyed high places and had taken away the ornate Assyrian altar which Ahaz had installed in the temple area. But these were the tokens of an apostasy which had taken a rude buffeting since Ahaz slept with his fathers. The more intelligent and the more godly in Jerusalem would see through this, and would curl their lips at this heathen perversion of truth.

The barrage of logomachy went on day after day. The foghorn voice of Rabshakeh wore itself out. But others in his Ministry of Misinformation took up where he left off:

"And they spake against the God of Jerusalem, as against the gods of the people of the Land, which were the work of the hands of men" (2 Chr. 32:19).

### **The defenders' secret weapon**

And their words were not wasted. For the people on the walls knew well enough their own military weakness. The faithful remnant among them lifted up their prayers in the temple:

"O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?...Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O Lord, and that the foolish people have blasphemed thy name...Arise, O God, plead thine own cause: remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily. Forgive not the voice of thine enemies: the tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually" (Ps. 74:10,18,22,23).

These Assyrian propagandists must have been much puzzled by the lack of response from the besieged. Could it be that they were so cowed that they hadn't even the courage to fight with words. What they did not know was that Hezekiah had commanded: "Answer never a word". And loyally, yet much discouraged, the people obeyed. Instead:

"Wherefore (they prayed) should the heathen say, Where is their God? (cp. Ps. 115:2) let him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed...and render unto our neighbours (the Edomites and others who were now firm allies of Assyria) sevenfold into their bosom their reproach wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord" (Ps. 79:10,12; cp. also Ps. 139:19-22; 140:8-11).

The heavenly counterblast to these rough Assyrian threats came, in the first instance, in an inspired message through the prophet of the Lord:

"The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn...Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel. By thy servants hast thou reproached the Lord, and hast said, By the multitude of my chariots am I come up to the height of the mountains" (Is. 37:22-24).

"Because thy rage and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore will I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips (figuratively, Sennacherib was soon to be treated as he, with savage satisfaction, treated his prisoners), and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou earnest" (37:29).

Although this stern rebuttal was primarily for the re-assurance of Hezekiah and his men, it would be surprising indeed if such a scornful riposte were not leaked to the Assyrians. And if it were, then what would they make of it?

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## 24. Israel's ancient Passover experience

About this time Hezekiah's men of God made much of the vivid memories, preserved in their ancient scriptures and in the national consciousness, of the unique and sensational deliverance which their forefathers had known when, under Moses, the people were delivered from a cruel oppression in Egypt. Indeed the king himself in some of the Hezekiah psalms, dwelt on this with a deep earnestness of spirit. There is no difficulty in seeing why this should be, for had not the king's reign begun with a uniquely enthusiastic observance of Passover in Jerusalem — this after one knows not how many years of shameful neglect? And, of course, even though this religious zeal tended to flag, Hezekiah's didn't, and he would see to it that this holy festival would be kept up in the holy city every year of his reign. Among the enthusiasts for this sustained revival none was so forward as Isaiah. When his long book of prophecy is read with an eye to such allusions they are found to be as common as daisies on a lawn.

### Crossing the Red Sea

References to the slaying of the Passover lamb and to the sprinkling of blood are relatively few. But the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea crops up time and again:

"Art not thou he which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?...Art thou not he that hath cut Rahab (nickname for Egypt), and wounded the dragon (the Nile crocodile)?" (Is. 51:10,9).

"Where is he that brought them (Israel) up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock?...that led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm (Ex. 14:16), dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? (63:11,12).

Isaiah wrote out of a conviction that what God had done for Israel in former times He could assuredly do again! So let His people look for a like experience now:

"Ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel shall be your rearward" (52:12) —

precisely as happened at the Exodus:

"And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed, and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before their face, and stood behind

them" (Ex. 14:19).

In similar fashion Is. 19 has a sequence of vivid pictures of a deliverance yet to be accomplished in Hezekiah's time (in part), and again (more fully) in Messiah's day, with one detail after another quarried out of the Exodus story — the pillar of cloud, the Glory of the Lord; the ruthless exposure of the futility of the gods of Egypt; the drying up of Egypt's waters; the pathetic inadequacy of the rulers of that highly organized land (19:1,3,5,11,16).

"When thou (Israel) passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers (e.g., Jordan), they shall not overflow thee...I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee...thou wast precious in my sight" (Is. 43:2-4).

### **Wilderness journey**

Always there was the implication that what God had done in ancient times for His people He could do again. Consider, too, how He cared for them in the wilderness:

"When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them...I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water" (41:17,18).

"I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert...to give drink to my people, my chosen. This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise" (43:19-21).

"He caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them: he clave the rock also (i.e. a second time), and the waters gushed out" (48:21).

In the time of Judah's desolation, and when vast multitudes of captives had been marched wearily away into distant bondage, the prophet's faith never flagged. As God had saved in the days of Moses, so He would save yet again, very soon, and even more powerfully:

"Say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves...they shall not hunger nor thirst (manna and the smitten rock); neither shall the heat nor sun smite them (the protecting shelter of the pillar of cloud; Ps. 105:39)...by the springs of water shall he guide them. And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted...from the land of Sinim (the two wildernesses of Sinai and Zin; Dt. 32:51)" (49:9-12).

The same context echoes the covenant at Sinai and the inheritance of the Promised Land.

In earlier days, before ever Hezekiah came to the throne, Isaiah was using this Exodus language to foretell a yet more glorious deliverance (10:24-27; 11:15; 4:5). His mind seems to have been fascinated by those awe-inspiring experiences of long ago. But he wrote of them as he did because the mind of his God also still dwelt on them lovingly.

### **In the Psalms also**

The Hezekiah psalms, some of which were probably written by Isaiah, constantly carry the same theme — God's vine in Egypt, the people's experience of hard bondage, how they were led by Moses and Aaron through the waters of the Red Sea, the destruction of the Egyptian crocodile, the fear-inspiring covenant at Sinai, the waters of Meribah, the tribes marching in correct order through the wilderness with the ark and its cherubim of glory in the midst,

earthquake at the crossing of Jordan, the overthrow of the Canaanite peoples — all of these are mentioned in a context which speaks vividly of the despair and hardship and mighty exultation of Hezekiah's time (44:1-3; 74:13,14; 77:19,20; 80:1-8; 81:5-7; 114). The special point attaching to these Passover and Exodus allusions will be made more clear in the next chapter.

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## 25. Jerusalem delivered at Passover

The strong emphasis throughout Isaiah on the Passover deliverance of Israel under Moses prepared the way for a sequence of quite exciting intimations that that act of divine salvation was now to be matched by a deliverance at least as sensational as that which the Passover feast celebrated.

Although the overflow of zeal for the Lord which Hezekiah's first Passover had witnessed was now almost spent, it may be taken as certain that even at the time of Sennacherib's invasion the faithful remnant came up to Jerusalem to keep the feast — this in spite of, or perhaps even because of, the havoc which the Assyrian invasion had brought with it. If there was one city in Judah, besides Lachish, which could withstand the Assyrian assault, it was Jerusalem.

There the piety and steadfast devotion of these faithful ones found its reward, for — as Isaiah had foretold, (ch. 19) — Jerusalem and all its people came through unharmed.

It was such a Passover night as had never been experienced before:

"As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and *passing over* he will preserve it" (Is. 31:5).

This reassuring promise employs the very Hebrew verb (a word of rare occurrence) which is used in the great Passover chapter in Exodus (12:11,21,27,43,48 etc.).

The language describes the protecting angel of the Lord not suffering the destroyer to come into the holy city (Ex. 12:23).

In this place in Isaiah, the context could hardly be more explicit:

"Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword (*hereb*, a play on *cherub*), not of a mighty man; and the sword, not of a mean man, shall devour him; but he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be discomfited" (31:8).

Other Isaiah passages are just as specific:

"Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord" (30:29).

"A holy solemnity" means one of the feasts of the Lord. The words speak of a pilgrimage to Zion. This is a feast that is kept at night-time. Only Passover is so observed. The context of this passage is as explicit as the one quoted earlier:

"For through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be beaten down which smote with a rod" (30:31).

Yet another example of the same sort:

"Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! (Ariel is one of Isaiah's names for Jerusalem). Add ye year to year: let them kill sacrifices" (29:1).

The Passover chapter (Ex. 12:2) begins with:

"This month shall be unto you the beginning of months."

So it was in the month of Passover when year was added to year and when special sacrifices were offered. Isaiah continues:

"And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel...shall be as a dream of a night vision...so shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion" (29:7,8).

Consider next this rather problematical passage:

"The night of my pleasure (Passover?) hath he turned into fear unto me. Prepare the table (the Passover meal?), watch in the watchtower ('It shall be a night of watching'; Ex. 12:42), eat, drink...anoint the shield (the door frame? Ex. 12:7)" (21:4,5).

Again, the context is the same:

"Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken into the ground" (21:9).

Here is the outcome of the controversy between Jehovah and the gods of Assyria (see ch.23). It is well-established that by "Babylon" Isaiah meant "Assyria" which had largely conquered Babylon. The reference to chariots and horsemen in pairs (21:9 RV) accords precisely with the character of Assyrian bas-reliefs.

### **Protection and Destruction**

Another passage about divine judgment and holocaust, is shot through with Passover language:

"Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee (None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning; Ex. 12:22): hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation (Passover destruction) be overpast. For, behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain" (26:20,21).

The exhortation to

"Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities (Passover again)...Jerusalem a quiet habitation" (33:20).

is preceded by:

"Thou shalt not see a fierce people (the Assyrians), a people of a deeper speech than thou canst perceive: of a stammering tongue, that thou canst not understand" (v.19).

There is much more like this in the context.

Very briefly, but effectively, Isaiah's narrative underlines the drama of this Passover:

"Then the angel of the Lord (Ex. 12:23) went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians...and when they (the inhabitants of Jerusalem) arose early in the morning, behold they were all dead! Corpses!" (37:36) —

precisely as happened in Egypt. And as the Egyptians were urgent upon Israel to get themselves out of their land of bondage, so also were the Assyrians. Chapter 33 will bring together some striking evidence that the outcome of this Passover was freedom for the multitude of captives already marched away from Judah.

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## 26. The Destruction of Sennacherib's Army

If indeed Isaiah's prophecies have been assembled in approximately chronological order, it is certainly very remarkable that time after time during the reign of Ahaz or in the early days of Hezekiah, the prophet seems to have made explicit prognostications not only about the Assyrian invasion but also about the cataclysmic destruction in which that arrogant exercise in empire-building would culminate. Here are four examples couched in fairly explicit terms:

"Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders...In the year that king Ahaz died was this burden" (14:24-28).

"My Land...my mountains" — this was the reason why it must so transpire. In an exhortation to the people of Moab to seek refuge with the people of Jehovah, there is this assurance:

"The extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the Land. And in mercy (i.e. according to God's promise) shall the throne (in Jerusalem) be established" (16:4,5).

"O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt (see ch.25)...And the Lord of hosts shall stir up a scourge for *him* according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb (Judges 7)...And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder...and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing (of Hezekiah, the new king)" (10:24-27).

"Thou hast multiplied the nation (by the great number returning from captivity); thou hast increased their joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest (the great Jubilee harvest; see ch. 32), and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil (the plundering of the Assyrian camp; see ch.28)...For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood, but this (threatened horror against Jerusalem) shall even be for burning and for fuel of fire" — in other words, the biter bit (9:3,5 RV).

### Vivid description

As the great crisis drew nearer the startling outcome which God purposed was depicted more and more clearly:

"Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas...The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind. And behold, at eveningtide trouble, and before the morning he is not. This is the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us" (17:12-14).

Whereas later prophecies were to specify Passover as the time of this deliverance, it is here foretold that the stroke of judgment would fall during the night (as in the day of Midian).

The figure of chaff being blown away from a threshing floor is repeated:

"The multitude of the terrible ones shall be as chaff that passeth away (here cp. Mic. 4:12,13): yea, it shall be at an instant suddenly. Thou (the invader) shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and

tempest, and the flame of devouring fire. And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel...shall be as a dream of a night vision. It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty...so shall the multitude of all the nations be that fight against mount Zion" (29:5-8).

The figures of speech vary astonishingly, but the net result is always the same:

"In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword will punish leviathan the piercing serpent...and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea. In that day sing ye unto her (Jerusalem), A vineyard of red wine (the environs of the city flowing with blood)" (27:1,2).

Here there is allusion to the two great powers of Assyria and Egypt, the former under the metaphors of the fast-flowing Tigris and the slow devious Euphrates, both of them belonging to the Assyrian heartland, and the latter (Egypt) appropriately described as the crocodile of the Nile (for 'sea' see 19:5).

### The Wrath of God

As the *dies irae* drew nearer, the expressions of God's wrathful purpose against the invaders intensified:

"At the noise of the tumult the people fled: at the lifting up of thyself the nations were scattered" (33:3).

"Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, not of a mighty man; and the sword, not of a mean man, shall devour him: but he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be discomfited. And he shall pass over to his strong hold for fear (cp. 37:37). ("So Sennacherib king of Assyria *departed*, and *went*, and *returned*, and dwelt at Nineveh"), and his princes shall be afraid of the ensign, saith the Lord, whose fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem" (31:8,9).

In "Second Isaiah" (which is certainly as contemporary with the Assyrian invasion as is "First Isaiah"), it is difficult to be sure whether the repeated descriptions of the holocaust are to be read as prophecies before the event or as reminiscences making use of that awe-inspiring devastation as a picture of a yet greater judgment to come in the days of Messiah's appearing. This is one of the great unsolved problems of this greatest of the Old Testament prophets. However, regarding the present investigation, the student loses nothing by the uncertainty.

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the Spirit (the wind?) of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass" (40:7). "Behold, all they that were incensed against thee (Zion) shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing: and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contend with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought" (41:11,12).

There is an impressive picture of God's patience giving out. How can He remain passive whilst swashbuckling conquerors bully and deride His faithful remnant?:

"The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies. I have long time holden my peace: I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once" (42:13,14).

These violent ruthless invaders, more brutal than any beasts, are to have a taste of their own medicine:

"Thus saith thy Lord Jehovah and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people,

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Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again: but I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over" (51:22,23; for the same idea, see 49:26).

### A barrage of prophecy

Other prophets were as vigorous, if not as copious, as Isaiah:

"And this man (Hezekiah, in whom the hopes of the nation centred) shall be our peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our Land: and when he shall tread in our palaces (the fine country residences), then shall we raise against him seven shepherds and eight principal men...thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian, when he cometh into our Land" (Mic. 5:5,6).

The seven shepherds were the prophets of the Lord who were better than military resources in stiffening the backbone of the faithful remnant — Isaiah, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk — and over them Hezekiah (himself a prophet, in the Book of Psalms), to lead and inspire them by his superlative Messianic example. Every one of these seven has a strong message against Assyria.

### Psalms also

The Hezekiah psalms rival Isaiah in the way awe at the mighty judgment of Jehovah is intermingled with irrepressible gladness at His gracious goodness in rescuing His people from a nightmare of destruction and torment:

"Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the Land. He maketh wars to cease unto the ends of the Land; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the Gentiles, I will be exalted in the Land" (Ps. 46:8-10).

"For lo, the kings (Sennacherib's allies) were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail" (48:4-6).

"In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion. There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle...The stouthearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep...At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep" (76:2-6).

The gloom and hopeless wretchedness of the siege suddenly gave way to an explosion of delight and thankfulness:

"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the Gentiles, the Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord *hath* done great things for us, whereof we are glad" (126:1-3).

Once the hunt is on in psalm and prophecy for echoes of this unique deliverance, there are many satisfying finds to be made by the diligent student.

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## 27. Theophany

There can be no manner of doubt that the destruction of Sennacherib's army outside Jerusalem was an act of God. The only question that remains to be settled about it is whether it was an act of God in the sense in which the insurance policies use the phrase — something cataclysmic in the world of nature, such as lightning or earthquake — or whether it was a quite unique demonstration of destructive power expressing directly the wrath of God.

Besides a handful of very forceful passages in the Hezekiah psalms there are in Isaiah's prophecy more than fifteen extremely vivid descriptions of what happened in this majestic act of divine redemption. Consideration will be given first to the two longest. It will be seen that the first is rather general in its description, the other is much more specific:

"And he (the Lord) saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompense to his enemies: to the lands of the sea he will repay recompense. So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him. And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord" (Is. 59:16-20).

The character of this language is readily explained when it is realised that the prophet is using the great Assyrian debacle as a picture in history already past, in order to portray the yet greater deliverance which Messiah will yet bring to Zion. Now contrast the lurid detail in an earlier passage which, although written before the event, reads as though written by an eye-witness:

"Behold, the name of the Lord cometh from far, burning with his anger, and the burden thereof is heavy (i.e. the prophetic message concerning it is terrible): his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire: and his breath as an overflowing stream shall reach even to the neck (cp. 8:7,8), to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity: and there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err...And the Lord shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall shew the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering (Jer. Bib: cloudburst), and tempest, and hailstones. For through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be beaten down which smote with a rod...For Tophet is ordained of old: yea, for the king it is prepared: he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord like a stream of brimstone doth kindle it" (30:27-33).

### **Hurricane — natural or divine?**

As Isaiah multiplies his testimonies of this judgment against the Assyrians the elements of storm and fire are frequently repeated. It is such details which impart an element of feasibility to the idea that it was a hurricane of freak intensity which hit the camp of the besiegers outside Jerusalem. Hurricanes of this nature are very local in their destructive effects, so in this way the city itself may have escaped the worst

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ferocity of the storm. It could, of course, be argued that hurricanes of such violence, which must have their birth over a considerable stretch of water, do not happen in the Mediterranean. But it is conceivable that such a "whirlwind of the south" (21:1) may have built up in the sub-tropical waters of the Red Sea and then have spent itself turning north towards Jerusalem.

But even if such an extraordinary natural phenomenon be invoked as the most likely explanation, there are still the remarkable features of time and place to be explained — that this violent storm should come just when it did, and that it should head directly for Jerusalem, bringing destruction all round the city and yet leaving the city itself virtually unharmed. What is the evidence supplied by Isaiah elsewhere?

"His (the Assyrian's) princes shall be afraid of the (Lord's) ensign, saith the Lord, whose fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem" (31:9).

"Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire" (29:6).

"He shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble" (40:24) —

a literal whirlwind, or just a figure of speech?

### The Shekinah Glory?

There are at least two places where it is strongly suggested that the destruction was associated with an overpowering manifestation of the Shekinah Glory of the Lord; and this phenomenon in turn is made into an anticipation of an essential feature of Messiah's coming in glory:

"O that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence (this is the language of the Sinai theophany), As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence!" (64:1,2).

"For behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his (cherubim) chariots like a whirlwind to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword (a paronomasia for cherub) will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many" (66:15,16).

### Psalms and Prophets

It is interesting now to turn to the testimony of the psalms on this fascinating topic. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea...Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the Land. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the Land; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire" (Ps. 46:1,2,8,9).

"Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined (this must refer to the Shekinah Glory). Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him" (50:2,3).

The destruction of an overpowering confederacy of enemies is invoked in Psalm 83 in very strong terms:

"As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire: so persecute them with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm" (83:14,15).

Psalm 97 is even more vivid:

"Clouds and darkness are round about him...a fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about (round about the city?). His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord" (Ps. 97:2-5).

The final picture comes from Joel:

"The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem: and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the Lord will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel" (Jl. 3:16).

Like Isaiah, Joel was making use of his personal experience of God's rescue operation in Hezekiah's reign in order to prepare succeeding generations for the overpowering majesty of Messiah's salvation of Israel in the Last Days.

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## 28. The destroyer destroyed

Everyone in Jerusalem knew that it had been a night of terror. The voice of the Lord had made the sinners in Zion afraid. The faithful and unfaithful alike among God's people marvelled that that night of frightfulness had left them virtually unscathed. But when dawn came over the mount of Olives the sight that was revealed to the eyes of the besieged was too astonishing to believe. All the various sections of the extensive camp of the Assyrians presented a scene of indescribable chaos. Tents, supply carts, cavalry..., elaborately prepared siege-works were all thrown about in a state of disorder, devastation and destruction such as no-one could have imagined the night before. Most amazing of all was the almost complete absence of life amidst all that wreck and ruin of the panoply of war. "They were all dead! Corpses!" Here was the might of Assyria, together with all the picked mercenaries, who had been brought in to make war against the God of Israel and against His holy city, now reduced to the stillness of death — everywhere jumbled corpses, piles of slain. There were clear signs of how these men of might had vainly sought to burrow into crannies in the rocks and into fox-holes frantically dug out in pockets of soil, for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty.

The siege was over. The invasion itself was at an end. For, when word reached the great Sennacherib and the other mighty force with which he was determined to reduce the fortress of Libnah, the fear of Jehovah so stamped itself upon his brutal soul as to reduce him to the feebleness of a woman. He bethought him of the reviling and blaspheming which he had dictated to his scribe, to be sent imperiously to "Hezekiah the Jew." And now, how long before the stroke of Jehovah fell again and he lost the rest of his invincible force, aye, and maybe his own life also?

### Salvaging the mighty gods of Assyria

So without any delay, orders went throughout the camp there for immediate abandonment of the campaign. Instead, a return to Nineveh, as fast as possible, before worse befell. Especially let there be reverent care in transporting away from this cursed land the images of the gods which were set up in the camp. Somehow they must be saved from the wrath of this God of Israel whom nobody had ever seen.

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Yet all this well-intentioned devotion came to nothing. Those loaded ox-carts made no progress. Those patient mindless beasts strained in vain at their yokes. Drivers wielded long whips and hurled frantic curses. The chaos and confusion of this sudden retreat was a misery to everybody: and it was made worse by the constant unexpected attacks of Israeli guerrillas.

"Bel bows down, Nebo stoops low; their idols are borne by beasts of burden.  
The images that are carried about are burdensome,  
a burden for the weary,  
They stoop and bow down together;  
unable to rescue the burden,  
they themselves go off into captivity" (Is. 46:1,2 NIV).

Joel has a vivid picture of two Assyrian armies getting lost in the wilder parts of the country, in their desperate efforts to get as far away from Jerusalem as possible:

"I will remove far from you the northern army, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the east sea (the Dead Sea) and his hinder part toward the utmost sea (the Mediterranean)" (Jl. 2:20).

"At the noise of the tumult the people fled: at the lifting up of thyself the nations were scattered" (Is. 33:3).

### Too good to believe!

It was almost impossible to salvage anything — men or materials, or gods! — from the wreck and collapse of a proud invasion.

"Thine heart shall meditate terror" —

it is a picture of bewildered men of Jerusalem trying to grasp this impossible truth, that their irresistible Assyrian tyrants were now reduced to helpless terror and the feebleness of women.

"Where is the scribe (making careful lists of plunder taken)? Where is the receiver (of tribute abjectly paid)? Where is he that counted the towers (the organizer of the siege works for battering or scaling the walls of Jerusalem)? Thou shalt not see a fierce people (any longer), a people of a deeper speech than thou canst perceive..." (Is. 33:18,19).

All this is swept away into a havoc of overthrow and extinction.

"Thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee" (49:17).

How briefly and eloquently does Isaiah's record describe Sennacherib cutting his losses and clearing out of Judah:

"So Sennacherib king of Assyria *departed*, and *went*, and *returned*, and dwelt at Nineveh" (37:37) —

that is, he stayed away from Judah, and made no further attempt to add that country to his dominions.

### Massive plunder

Meantime, once the men of Jerusalem had recovered from the shock of beholding the Assyrian camp, now a shambles of ruin and death, it was realised with eagerness and glee that here was a unique opportunity for plundering the plunderer:

"When thou (Assyria) shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled." "Your plunder, O nations, is harvested as by young locusts; like a swarm of locusts men pounce on it"

(33:1,4 NIV).

How graphically this figure of locusts describes the swarm of "beachcombers" streaming forth from Jerusalem to salvage everything of use left by the receding Assyrian tide. Weapons, clothing, food, tents — and especially the plunder that had already been gathered from far and wide by these insatiable predators. The initial chaos was made yet more chaotic as the eager search for anything of value went on. Even the weak and disabled joined in the exhilaration of it all:

"Then is the prey of a great spoil divided, the lame take the prey" (33:23).

It is a lovely allusion to how, long centuries before "the lame and the blind" had been used to add mockery to the frustration of David's men besieging Jebus (2 Sam. 5:6). Now the lame of the city gloated over the discomfiture of their besiegers. And the finest items out of all that plunder were dedicated to the glory of the God who had wrought this fantastic deliverance:

"I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth" (Mic. 4:13).

### **A threat of pestilence**

But this sweeping destruction also created a serious problem. The piles of carcasses scattered in the valleys round Jerusalem made a gargantuan feast for all the scavenger birds in the country. Ghoulish vultures in their scores shared fellowship in a gorgeous fraternal gathering. Yet even though they gave thanks to their Creator for His beneficent satisfying of their appetites, and happily ate till they could eat no longer, the stench of decay intensified and hung heavy on the air all round and within the city. It almost seemed inevitable that God would now destroy His saved people by pestilence.:

"And they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me" (66:24).

"Their slain also shall be cast out, and their stink shall come up out of their carcasses" (34:3)

There was nothing else for it but to organize a rapid collection of these grisly human remains into one place — the valley of Hinnom — and burn them there until a final destruction of the destroyers had been achieved. Thus the Land was cleansed.

### **"How are the mighty fallen!"**

And what of Sennacherib himself, this puny mortal who had set himself so proudly against the God of Israel, with a confident resolve to wipe out the stain of that submission which had once been imposed on Nineveh by a paltry prophet?

With this set purpose he had become

"a ravenous bird from the east"

yet he was in truth

"the man that executed the counsel of Jehovah from a far country" (Is. 46:11).

Isaiah foretold that

"he shall pass over to his stronghold *for fear*, and his princes shall be afraid of the ensign" — the Lord's pillar of cloud and fire (31:9).

In his own land retribution came home to him, the mightiest man in that civilisation:

"And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer (Arad-melek and Nergal-shar-usur) his sons smote him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Armenia: and Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead" (Is. 37:38).

According to Esarhaddon's Nineveh prism this took place about twenty years after the debacle at Jerusalem. It may be wondered why the judgment which fell in such summary fashion on troops and officers spared Sennacherib, the real villain of the piece, for so long. Could the explanation be that for all his beastliness he had the good sense to recognize and humble himself before the authority of Jehovah, and for this was given a longer lease of life? But if so, in time he went back on this, resuming his devotion to the god whose futility had been so signally exposed in Judaea. So he died ignominiously in the very shadow of a useless deity. (For more on this, see "Hezekiah the Great", H.A.W., ch.17).

Slain in a crisis of revolution, with his capital a turmoil of warring factions, there was no possibility of dignified sepulture with pomp and circumstance. Instead this mighty monarch

"that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms: that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof...was cast out...like an abominable branch (LXX: corpse)...as a carcass trodden under feet."

Thus in due time, what Isaiah had foretold (14:16-19) concerning him duly came to pass. His carcass suffered a fate similar to that of his soldiery who died under the walls of Jerusalem.

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## 29. The No-gods

There was no part of the Assyrian war of words against the defenders of Jerusalem which did not include a vigorous tirade against dependence on the help of Jehovah. These diatribes came time and again.

### Vigorous propaganda

Here is a sample:

"Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, Jehovah will deliver us. Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? and have they delivered *Samaria* out of my hand? (Here was accurate information about the theological prostitution practised in the Northern Kingdom.) Who are they among all the gods of these lands, that have delivered their land out of my hand, that Jehovah should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?" (Is. 36:18-20).

Not only truth but also logic is a front-line casualty in war-time propaganda. This argument: Those gods were clearly no good. Therefore neither is Jehovah,' falls in the same class as the unbeliever's contention: They've looked for the Second Coming of Christ for generations, and he hasn't come yet. Therefore he never will.'

Here it comes again:

"Behold, thou (Hezekiah) hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by destroying them utterly; and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed, as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Telassar? Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah?" (Is. 37:11-13) —

And where were they? — impaled on stakes, poor fellows!

Yet, having dismissed Jehovah as of no more worth than the pantheon of pagan gods, Sennacherib was not averse to pulling in the Lord of hosts on his side:

"Am I now come up without Jehovah against this land to destroy it? Jehovah said unto me (yes, indeed, He had done so; 8:7; 10:5,6), Go up against this land, and destroy it" (36:10).

So this vainglorious dictator congratulated himself in advance:

"As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria, shall I not...so do to Jerusalem and her idols?"

### **Blunt riposte**

To this there could be only one answer:

"Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he said, By the strength of my hand I have done it" (10:10-13).

Long years before this the might of the angel of the Lord had struck against the pride of Egypt and "against all the gods of Egypt" (Ex. 12:12). Now at another Passover angelic retribution was stored up for a mightier oppressor:

"Hast thou (Sennacherib) not heard long ago, how I (the Lord) have done it? ... now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldst be to lay waste defenced cities into ruinous heaps. *Therefore* their inhabitants were of small power...Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, *therefore* will I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips (precisely as this arrogant conqueror had treated many of his victims)" (37:26-29).

Not only was *he* to face humiliation, but so also the gods of Nineveh about whom his emissary crowed before the walls of the holy city. The mighty overthrow which left the Assyrian camp a squalid desolation also brought humiliation to all the idols honoured there — they were left smashed or prostrate. Everything that had been so proudly said against the gods of the conquered peoples now came back in unexampled violence against these deities whose almighty power had been proclaimed with confidence and gloating.

### **The prophet's withering commonsense**

Forthwith Isaiah went into action with a campaign of blistering exposure of the inane futility of all idol worship. His classic passage (44:9-20) now paraphrased here, is unequalled in any theological polemic for its scorn and satire and sweet logic:

'These graven images, so handsomely decorated, are not even worth the materials they are made of. Made by *men*, how can they possibly be greater than men? See the metal-worker as he dedicates his labours to the fashioning of one of them. His muscles ache with the effort. In the heat of his furnace his throat is parched with thirst. He feels ready to drop. And he — mark you! — is the creator of a god. What sort of a god is this?'

Another craftsman starts on his six days of creation by chopping a tree down — a tree which a *man* planted and whose growth the rain of heaven nurtured and encouraged. Now that it is felled, it is too immense for his holy purpose. Much of it therefore becomes fuel to warm his house in the winter. Another portion becomes firing under his oven to bake his family's bread and to roast their joint of meat. And now — the great climax! — there is yet sufficient of it left for the fashioning of an idol with skill and pious patience. Thus at last he has before him the almighty controller of his destiny, and in deep devotion and humble service he prostrates himself before it' (Is. 44:9-20).

### **Priest-ridden Sennacherib**

Behold, then, this Sennacherib, the mighty monarch of the most powerful empire the world had yet known, behaving in this bird-witted fashion, cozening himself into pious reverence of a block of wood or stone. Back in his own land, having rushed awe-struck away from the chaos and carnage of a battle-field where no battle was fought, he still fails to learn the lesson which, with jeers and crudity, he has but lately hurled at those whose lands he has trampled. There, with what becoming obeisance does he prostrate himself in the incense-laden atmosphere of Ashur's holy sanctuary whilst crafty priests, unscrupulous and feigning, congratulate themselves on their own manipulation of the reins of power. Not Sennacherib, not Ashur, but themselves are the true lords of all! — except for what happens a thousand miles away in a paltry province called Judaea.

There it is possible to imagine Isaiah, back home from a moving service of thanksgiving to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, now contemplating the shattered remains of Assyrian idols, brought to his door by scavenging schoolboys. Would he not laugh his head off, the while thanking Jehovah that he had not been born into such idiocy as these pagans practised:

"They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, and hire a goldsmith; and *he* maketh it a god: they fall down, yea, they worship. They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place he shall not remove (this mighty deity!): yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble" (46:6,7).

### **The God of Israel**

What a contrast with the God who makes the clouds his chariot and who walks on the wings of the wind, whose voice is heard in the storm, whose lightning stroke slays in an instant, whose messenger operates in a vast pillar of cloud and fire.

"To whom will ye liken (such a) God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?" (40:18).

Let all men know

"from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things" (45:6,7).

And Isaiah not only circulated such Scriptures as these, he also composed psalms on the same theme, and Hezekiah gladly saw to it that they were incorporated in the temple service (Ps. 96:3-5; 97:7-9; 115:4-8).

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### 30. Rejoicing and Thanksgiving

Naturally, when daylight came flooding in over the mount of Olives after that night of destruction in the Assyrian camp, it was the watchmen of the city who first became aware of the effects of that divine cataclysm:

"Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall return to Zion."

That familiar phrase "eye to eye" implies the curing of blindness, as when Jesus came the second time to the blind man in Jerusalem; now he was seen in person, and worshipped. In the primary reference of these words, there was all at once a ready acknowledgement of the might and saving power of their God:

"Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem (i.e. the outlying suburbs made desolate by the invader): for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath *redeemed* Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations (who aided the Assyrian onslaught; see ch.21); and all the ends of the Land shall see the salvation of our God" (52:8-10).

With unflagging enthusiasm Isaiah constantly returned to this happy theme:

"Behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy...The voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying" (65:18,19).

The prophet was, of course, using the recent glad redemption of the Holy City to foreshadow the loveliness of the salvation Messiah will one day bring to Jerusalem. It will come with the same suddenness, and with as terrifying a destruction. An end to misery and hopelessness; instead, irrepressible delight.

"Sing, O heavens (the angels, redeeming God's people with another great Passover judgment), and be joyful, O Land: and break forth into singing, O mountains (of Israel): for the Lord hath comforted his (hopeless) people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted" (49:13).

A very similar passage (44:23) ends with:

"For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and hath glorified himself in Israel" (cp. also 25:6,9; 55:12).

In Isaiah's day these words had a very real meaning in the startling experience of a stricken people.

Yet another passage of intense rejoicing ends with these words:

"...and the hand of the Lord shall be known toward his servants, and *his indignation toward his enemies*" (66:10,14).

Here is the prophet declaring: Our God has done this in our time, and one day when Messiah comes, He will repeat this scenario with even greater majesty.

Familiar words of an Isaiah psalm take on a new and heartening meaning when read against this background of sensational events:

"Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, *because* of thy *judgments*. Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof (cp. 'where is he that counted the towers?' — spoken derisively against the Assyrian inspection of Jerusalem's defences). Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces (all of them under divine protection — as experience had just proved); that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God (who has so delivered us) is our God for

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ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death (an allusion to the specified extension of Hezekiah's life: 15 years)" (Ps. 48:11-14).

### A great national celebration

The relief and gladness of the people of Jerusalem at their deliverance, and the startling nature of it, expressed itself in a heartfelt Te Deum. With such a king as Hezekiah leading the nation, it could hardly be otherwise. The king had his own personal thanksgiving to make for the astonishing recovery granted him from an incurable disease:

"The Lord was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of *our* life in the house of the Lord" (Is. 38:20).

The plural pronoun there neatly indicates a national celebration. Psalm 71:14-17, 21-24 is a splendid, but not isolated, example of how the king's gratitude was expressed.

But the national redemption called forth yet more copious expressions of praise from a people brought back from the jaws of death. In "Hezekiah the Great", p.82, it has been stated that such a formal large-scale act of thanksgiving is not actually recorded in Holy Scripture, but can safely be presumed. This is an error, as this quote from what is undeniably a Hezekiah psalm demonstrates:

"What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay *my* vows unto the Lord now *in the presence of all his people*. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Ps. 116:12-15).

So the king, whilst yet stricken and his city beleaguered, had not only prayed for help but had also made vows by which to acknowledge it. These vows, of sacrifices and gifts to the temple, were to be paid before a great assembly of "saints", the holy people.

### Familiar Scriptures more vivid than ever

Psalm 118, another Hezekiah psalm, has the same theme:

"Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord: this gate of the Lord into which the righteous (plural!) shall enter. I will praise thee, for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the head of the corner" (118:19-22).

The attention of readers is commended specially to Psalms 149,150 as expressions of the nation's devotion and thankfulness for a seemingly impossible deliverance from captivity, oppression, and probable genocide. Psalm 47, with the same context, has the praise of God five times in two verses (v.6,7).

It is a mystery how Isaiah's delightful psalm (in ch.12) failed to gain acceptance in the complete psalter compiled by Hezekiah's men. Every detail in it is appropriate to the marvel of Jerusalem's escape from death:

"...thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song: he also is become my salvation (allusion to Siloam and the deep well at Gihon, both inside the walls of the besieged city)...Sing unto the Lord, for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth (see 2 Chr. 32:23). Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee."

The lovely words of Isaiah 25 had their primary reference to this national gladness:

"It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him...we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (25:9).

and no wonder, for —

"Thou hast been...a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat (cp. the pillar of *cloud* and *fire* at the deliverance of Israel at the first Passover; Ex. 14:19,20), when the blast of the terrible ones (the dreaded Assyrians) is as a storm against the wall (of the city?)"

and next morning the people saw how the majesty of their God had

'swallowed up death in victory, and wiped away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people (so crudely spoken by Rabshakeh) he had taken away from off all the Land.' —

So of course they were glad, rejoicing in His salvation. And the song they sang in the land of Judah was this:

"We have a strong city: salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks (26:1).

No other wall, no other defences were needed. They had God as their strong salvation. So, for a time at any rate, their praise of Jehovah was loud and heartfelt.

## 31. Gentile friendship

When Hezekiah was quite a youngster and only lately appointed to rule with his disreputable father, the prophet Isaiah looked forward to what he had been guided to anticipate — that when the new king came to the fulness of his powers, one very impressive outcome of his devotion to the Lord would be the diffusion of his godly influence among many neighbouring Gentile countries.

Those early expectations were strongly shot through with warm enthusiastic Messianic language (e.g. 2:1-4; 11:10; 14:1; 16:1,4), but there can be little doubt that the picture being presented was made all the more real and alluring by having the unexpected climax of Hezekiah's reign as its foundation.

### The Babylon blunders

For most readers the most familiar instance of this growing Gentile friendship for a country and people existing in near-isolation among the more powerful neighbours ringing it round, is the inglorious story of the deputation which came to Jerusalem from Merodach-baladan of Babylon. This restless ambitious fellow, an ancestor of Nebuchadnezzar, was almost the only king in that area, besides Hezekiah, who had refused to knuckle under to Assyrian might. After the wholesale slaughter of those invaders outside Jerusalem, it needed no very considerable political acumen to realise that a strong alliance between Babylon and Judaea should be able to hold Assyrian pride and expansion in check. The entire episode, with all its trappings of political manoeuvre and chicanery, was a faithless blot on Hezekiah's reign; yet (as has been shown in "Hezekiah the Great", ch.20) he was a better man for the experience. Thanks to Isaiah's unpalatable and austere rebuke he came out of it both wiser and greater:

"He feared the Lord, and besought the Lord, and the Lord repented him of the evil he had pronounced against them" (Jer. 26:19);

in token of which Micah followed on his denunciation of judgment (3:12) with a repetition and expansion of one of Isaiah's most delectable promises of the Messianic kingdom (4:1-4).

### A different kind of friendship

That kind of experience did Hezekiah a lot of good. It taught him how better to react to the rising tide of Gentile eagerness to be friends with such a king who was apparently able to brush off the very worst impact of tough Assyrian aggression. Obsequious deputations appeared one after another in the court at Jerusalem, and lavish gifts accumulated there, to the astonishment of the king and the great delight of his entourage:

"The Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory" (Is. 62:2).

"Nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God" i.e. because of His mighty acts (55:5).

"Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers (an allusion here to the expected birth of an heir to the throne?): they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth" (49:23).

All Hezekiah's better instincts came to the fore once again, and he made the most of the unique opportunities thus presented to him and his people to bear witness to these ignorant Gentiles concerning the might and power and faithfulness of the God of Israel:

"*Thy way...known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations...God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear him*" (Ps. 67:2,7).

"Say among the Gentiles that the Lord reigneth...he shall judge the people righteously" (Ps. 96:10).

"Let all that be round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared. He shall cut off the spirit of princes: he is terrible to the kings of the earth" (Ps. 76:11,12).

These quotations are all from Hezekiah psalms.

One prophecy after another mentions by name the kings and nations who now sought the favour of Jehovah. In the time of the Assyrian invasion, hoping that a hastily patched-up treaty of friendship with Sennacherib and a substantial addition to his army besieging Jerusalem would save them from the havoc of war in their own territories, not a few of them were the very states that had turned against Judah. But now the wheel had gone full circle:

"(Tyre's) merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the Lord...for them that dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently, and for stately clothing" (Is. 23:18 RVm).

### Learning about the God of Israel

Evidently Tyre had obsequiously asked that it might have the honour of supplying out of its mercantile prosperity a steady tribute of food and fine priestly garments for those who ministered in the temple to Hezekiah's God.

"The isles shall wait for his law...I will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles...the villages that Kedar doth inhabit, the inhabitants of the rock (Petra in Edom)...let them give glory unto the Lord, and declare his praise in the islands" (Is. 42:4,6,11,12).

"The labour of Egypt, and the merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans... shall come over unto thee...and they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee" (45:14).

What a contrast here with the earlier phase when in desperation the princes of Judah sent into Egypt long caravans loaded with the finest of gifts in the hope that Pharaoh might be persuaded to come to the rescue of Jerusalem (see ch. 14!) Now a defeated Pharaoh, trembling but lately at the prospect of inevitable Assyrian invasion, was happy to send yet more munificent gifts to his very good friend who had somehow saved the situation and sent

the invaders scurrying homeward. "I will also give thee (Hezekiah) for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth...Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship because of the Lord that is faithful (i.e. he keeps his promises), even the Holy One of Israel" (49:6,7).

### Helping the refugees

Refugees who had scattered from Judah in all directions in a frantic effort to escape horror indescribable were now being freely offered every possible facility to return in comfort and assurance to their Judaeen homes:

"I will lift up my hand to the Gentiles...and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders" (49:22);

what a lovely figure of speech!

But, out of all the richness that is in Isaiah, no prophecy can compare with chapter 60 in its vivid pre-Messianic picture of Messianic glory:

"The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising (the appearance of the Shekinah Glory when the hostile camp was brought to desolation; ch.27)...the forces (i.e. resources) of the Gentiles shall come unto thee...the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense, and shall show forth the praises of the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar."

So not only Tyre but also various eastern peoples discerned that the best way to cultivate friendship with Hezekiah was to honour the God he worshipped.

Accordingly:

"The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee...and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (60:3,5-7,13,14).

Among the presents brought to Jerusalem were gifts of slaves, men chosen for their handsome appearance and dignified bearing. The God of Israel was to be honoured by having men of such fine physique to be His hewers of wood and drawers of water:

"The sons of the stranger that join themselves to the Lord...even them will I...make joyful in my house of prayer...for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people" (56:6,7).

A wonderful foreshadowing of a yet more profound truth! More than this, the noble purpose for which God called Israel to be His peculiar people (Ex. 19:5,6) — that they might be a missionary nation, taking to benighted Gentiles the burning message of a covenant-keeping Jehovah — now had a stirring fulfilment (*at last!*) whilst faithful Hezekiah's fifteen years ran their opportunist course:

"I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory...And I will send those that escape of them (of Israel) unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud...to Tubal, and Javan, and to the isles afar off...and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles" (66:18,19).

In this often-repeated emphasis on the superb God-given evangelistic opportunities ensuing from the sensational military cataclysm controlled by the destroying angel of the Lord, many diverse nations are mentioned as responding to a unique encouragement to learn divine truth, there is one highly significant omission —

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Babylon!

Merodach-baladan's emissaries may have gone home congratulating themselves on a highly successful diplomatic mission. But in point of fact the Jerusalem treaty might just as well never have been signed.

Hezekiah had learned his lesson!

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## 32. Jubilee

Hezekiah, promised the healing of his leprosy, sought and got a sign concerning it. This sign, the shift of the shadow on the sun-dial, he personally witnessed before ever there was any healing at all. It was God's guarantee that on the third day he would go up to the house of the Lord.

### Another special sign

Not long after this, worried by the intensification of the Assyrian threats, he went into the house of his God again, seeking reassurance, and got that as well — in the form of an emphatic promise that he and his people would enjoy the Year of Jubilee which was due to begin in six month's time;

"And this shall be a sign unto thee, ye shall eat this year such as groweth of itself; and the second year that which springeth of the same: and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit thereof" (Is. 37:30).

On the face of it, it was impossible that the people, going back to their ravaged farms and homes would be able to survive through two full years, especially since they were already near to starving. But, as will be seen by and by, with the good hand of their God upon them it became easily, lavishly, possible to celebrate this Year of God's Grace in a way that had not been known since the time of David. There is, however, a problem: How could the experience of a Year of Jubilee be a sign that their enemy would be humiliated and swept out of their shattered land, for clearly the Jubilee must come *after* the destruction of the Assyrians, and not before it?

The explanation lies in the two-fold usage of the word "sign" (*'oth*). certainly in not a few places it signifies a sign or a guarantee of what is about to follow: e.g. the unique behaviour of the shadow on the sun-dial (38:22); and so also the sign of a virgin bearing a son called Immanuel (7:14). But also this word *'oth* was used of a celebration or commemoration: the sabbath was a recurring token of the fact long before established that Israel are God's special people (Ex. 31:13; Ez. 20:12); and so also circumcision, administered to each successive generation: "It shall be a token of the covenant between me and you," God had said to Abraham (Gen. 17:11).

Thus Isaiah's reassuring message to Hezekiah really meant that the great deliverance from present hopelessness was to be regularly commemorated by the people each forty-ninth year thereafter. In point of fact Israel's faithlessness guaranteed that the Jubilee would *not* be so observed in gratitude to the God who had rescued their fathers in Hezekiah's time. However this was the intention, and was so expressed by Isaiah:

"Instead of the thorn (growing profusely in an uncultivated war-torn land) shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off" (55:13).

### **Jubilee rejoicing**

There are several allusions to this double year of rest from toil on the land:

"Her iniquity is pardoned, for (in proof of this) she hath received of the Lord's hand double (double grace, double forgiveness) for all her sins" (40:2).

Hence also the repetition:

"Comfort ye, comfort ye."

A later chapter has copious allusions to the lovely features of God's care and generosity in this celebration:

"For your shame (i.e. the shame you have endured), ye shall have double (blessing)...therefore in their land they shall possess the double (of Jubilee): everlasting joy shall be unto them" (61:7).

The context develops in matchless language a sequence of heart-warming promises of how this Jubilee with its unique features is to foreshadow the graciousness and gladness of the Messianic age:

"...to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound (this is the return of the immense numbers of captives taken off into Assyrian bondage), to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Jubilee, God's special year), and the day of vengeance of our God (in the summary obliteration of an invading army); to comfort (as in 40:1) all that mourn...beauty for ashes (the Glory of the Lord instead of burnt-out villages), the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (time in this glad year of leisure to rejoice before the Lord, instead of mourning helplessly over the havoc and desolation brought by war); that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified (everything that grew in this lush year grew "of itself" because of a fecundity imparted by the smile of God) (61:1-3).

### **The work gets done**

There was, apparently, a special divine dispensation in the field of husbandry to make use of imported labour, either the willing help of neighbouring peoples or the less willing labour of prisoners taken in punitive expeditions (see ch.36):

"Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your ploughmen and your vinedressers"

This left the menfolk of Israel free to re-habilitate their families and to restore their shattered homesteads:

"They shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations" (that is, the sad ruins that seemed past all restoring) (61:5,4).

### **Copious rains, unexampled fertility**

God did not work his deliverance by halves. In a couple of matchless years the entire country was brought back to its normal fruitfulness, prosperity, and order.

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And the amazed people saw it all, from start to finish as a palpable act of God. "Hallelujah" was on the lips of everybody, from Hezekiah the Great to the humblest peasant.

One awestruck passage after another tells how God "opened the windows of heaven and poured out a blessing".

"I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia tree, and the myrtle, and the wild olive: I will set in the desert the fir tree and the plane tree and the cypress together: that they may see and *know* and *consider* and *understand* together, that *the hand of the Lord* hath done this" (41:18-20).

The Lord God was planting another garden eastward in another Eden,

"that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified" (61:3)

There is both literality and beautiful spiritual symbolism here.

Evidently their God took care to send copious and frequent rains, and these combining with the warm sunshine and the natural fertility of the soil caused self-sown trees and plants to burgeon forth with a vigour that had never before been experienced.

Even before these phenomenal seasons began, Isaiah interpreted his own Jubilee prophecy with an unsurpassed richness of language:

"Then shall he give the rain of thy seed, that thou shalt sow the ground withal, and bread of the increase of the earth, and it shall be fat and plenteous: in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures. The oxen likewise and the young asses that ear (i.e. plough) the ground shall eat clean provender...And there shall be rivers and streams of waters in the day of the great slaughter (of the Assyrians), when the towers fall (those intended for the attack on Jerusalem)" (30:23-25).

Judging by the caustic diatribes of strong disapproval interspersed with Isaiah's lyrics of gladness and paeans of praise, it is surely to be doubted whether the nation deserved this marvel of redemption and such an overflowing wealth of added blessings. Nevertheless the windows of heaven were opened wide — for the sake of the faithful remnant, nurtured by Isaiah and his fellow-prophets, and specially for the sake of Hezekiah, their Messianic king of such unconquerable faith and fervent religious zeal.

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## 33. The Return of the Captives

This is one of the most important chapters in this book. It aims at developing in detail (though not as fully and completely as it might), the prophetic pictures of a sensational restoration of the great multitude of prisoners who, according to the Taylor Prism, had been marched away to bondage in the land of the enemy.

### The Jubilee commandment

The second impressive sign appointed for Hezekiah was a great Year of Jubilee at the time of the Assyrian defeat. Once the power of this is appreciated, it is easy to see that a further blessing — the release of the prisoners — would be necessary, for from ancient times God had appointed that this must be an integral part of Jubilee observance and practice:

"Ye shall proclaim liberty throughout all the land...ye shall return every man unto his possession" (Lev. 25:10).

This was re-enunciated for Hezekiah's encouragement when he was promised a Jubilee as a special token of God's salvation from the Assyrian locusts. Isaiah 37:30 specifies the Jubilee as an added gift of grace, and the next verse continues:

"And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward" (37:31).

This promise of the deliverance of the oppressed was a recurring element in Isaiah's prophecies even before the Assyrian invasion began:

"In that time shall the present be brought unto the Lord of hosts of a people scattered and peeled...a nation meted out and trodden under foot...to the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, the mount Zion" (18:7).

In this context it is the return of refugees from Egypt that is being foretold. But in a *great many* places it is the freeing of those already in captivity about which the prophet's anticipation specially rejoices:

"He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit...The Lord shall beat off (his fruit) from the channel of the River (Euphrates) unto the stream of Egypt, and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel...A great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem" (27:6,12,13).

"And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads" (35:10).

### "Deutero-Isaiah"

However, it is in what is often called "Second-Isaiah" where descriptions of this astonishing restoration to farm and homestead abound. Indeed it is the copious detail of these "return" passages which has, rather perversely, become the main evidence (sic!) for the critical conclusion that Isaiah 40-66 should be dated in the time of Ezra-Nehemiah, or even later. This is a point of view bristling with difficulties which the modernist either ignores or else surmounts by a vigorous exercise of imagination.

On the other hand, when these disputed chapters (40-66) are received as authentic Isaiah and are studied against the background of the unique events of Hezekiah's reign a multitude of otherwise obscure details become luminous and the entire prophetic picture is then immensely satisfying. More on this in later chapters. The fact is that even if a determined attempt is made to pin Isaiah 40-66 on to a post-Babylonian-exile scenario, the discordances are so numerous and so sharp as to make the whole process an exercise in obscurity.

Let these eloquent restoration passages (which occur also in Hosea, Amos, Micah and the Psalms) be read as descriptions of the joy of the captives tasting Jubilee freedom and home-coming, and there is virtually no difficulty — except perhaps in the occasional overflow into an understandable enthusiasm for seeing this almost unbelievable experience as an inspiring (and inspired) foreshadowing of a yet greater Messianic deliverance.

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### Historical fact and Messianic foreshadowing

The greatest and most sustained description is to be found in Isaiah 49:

"Thou shalt say to the prisoners Go forth...They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the heat nor sun smite them; for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them (see ch.32 on this). And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted...Thy children shall make haste (to come home): thy destroyers, and they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee (Assyrians and their allies slinking away from Jerusalem). Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together...The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell (such an unexpected and copious influx that re-settling becomes a major problem). Thou shalt say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate...Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered, for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children" (49:9-11,17-18,20-21,25).

These verses are only extracts from a long and eloquent chapter. It is specially noteworthy here, and in the other passages to be quoted, that against all expectation the return described is in prosperity and exuberant joy — a very different picture from that of uphill struggle and contention such as Ezra and his fellows encountered.

"I have called thee (Hezekiah)...and I will give thee for a covenant of the people...to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house" (42:6,7).

"Fear not, for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west: I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back; bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth: everyone that is called by my name" (43:5-7).

It is futile to attempt to apply these words to the end of the later Exile; but as a picture of returning captives and scattered refugees now saved for the sake of good king Hezekiah, it answers splendidly — and also provides a moving anticipation of the final re-gathering of scattered Israel in the day of Messiah's glory.

### Shear-jashub

The allusion to "my sons...my daughters" may have been specially heartfelt, for it has been suggested that Isaiah's own son Shear-jashub (= a remnant shall return) was surely prominent among those taken off into captivity. Certainly this would add special point to the prophecy centred in him (7:3).

Again, the often-encountered exposition of Isaiah 44,45 with reference to Cyrus bristles with incongruity and unanswered problems (see ch. 44(3)), but when applied to this Jubilee restoration, all runs smoothly:

"I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and will cut in sunder the bars of iron...He shall let go my captives, not for price, nor for reward" (44:2,13).

Micah has a very useful specific prophecy about the wholesale Sennacherib captivity (note 5:5,6):

"O daughter of Zion, now thou shalt go forth out of the city, and thou shalt go even unto Babylon" (4:10).

It is known that at this time the Assyrians had compelled a mass migration of people from recently-conquered Babylon to replace populations already transplanted from Northern Israel

and other conquered countries (2 Kgs. 1 7:24). Those 200,000 Judaeen captives Sennacherib boasted about were now "topping up" a depleted Babylon. Micah continues:

"There shalt thou be delivered; there the Lord shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies" (4:10).

Isaiah confirms all this:

"Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans...say ye, The Lord hath redeemed (a Jubilee word) his servant Jacob (how appropriate is this phrase for slave Israelites a long way from home; Gen. 31:38-41)" (48:20).

Another specially eloquent prophecy of this unlooked-for salvation comes in Isaiah 52:

"Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord."

Shear-jashub would be a priest, like his father, and on that account may have been entrusted with the care of some of the holy vessels which had been handed over to Sennacherib's minions (2 Kgs. 18:15).

"For (the prophecy continues) ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight; for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rearward" (52:11,12).

### "Resurrection"

It was like the resurrection of a people dead and buried. Isaiah and Hosea used the figure, doubtless, because of its splendid appropriateness also, (in an even more vigorous sense), to the days of Messiah.

"Thou hast increased the nation...thou hadst removed it far unto all the ends of the earth...Thy dead men (these captives, "buried" in Babylon) shall live, together with my dead body (Shear-jashub?) shall they arise. Awake, and sing, ye that dwell in dust...!" (26:15,19).

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave (buried alive in Babylon). I have afflicted, and I will make ... (hence Paul's Messianic use of these words; 1 Cor. 15:55). O Death (this is an apostrophe to the Assyrian captor), I will be thy plagues (the angelic stroke; Is. 37:36); O Grave, I will be thy destructions. Repentance shall be hid from mine eyes (no going back on this divine decision)" (Hos. 13:14).

In the quite exceptional development reviewed in this chapter there lies, very probably, the explanation of the strange fact that whereas the Assyrian army was almost wiped out at Jerusalem, Sennacherib himself, one of the most beastly destroyers in ancient history, went unscathed for something like twenty years. This release of the captives could only have been at his behest. Then was that decision a tacit acknowledgement of the superior might of Jehovah over all the idols of Nineveh?

N.B. Other passages on this theme: Isaiah 42:16; 45:20; 27:12,13 (a reference to the Jubilee trumpet); 57:1,14; 56:8; 60:4,9; Psalm 85:1; 107:2-7.

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## 34. Fruitfulness and Prosperity

"If ye shall say, what shall we eat in the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years..." (Lev. 25:20,21).

This promise of heavenly care eased considerably the strain which the prospect of two years without cultivation would put on the faith of every conscientious Israelite. Because of the nerve-shattering ravages of invasion, Hezekiah's Jubilee proved a special test of faith. Had not the callous depredations of Assyrian armies created a starvation crisis? How could the nation hope to survive?

Nevertheless, before ever the promise of God was revealed of Assyrian defeat and Jubilee rejoicing (37:29,30), Isaiah anticipated with an almost unnatural confidence that the impending Jubilee would provide abundantly for the needs of a people "scattered and peeled" by the invasion:

"Is it not yet a very little while (the prophet knew beforehand how long to the forty-ninth year), and Lebanon (the wild open country) shall be turned into a fruitful field" (29:17).

Thereafter, in one charming passage after another, Isaiah described the lush blessedness of the holy year:

"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing (i.e. this will be the reaction of the people living in the most arid areas)" (35:1,2).

### The blessing of Heaven

The simple explanation of this paradox would be for the Land to experience a year (or maybe two years) of exceptional rainfall — not the short excessive downpours which are fairly normal in Israel, but regular moderate rains approximating more closely to the British type of climate. These, along with the bounteous endowment of sunshine commonplace in Mediterranean areas, would be a sure guarantee of exceptional growth even in the absence of tillage and careful farming. This is the explanation of a most extraordinary fruitfulness, as supplied by the prophet himself in a remarkable sequence of passages:

"In the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water...grass with reeds and rushes" (Is. 35:6,7).

"Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass" (32:20).

This latter passage seems to imply that because of the terribly run-down state of the country there was a special divine relaxing of the normal Jubilee commandment against systematic tillage (Lev. 25:11).

One of Hezekiah's Songs of Degrees is perhaps more specific on this:

"He that goeth forth and weepeth (because his farm is now a wilderness of destruction), bearing precious seed (because hardly any is left after the recent tribulation), shall doubtless come again with rejoicing (at harvest-time), bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps. 126:6).

Amos also has an entrancing picture of these days of unexpected plenty; and he too implies a relaxation of Jubilee law to allow of a normal agricultural programme:

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed...and I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them, and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them" (Am. 9:13,14).

No wonder Amos used all this as a basis for a prophecy of the Messianic age.

### Lovely language — literal and symbolic

Against this background of an incredibly beneficent Jubilee, how eloquent do the prophet's figures of speech become:

"For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth...Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree" (55:10,11,13).

It was to be expected, of course, that in a countryside neglected as the Holy Land necessarily was because of invasion and the flight of the peasantry, thorns and briars would abound in heart-breaking profusion. Instead, the smile of the Lord encouraged the fast growth of self-sown firs and maples. No wonder, then, that they were

"called trees of righteousness, *the planting of the Lord*, that he might be glorified" (61:3).

"Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness...and let righteousness spring up together; / *the Lord have created it*" (45:8).

"Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever (no more Assyrian invasion), the branch of *my planting*, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified" (60:21).

### The Day of Atonement

Yet another "undesigned coincidence" arises from the fact that the beginning of the Year of Jubilee was to be proclaimed on the day of Atonement (Lev. 25:9). Isaiah 58 is a chapter with plenty of allusions to the day of Atonement; but it also has this Jubilee language:

"And the Lord shall...satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And they...shall build the old waste places (war's legacy of ruin)...and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in" (58:11,12).

When the Assyrians had been sent packing, there would be a fever of reconstruction. Fired houses and ruined farm buildings would need immediate attention. Understandably, this theme — the re-building of shattered homes and burnt cities — has plenty of emphasis. The greater leisure afforded by the second year of agricultural "holiday" allowed for restoration to normality in record time.

"...that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof...He shall build my city and he shall let go my captives, not for price, nor for reward, saith the Lord of hosts" (44:26; 45:13).

These passages are commonly but quite mistakenly applied to Cyrus in the post-exilic period — an exposition that should have been abandoned long ago; see later exposition of Is. 44,45).

Out of a copious catalogue of other Jubilee passages, the following might usefully be considered: Is. 25:6; Joel 2:19; 3:18; Mic. 4:4; Ps. 67:6; 81:16; 85:12 (a day of Atonement psalm); 96:12; 107:35-38; 133:2,3; 147:8,9 (nearly all of these are demonstrably psalms of Hezekiah's time).

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## 35. Queen Hephzibah

It can readily be inferred from 2 Kings 21:1 that Hezekiah's wife was called Hephzibah (= my delight is in her). The probable details about her have been put together in "Hezekiah the Great", ch. 19.

So far as can be discovered, she was a Tyrian princess. The marriage took place in the year of Jubilee, and two years later her son Manasseh was born. Since it was normal for kings of Judah to marry very early, it is somewhat surprising that Hezekiah's marriage should not take place until he was 39. There are two possible explanations of this unusual phenomenon.

It may be that betrothal took place a good while earlier but that the king's developing disease hindered the actual marriage. It could be that his queen, finding herself about to be given in marriage to a husband with such affliction, was loth to ratify their union by a formal marriage ceremony. In other words, without the necessary modern legalities she declared herself divorced. The marriage was at an end. Tyrian princesses were an imperious lot. So such an action would not be out of character. In Judaea this would be regarded as a divorce, for betrothal had all the binding force of a marriage (cp. Mt. 1:18,19).

Or, very differently, it may be that it was the king who insisted on divorcing her. For, in spite of the "auld alliance" between Tyre and Jerusalem, in the Assyrian war Tyre and Zidon came in on the side of the invader (Ps. 83:7; 48:7; Is. 23:8,9,11; and ). In such circumstances it would hardly be unnatural for a disgusted Hezekiah to send his Gentile wife away.

Already one vivid figure of speech after another in Isaiah has been shown to be rooted in actual happenings at the time he was prophesying; e.g. the waters of Siloam, all the features of the Jubilee were both factual *and also* figurative, the whirlwind, fire and storm at the wreck of the Assyrian camp, the disease of the king, Shear-jashub in captivity, and the remarkable post-war growth of Gentile friendship. Then what was it that led the prophet to use these words?:

"Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement? ... for your transgressions is your mother put away" (50:1).

It is surely not unlikely that some important divorce, known to all the nation, provoked the use of this figure.

Later on, Hezekiah's restoration to health and to his kingdom, and the sensational rout of the invincible Assyrian army doubtless made desirable a patching up of the friendship between Tyre and Judaea. Thus would take place a fresh and finer wedding ceremony, one which finds its way into Isaiah's prophecies in several places:

"He (the Lord) hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels" (61:10).

And the wedding itself became an acted parable of redemption,

"Thou shalt no more be termed *Forsaken*, neither shall thy land any more be termed *Desolate*, but thou shalt be called *Hephzi-bah*, and thy land *Beulah*: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married (to Him). For as a young man marieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee" (62:4,5).

Another Isaiah prophecy is much more specific:

"Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child; for more are the children of the desolate (Hephzibah the divorcee) than the children of the married wife (Hephzibah when at first queen in Jerusalem)...For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused" (54:1,6).

This is strange language to use, unless Isaiah had some strong contemporary reason for such a drastic figure of speech.

Hezekiah's willingness to resume the marriage was, of course, linked with his great eagerness to be assured of the continuation of the royal line without break until the promised Messiah should come (2 Sam. 7:12-16). Hence, then, the further promise:

"I will give thee the sure mercies of David" (55:3; Acts 13:34),

the fulfilment of the great Promise.

The king's psalm of thanksgiving on recovery from his sickness mentions the same element of anxiety, now set at rest:

"The father to the children shall make known thy truth" (38:19; see "Hezekiah the Great", ch. 12).

The Song of Degrees, Psalm 132:11,12, has the same emphasis:

One psalm after another has this happy anticipation of blessing in the royal family:

"He (the Lord) maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children" (Ps. 113:9).

"The Lord shall increase you more and more, you and your children" (Ps. 115:14).

So it may be safely inferred that Manasseh was only the first of a copious family.

Two Songs of Degrees develop this theme:

"Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows in the hand of a mighty man so are the children of thy youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them" (Ps. 127:3-5).

"Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table...Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Ps. 128:3,6; see "Songs of Degrees", Geo. Booker, for fuller details).

The Wedding Ode has a delightful allusion which helps to explain why the firstborn of this marriage was called Manasseh:

"Hearken, O daughter, and consider...*forget also thine own people*, and thy father's house" (Ps. 45:10).

Not only do these words look back to the Gentile bride described in Deuteronomy 21:13, but also Manasseh means "causing to forget". (For the same reason Joseph's wife Asenath was happy to have her firstborn named "Causing to forget thine own people").

The family has become a parable. This is specially true in a lengthy passage in Isaiah 66:

"Rejoice greatly with her (Jerusalem), all you who mourn over her.  
For you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts;

you will drink deeply  
and delight in her overflowing abundance ...  
you will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees.  
as a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you"  
(66:11-13 NIV).

But again it has to be emphasized that these prophecies about Hezekiah and Hephzibah, as all else that is written in Isaiah, have a wide-ranging Messianic meaning, which, necessarily, has been kept in the background in this book. But the student who would dare to assert that the Messianic reference is not there and was not intended, has wandered a long way from the essential truth of these Holy Scriptures.

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## 36. The State of the Nation

All was set fair, for a wonderful fifteen years at least. Judah had its best king for long generations. He had at his side a fine capable team of godly advisers. The wonders of a wonderful Year of Jubilee had lifted the nation out of the shambles of war, and had blessed them with an unbelievable era of prosperity coming in like a fast-flowing tide. All Judah's Gentile neighbours were disposed to be friendly, that is, except for the Edomites, ever determined to nurse a quarrelsome vengeful spirit. But a punitive expedition, designed to remind these implacable brethren that their treachery in the time of Sennacherib's invasion was not forgotten, had cowed them into good behaviour (see commentary on Is. 63:1-6).

Guiding his policies, Hezekiah had a team of half a dozen prophets of the Lord, any one of whom was fit to be a world figure. So the king could surely look with confidence for a new reformation, like his dramatic year of accession, only better. The old hangover from the sordid reign of disreputable Ahaz could be considered a thing of the past. A wonderful new order was now to rise up out of the ashes of their battered war-torn world.

### A New Creation

"Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy" (Is. 65:17,18).

Everybody knew that Isaiah meant these words to inspire the people concerning the golden glory of Messiah's reign. But everybody knew, as well, that Isaiah meant his fine poetic phrases to goad the people into a more intense dedication fit for Messiah's coming. And to make this the more evident, he talked in terms of the feverish and happy rehabilitation which was going on to bring in a "new heavens and earth" worthy of their good king — a healthy godly people, busy with their building and planting, and rejoicing in what was almost a Paradise restored.

"Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner (all this describes the end of the old disreputable order): but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished" (51:6).

This was the target — a new reformation that would sweep away all abuses and that would bring their good king's piety and godly zeal into every home in the land.

"I have put my words in thy mouth (Isaiah's or Hezekiah's mouth?) and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion (the temple and its devotees), Thou art my people" (51:16).

To achieve all this there must be exhortation of a very forthright but attractive character:

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (55:6,7).

"Where is the house that ye build unto me?...To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (66:1,2).

"And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken" (62:12).

To describe this fresh movement towards re-dedication amongst a thankful regenerated people, Isaiah constantly talked in terms of a New Creation:

"I am the Lord, that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself" (44:24).

"Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me. I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded" (45:11,12).

One example after another of this sort makes clear that all this is double-purpose language — not only emphasizing the might of Jehovah, the great Creator, but also setting out His present and future Purpose to fashion a New Creation out of men and women new-born in His family of the redeemed. Those who fail to read this phase of the prophet's message rob themselves of a great deal of its uplifting stimulation.

"Lift up your eyes to the heavens and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner (this is a vivid way of describing the passing of the old unspiritual order; cp. 50:9): but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished" (51:6). "Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last. Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together" (48:1 2,13; see also 45:18; Ps. 102:25-28 — a Hezekiah psalm).

### **A "Born-Again" Israel**

Those identifying themselves with this new holiness movement became a new and separate people whose devotion to Jehovah was well-marked by their devotion to the temple:

"Ye shall be named the priests of the Lord: men shall call you the ministers of our God" (61:6).

And this was the expression of their faith and devotion:

"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me...with the robe of righteousness..." (61:10).

"One shall say, I am the Lord's: and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand: The Lord's' (the phrasing is just like that found by archaeologists on contemporary items of property); and shall surname himself by the name of Israel" (44:5).

The student who concentrates on this aspect of Isaiah's message finds it vigorous, heady, exhilarating stuff.

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### The old nature also

But the quality of human nature, and especially of human nature in Israel, guaranteed also a national trend in a very different direction. It was ever thus. In the Bible story there are never sheep without goats. He calls His own sheep by name. But He has also curt words of reprobation for the rest of the flock, the wayward and the undisciplined.

And so it was in Hezekiah's post-war reformation. So Isaiah had not only to inspire and direct; he must also, in duty bound, castigate and censure the others — the thankless and self-centred, the irreligious and the apostate. There were plenty who went along with the new surge of religious spirit just because that was the thing to do. "Hypocrisy is the compliment that vice pays to virtue" — and in this generation there was no lack of either.

"Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel...which swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth nor in righteousness..." (48:1).

"I knew that thou wouldest deal very treacherously (as the Assyrians had done, making their empty promises; see ch. 13); thou wast called a transgressor from the womb" (48:8) —

this with allusion to the name of Jacob the grabber.

On the Day of Atonement especially, these went through the motions of repentance and devotion (as they do to this day), but it was all a matter of form and not at all of the inner spirit:

'Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet (blown on the Day of Atonement); shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways...they take delight in approaching to God" (58:1,2).

There is no stiffer irony to be found in Holy Scripture than this. The same chapter goes on to catalogue the shouting contrasts between the gross abuses they blithely tolerated and the spirit of the New Creation to which they were called. But it was effort wasted, for:

"Thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass" (48:4).

Isaiah could achieve little, for many of the religious leaders were on the wrong side:

"His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark: sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber...shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain" (56:10,11).

"Thy first father (Jacob) sinned, and thy teachers (today) have transgressed against me. Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary. " (43:27,28).

### A reformed nation in decay

Formality took over; the spirit was dead. Let Isaiah speak out never so bluntly (and in this he was reinforced even more vigorously by his contemporary, Micah the Morasthite), there was little heed given. It was as much as he could do to hold his faithful remnant together.

"O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river" (48:18).

But these, the formalists and the worldly, raised in defence a barrage of derision against the pietists. Isaiah himself was their special target:

"They make a man an offender for a word (because of the Word?), and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate" (29:21).

Idolatry became fashionable again. It was quite the done thing to attend the temple services and then go off to the high places for a religious kick of a different sort:

"I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts; a people that provoketh me to anger continually to my face, that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick" (65:2,3).

Nor did they stop at such perversions, but went off into religious abuses of an abominable kind (v.4). And yet they appropriated to themselves a religious aura rather like the king's new clothes:

"Stand by thyself, come not near to me, for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day" (65:5).

There was evidently a craze for gambling also — all done in the name of religion, with special devotion to the gods of Good Luck and Destiny (65:11 RV).

This social decay showed itself in a variety of other ways:

"Your iniquities have separated between you and your God...your hands are defiled with blood...your lips have spoken lies...None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth" (59:2-4).

This was only the beginning of a long diatribe. Micah joined in with equal vigour. But the forces of decay were too strong. Once again the nation was on the slippery slope.

"We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee; for thou hast hid thy face from us...because of our iniquities" (64:6,7).

These developments help to explain why the histories have so little to say about the second half of Hezekiah's reign. What might well have been a fine Messianic kingdom in embryo petered out in empty religion and increasing iniquity. And Hezekiah, Isaiah, Micah, Joel, Habakkuk, for all their reforming zeal, had little strength against the creeping decadence.

### **The end of two good men**

So Hezekiah died an unhappy man, hoping — but not too confidently — that in time his son would emulate his own honouring of Jehovah. But alas, Manasseh means Forgetting.

And Isaiah lived on into that evil time and was chased by the boy king's KGB. They sawed him in two (Heb. 11:37). And more recently their successors have sawed his message in two, but still it lives, and inspires.

And Hezekiah sleeps with his fathers. Yet he too lives on, and he too inspires.

IN MEMORIAM  
REGIS  
ET VATIS  
DUI HOMINES BONI  
DEO GRATIAS

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# **ISAIAH**

## **PART TWO**

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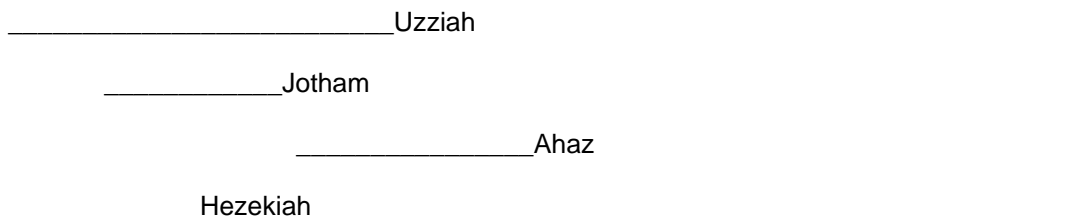
# ISAIAH

## Chapter 1

### 1:1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Very little is known about Isaiah the man. The rabbis say his father Amoz was brother to king Amaziah, but this is only a guess (those rabbis were great at making vague possibilities into certainties). It can be definitely inferred from 6:1 that Isaiah was a priest; he was also a statesman with ready access to the king and to the high priest (8:1). He lived in "the valley of vision" (the prophets' quarter), with a wife called "the prophetess" (8:3); this does not mean "Mrs. Prophet", but that she too prophesied. This fact may explain certain remarkable characteristics of "Second Isaiah" — but that is another story. Isaiah had two sons, Shear-jashub (7:3) and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:1). There is a Jewish tradition that in later years, pursued by Manasseh's men, Isaiah took refuge in a hollow tree. Whereupon the king had the tree sawn through, and the prophet as well. This seems to be confirmed by Hebrews 11:37. Modern critics have lent a hand, and have sawn Isaiah's prophecy in two. This exposition will shew little sympathy with such "Deutero-Isaiah" ideas.

The chronology of Isaiah's time is in chaos. Those who take the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah as strictly sequential make Isaiah's prophesying about 65 years. But Uzziah's immense reign (very much of it as a leper, 2 Chr. 26:3,21), and other hints, suggest regencies, something after this pattern:



If this is correct, those 65 years shrink to about 45.

It is not at all certain whether Isaiah's prophecies are in chronological order. Chapter 6 bears all the signs of being the prophet's initial commission, a fairly close parallel to Jeremiah 1 and Ezekiel 1,2; and Is. 2:1 follows on very suitably.

If this is accepted, then the pattern is probably, but not certainly, this:

- Ch. 6: Isaiah's initiation as a prophet
- 2-5: Uzziah-Jotham
- 7-14: Ahaz
- 15-17: Hezekiah

But what about chapter 1?

One suggestion is that it was written last of all; and this idea finds support in a number of verbal resemblances with the last group of chapters, e.g.:

- v.1a = 65:17
- v.4 (the Holy One of Israel) seems to demand that it be preceded by 6:3; all the other occurrences look back to that verse.
- v.6 seems to call for association with the leprosy allusions in ch. 53.
- v.11,13 = 66:3
- v.17 = 58:6,7
- v.18 = 55:7
- v.20 = 65:3; 66:17
- v.31 = 66:24

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Yet over against these considerations there is the picture of a Land devastated by war (v.7), with Jerusalem besieged but saved (v.8) and turned back to righteousness (v.26). All these details are apparently an anticipation of the bad and good times of Hezekiah's reign.

Then precisely where chapter 1 belongs is not easy to decide; ch. 15,16 (see note on 16:13) could well be an older prophecy deliberately included here by Isaiah. It is not possible to be sure about these conclusions.

Why no mention of Manasseh in ch. 1:1? Perhaps because persecution put an end to further prophesying as soon as Hezekiah died. But there is some reason to believe that even ch. 40-66 belong to the earliest part of Hezekiah's last 15 years. So Isaiah may have ceased prophesying 10 years or so before the great king's death.

He prophesied "concerning Judah and Jerusalem." But a quick survey reveals that not a few of his prophecies are about other nations — Babylon, Egypt, Moab, Syria, Tyre, Edom. It is all the same. These pronouncements, however Gentile they may appear to be in subject, are only spoken concerning the marked impact these nations made on Israel. Indeed, in such chapters as 13 and 17 it will be seen in due course that even the burden of Babylon or of Damascus is not so much about them, as about God's people.

There is one small problem here to which no really satisfactory answer appears to be forthcoming — that whereas this introductory verse says "Judah and Jerusalem", thereafter (e.g. in 3:1,8; 5:3) the names are reversed. The modernist says that this proves that 1:1 was a heading added by a later editor. Perhaps! But one could wish for a better explanation than that.

The entire set of prophecies is referred to as "the Vision of Isaiah...which he saw;" this is clear from 2 Chr. 32:32 where the historical chapters (36-39) are included in "the vision of Isaiah." Yet apart from the outstanding experience described in chapter 6 there are no visions of the kind seen by Daniel or Zechariah. It would seem possible that "vision" had come to be used to describe any prophetic communication, as in 13:1 or Obad. 1 or Hab. 2:3, where vision as such was not involved. The earlier word for "prophet" was "seer", but this fell into disuse, perhaps because it was taken over (and so became discredited) by clairvoyants (see 8:19). The more usual word for prophet: *navi'*, is possibly connected with a verb meaning "to touch", as signifying a man touched by the finger of God (6:7).

### **1:2a "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken".**

The precise point of this introductory apostrophe is not obvious. There are various possibilities:

- a. A figure for the rulers and people of Israel.
- b. The literal heavens and earth; e.g. Dt. 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; 32:1.
- c. A poetic figure for the Land of Israel and the Heaven which controls its destiny; e.g. Jer. 2:12; 6:19; 22:29; Ez. 36:4,6; Mic. 1; 2; 6:2.
- d. Angels and men, the powers of heaven and of the surrounding nations; Ps. 50:4.

There seems to be really little support for the first of these alternatives, made popular long ago by Daubuz.

Almost certainly the allusion in this verse is to Dt. 32:1, for Kay (Speaker's Comm.) supplies a list of no fewer than twenty-four verbal contacts between Dt. 32 and Is. 1. And the theme of Dt. 32 — Israel cast off, Gentiles accepted, then Israel restored — is the theme of Isaiah begun in this chapter.

**1:2b "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me."**

The Hebrew phrasing also means: I have made great and exalted children — a hint of the remarkable prosperity of Israel before Ahaz came to the throne. "Rebelled" (transgressed) sums up in a word how Jeshurun had waxed fat and kicked (Dt. 32:15).

Here is the Father of Israel complaining of his "stubborn and rebellious son" (Dt. 21:18), fit only to be stoned and hung on a tree. Remarkably, this example of God's indictment of His own son is the only application in all the Scriptures of this austere commandment. But in chapter 53 and in the New Testament, especially Gal. 3:13, it is God's sinless Son, the true Firstborn, who takes this curse upon himself.

What a contrast with Israel's beginnings at Sinai: "A kingdom of priests, and a holy nation...All that the Lord hath spoken will we do" (Ex. 19:6,8).

**1:3 "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."**

For the first, but by no means for the last time, Isaiah reveals himself as an animal lover; 11:6,7; 30:24; 46:1; 53:7; 65:25.

There is a telling contrast here. Instead of seeking God as a father (v.2: "children"), Israel cannot even rise to the level of the animals. Ox and ass recognize their master, on the sabbath as on other days (Lk. 13:15), but Israel did not acknowledge its Father, not even on the sabbath (v. 13).

These quiet humble creatures give service and obedience, as a lesson to Israel. And not these only, for in obedience to the control of the Creator "the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming" (Jer. 8:7); and so also did the vast variegation of creatures that came to Noah and his ark (Gen. 7:9). "But my people know not the judgment of the Lord."

Long after Isaiah, in an unexpected sense his appreciative words of ox and ass proved true, when the Son of God was laid in a manger (Lk. 2:7). And at that time also, God's people did not know, nor consider, although it was told them in a variety of ways.

Here at the outset is the startlingly true feature which Isaiah shares with all the other prophets (except perhaps Daniel) — that every separate section of the prophecy has relevance to the prophet's own time, but with a fuller and more important force it also ranges forward to the Messiah, either in his first or his later advent. This double aspect of these long chapters it is hoped to emphasize repeatedly as the study proceeds.

**1:4 "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward."**

The appeal to heavens and earth to take notice of the declension of a chosen people now becomes more detailed. The fourfold catalogue of condemnation is introduced by a sorrowful divine "Alas!" They are a nation, a people, a seed, sons who are sinful, a burden of iniquity, evildoers, corrupters.

Israel, designated at Sinai "a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6) are now (as indeed they had shown themselves whilst still at Sinai) "a sinful nation", a people bearing no burden of divine message to the world but instead a massive burden of their own sins — "a heavy burden too heavy for me" (Ps. 38:4) — which only their God can bear away: "the Lord God...bearing iniquity and transgression and sin" (Ex. 34:7). In later times, to those "weary and heavy laden" God's Son made the offer of an exchange. Taking their burden of sin on himself he substituted an easy yoke and a light burden of Christian service (Mt. 11:28).

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At this time, however, this "sanctified nation" shows itself to be "a seed of evil doers", that is, they really *are* evil, this is their normal characteristic (cp. 65:23; 57:4; Mt. 3:7). Israel are become in character like their strong and savage enemies (14:20), and like the Amorites whom they had displaced centuries before when *their* cup of iniquity was full (Gen. 15:16). Now let Israel prepare for a comparable overthrow, and for the same reason, now intensified.

Yet even now all was not lost. As in the time of Elijah two centuries earlier a faithful remnant of seven thousand had kept the nation in existence, so now "the holy seed shall be the substance thereof" (6:13), "a seed whom the Lord hath blessed" (61:9).

But such hopefulness was all that faith had to hold on to. Moses, despairing, had given due warning: "I know that after my death ye shall utterly *corrupt* yourselves" (Dt. 31:29). So they made haste to prove him a true prophet, and thus they so continued.

In ancient days men had evolved a similar pattern: "The earth was *corrupt* before God (that is, in its worship)", and for that reason the Creator resolved to "*destroy* all flesh" — in one form or another this word of pitiless reprobation comes five times (Gen. 6:11,1 2,13,17). And now in Isaiah's time God brought into being "the waster (s.w.) to destroy" (54:16).

And not only then, for when the Son of God came on the scene with authority far surpassing that of Isaiah, there was the same *corruption*, or worse, and the same *destruction*, indeed worse, became inevitable.

### 1:5a "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more:"

The opening phrase here is ambiguous. It may mean "Wherefore?", or (assuming ellipsis) "Upon what part?", as though the body of the nation were already completely covered with stripes and contusions divinely administered (v.5b,6). This masochist nation is a glutton for punishment — and also to this day, wilfully preferring the gruelling retribution meted out to wilfulness, in preference to a humble subjection to the will of God, with the blessing of His fellowship.

Why be "stricken any more"? From the sin of the golden calf (Ex. 32:7,8) the story was ever the same. Moses warned against the piling up of retribution: "I will punish you *seven times* more for your sins...I will bring *seven times* more plagues upon you according to your sins" (Lev. 26:18,21). Again and again judgment is to be multiplied against them, as many places in this strong chapter foretell. But the student needs to be warned against the often-repeated howler that judgment is promised for a period of 7 x 360 years. This is an outrageous blunder which should never have been made, for the simple reason that the word "times" is not in the Hebrew text. The repeated phrase (v. 18,21,24,28) simply means "sevenfold" (B.S. 4.08).

This expostulation by Isaiah was later to be matched by Ezekiel's: "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (18:31). But in Isaiah's day, as in Ezekiel's, the people took no notice. Revolt continued (31:6; 59:1 3). Things went from bad to worse.

In the times of Jesus, revolt against Rome was trivial compared with the revolt against God, so again they were stricken. "O that they were wise...that they would consider their latter end!" (Dt. 31:29).

Nor in the time of "their latter end" is the situation changed. Offered healing with the stripes of the stricken Messiah (53:4), they still specialize in self-justification and revolt against the God of their fathers.

Even those in Christ need to take notice of the warning here, for it is echoed in Rev. 22:18: "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book." There is no obvious resemblance to the English text of Isaiah 1:5, but the LXX text has an unmistakable similarity. The "revolt" then need not be directly against God in heaven but may achieve the same evil result by man-handling God's revelation.

**1:5b,6 "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it: but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment."**

Prosperous and mighty and egotistical Uzziah, king of Judah, was not content with the prosperity and the honours God had poured upon him. He would fain be a Melchizedek King-priest, as David had been (2 Sam. 6; Ps. 110). Yet when he took on him the right of a priest to burn incense before the Lord, divine indignation smote him with leprosy, so that he spent the rest of his days not in the holiness of the courts of the Lord but in a lazar house. As a result his son, Jotham and, for some years, his grandson Ahaz acted as regents (it is this fact, not accurately detailed in the record, which makes the chronology of this period such a headache).

The stricken leprous king became a token of the spiritual decay of the nation, specially when Ahaz came to the throne: "The whole head (2 Chr. 26:19) is sick, the whole heart faint." Almost every phrase in this gruesome description uses the Hebrew terminology of leprosy, as used elsewhere with reference to Job (2:7) and to Hezekiah (Is. 38:9; 53:4,5,6) and to David (Ps. 38:3,7; 41:3), all of whom were lepers at some time in their experience.

The call of Isaiah (ch.6) probably took place shortly before his proclamation, in this first chapter, of Israel's sin. The language of leprosy is employed there (6:5) also. But it remains an unsolved problem why that account of his dedication as a prophet should come where it does, and not before ch.1.

In later years, after Uzziah's long reign had come to an end, the leprosy of Hezekiah became Isaiah's figure for the nation's moral corruption; for this, see on ch.53 especially.

In this language of sickness and disease there is a special irony in that Hosea was to use the same figure in mockery about the entire kingdom:

"When Ephraim saw sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb (a nickname for Tiglath-pileser III?): yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound" (Hos. 5:13).

This attempt of the lamb to make friends with the lion ended in Ahaz's time with the ravaging of the northern kingdom and in the humiliation of Jerusalem — an Assyrian garrison in the temple court.

In those decadent days no heed was given to the prophet's heartfelt appeal:

"Come, and let us return to the Lord: for *he* hath torn, and *he* will heal us; *he* hath smitten, and *he* will bind us up" (Hos. 6:1). It was to need the godly lead of Hezekiah to turn this exhortation into practice (6:2).

How long would it be before God's people would come to recognize that very often sin

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supplies its own punishment?:

"They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices" (Prov. 1:30,31).

"Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backsliding shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter; that thou hast forsaken the Lord" (Jer. 2:19).

And, knowing this, the prophets echoed the blood-curdling threat of Moses' prophecy:

"And the Lord will strike you with wasting disease, with fever, and with an inflammation,... with the boils of Egypt and with tumours, festering sores and the itch from which you cannot be cured" (Dt. 28:22,27 N.I.V.).

The time was to come when Jesus would borrow Isaiah's language with special reference to the spiritual rescue of his sin-stricken people and indeed of all kinds of men. The good Samaritan, "despised and rejected of men," came to the stricken wayfarer and "*bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine.*" The gospel has three of these terms in common with Isaiah (Lk. 10:34). Thus, again, Isaiah's words reach beyond his own day.

**1:7,8 "Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city."**

These verses make the placing of this chapter 1 against its historical background an acute problem. The rest of this prophecy suggests a time of prosperity and complacent formal worship of Jehovah such as hardly fits the time of Ahaz or of Hezekiah (though it has been suggested that it was the last of the 66 chapters to be written, just as in a modern book the foreword is written last of all).

However, the obvious reference of verses 7,8 is to the irresistible Assyrian invasion in the days of Hezekiah, when the Land was plundered and its cities destroyed, and only Jerusalem was left intact in the midst of a sea of desolation — and it a city of Sodom, saved only because of its "ten righteous", as verse 9 goes on to explain.

It may be, then, that chapter 1 describes the religious decline in the last years of Uzziah's reign (and Jotham's regency — he was a good man but evidently without the personality to influence the nation; 2 Kgs. 15:32-35). Verses 7,8 are to be read as a prophecy of an impending well-deserved judgment.

What a contrast there is with the almost unique prosperity of Uzziah's reign! (2 Chr. 26:10). Instead, widespread desolation! "The cities shall be wasted without inhabitant...the land utterly desolate" (6:11). "In that day shall his (Judah's) strong cities be as forsaken places in the wood and on the mountain top...there shall be desolation" (17:9 R.V.).

In his well-known inscription on the Taylor Prism, Sennacherib boasted about the capture of "forty-six of his (Hezekiah's) strong walled towns and innumerable smaller villages."

The people were to witness all this, and be helpless: "strangers (29:5) devour your land in your presence" — "so that thou shalt be mad for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see" (Dt. 28:34). This burning of cities would be the penalty for apostasy (so Dt. 13:16 had foretold), and so it came to pass in due course — "confused noise...garments rolled in blood...burning and fuel of fire" (Is. 9:5).

It was to be (so v. 10 says explicitly) a judgment such as God brought on Sodom, and for a like reason. Here the reader of the Hebrew text encounters the earliest examples of Isaiah's powerful (but untranslatable) play on words. No writer in Holy Scripture was more addicted to the pun than was Isaiah — (not in fun, however, but in deadly earnest). The word for "your land" (adamah) suggests Admah, one of Sodom's sister cities; and 'besieged' (n'tzurah) is a reminder of Tzoar, where Lot could have found refuge (Gen. 19:22; Dt. 29:23). This latter word, whilst meaning "besieged", also means "preserved" — highly appropriate here, for Jerusalem turned out to be the only city preserved from the savagery of Sennacherib's warriors. Not for nothing is the holy city referred to here as "the daughter of Zion," for Zion was the temple mount (contrast modern identifications!) and the inhabited city was its "daughter."

It is tempting to look for a further fulfilment of this promise of a surviving Jerusalem with reference to A.D.70. But this will not do, for then it was the holy city which felt the worst brunt of the well-deserved judgment.

However, in the last days the parallel will be very close, for then when the holy city has its righteous king, godless peoples will set themselves "against the Lord and against His anointed" (Ps. 2; Ez. 38), and will find themselves laughed to scorn by "the Lord whose fire is (then) in Zion" (31:9). But, as v.10 here intimates, there will be salvation only because of a faithful remnant amongst the godless holy people.

**1:9 "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom and we should have been like unto Gomorrah."**

How like the beginning of Psalm 124 are these words: "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side..." This Song of Degrees is almost certainly included here because of its relevance to the exciting days of king Hezekiah: "Then the waters (of Assyrian invasion; Is. 8:7) had overwhelmed us...then the proud waters had gone over our soul. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped." How like Sennacherib's boastful language this is: "Hezekiah the Jew...like a caged bird shut up within Jerusalem, his royal city" (Taylor Prism).

Isaiah uses the title: Lord of hosts. This may refer to the heavenly host of stars (Gen. 2:1; Dt. 4:19), or to the heavenly host of angels (1 Kgs. 22:19; Josh. 5:14), or the hosts of Israel (Ex. 12:41). "Hosts of glorified saints" has been another popular interpretation, but indeed it is not easy to find clear Biblical support for this view. In the present instance the most appropriate reference is to hosts of angels, for the picture of a Jerusalem saved from destruction almost requires allusion to the angel of the Lord who annihilated the Assyrian besiegers (37:36). So also does the Sodom context here (Gen. 19:1ff).

There is here also the first clear mention of Isaiah's doctrine of a faithful remnant. Even though most of his prophesying is concerned with the days of godly king Hezekiah, the consistent picture is of that good man's wholesome influence affecting only a small minority of the nation. Many went along with his religious reformation in a formal sort of way but with little of the godly zeal which constantly animated their king. The "remnant" allusions make an impressive sequence:

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- 3:10 "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him... Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him..."
- 4:3 "He that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem."
- 5:17 "There the lambs shall feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat."
- 6:12,13 "A great forsaking in the midst of the land. But yet in it shall be a tenth... so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof."
- 7:3 Isaiah's son of sign is called Shear-jashub, "a remnant shall return." See also 10:21 - 23.
- 28:5 "In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory...unto the residue of his people."
- 29:19 "The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel."

Joel 2:32 and Mic. 5:7,8 are other contemporary pronouncements in harmony with Isaiah.

Later prophets were to lament even more bitterly the rarity of simple faith: Jer. 5:1; Ez. 22:30.

By his repeated personal pronouns "we...we..." Isaiah identified himself very emphatically with this godly minority. The rest were no better than Sodom and Gomorrah. There was the same blatant shamelessness: "They declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not" (3:9). His language echoed Moses' vigorous bitter anticipation of his people's declension and judgment: "the plagues of that land, and the sickness which the Lord hath laid upon it...like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim, which the Lord overthrew in his anger" (Dt. 29:22,23). Isaiah knew his Bible, and recognized that the time was ripe for some of its prophecies to come to pass.

More than 700 years later Paul studied his copy of Isaiah and discerned a further fulfilment in his own day when again in the ranks of Israel only a remnant showed faith in God's Messiah, and — thanks to a vigorous, almost violent, Judaist counter-reformation — as the years passed that remnant sadly decreased. Yet even as he quoted the words in his Epistle to the Romans (9:29), he took comfort from the fact that the ranks of the faithful were being made up by believing Gentiles who "attained unto the righteousness which is of faith."

Paul quoted from the Septuagint version which has "seed" for "remnant". Although, according to the earthly part of the promise made to Abraham "thy people Israel are as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant shall return" (Is. 10:22). It is they who were, and are, the true seed.

In the last days, that remnant is to be represented by God's two witnesses described in Revelation 11 as fulfilling to Israel the function of Law and Prophets. Again, a faithful remnant. "And their dead bodies lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified". The fulfilment of these words is not far away.

**1:10-15 "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah ... To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.**

**When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them ... And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood."**

Here are the reasons for the impending judgment. It is possible that the preceding attack by the prophet provoked a vigorous self-righteous rejoinder from the religious leaders of the day, and this attempt at justification — a catalogue of feasts observed, ceremonies kept, and sacrifices offered — was forthwith torn to shreds by the indignant prophet of the Lord.

"Hear the word of the Lord...give ear unto the law of our God" are two ways of saying the same thing. The spoken word of the inspired man of God *is* the law of God every bit as much as the law which was brought down from the mount.

But there was little hope that Isaiah's expostulation would be heeded, for these were "rulers of Sodom and people of Gomorrah." The sin of Sodom was "pride (in refusing rebuke), fulness of bread (a gross materialism), and abundance of idleness (a spirit unwilling to bestir itself in duty to God)" (Ez. 16:49). All these symptoms were there in Isaiah's day, and again in the time of Christ, and again in the twentieth century.

The tirade against "the multitude of your sacrifices unto me" is, of course, not a denunciation of the temple sacrifice as such but of the complacent spirit of formality in which these religious rites were carried through. Amos and Micah, contemporary prophets, were also withering in their exposure of this decay of spirit (Amos 5:21-24; Mic. 6:7,8). And a psalm, probably added to the temple service in the time of Hezekiah, enshrined the exhortation in a perpetual reminder (50:7-15).

The people of God are come to a sorry pass when they have a mind to give more attention to the forms of their religion than to its inner meaning. The multitude of sacrifices had ceased to be rejoiced in as a medium by which God's merciful forgiveness was received. Instead they had become a kind of bribe to the Almighty as a way of bespeaking His favour and help in emergency.

"I delighted not in the blood of bullocks." But later there was to be a sacrifice in which God took special pleasure: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold: mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth" (42:1). But not so the nation: "There is no beauty that we should desire *him*"(53:2).

"Who hath required this (all this sacrificing) at your hands?" Who, indeed? Not I, the Lord, but your self-important priests. Thus "ye trample my courts," driving animals to the altar, but with no sense of the holiness of the place or of the occasion.

Thus it was in later days also. In almost the last of the days of his flesh, an indignant Jesus drove animals out of his Father's house. An end to this soulless formality! He would rather have the sincere Hosanna of children. And he went on to tell a parable of a vineyard, the story taken straight out of Isaiah's prophecy. And he foretold the treading-down of temple and city by Gentiles — an inevitable retribution (Mt. 21:12-15,33ff; Is. 5:1-7; Lk. 21:24).

Item by item, the elaborate formality of temple ritual, void of a spirit of true worship, was scornfully castigated by the prophet:

Meal-offering — vain, meaningless (N.I.V.).

The burning of incense — an abomination; it is the term reserved in the Old Testament for the most repugnant forms of debased heathenism.

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Special feasts and holy days — the Almighty cannot stomach them; His soul hates them; in His sight they are so much iniquity.

Holy posturing in worship He turns away from in disgust.

Formal prayers going on and on — He stops His ears to the noise of them.

Holy hands consecrated in worship (Ex. 29:9 mg.) — He sees them as defiled with bribery (v. 23) and smeared with the blood of murdered victims.

What a contrast with the impassioned call to "weeping and fasting and mourning" which contemporary Joel was to urge on his people in the time of the impending Assyrian crisis! (1:14; 2:15ff).

But would reformation come? There is nothing harder to budge than self-satisfied formalism in the religion of either temple or ecclesia.

**1:16,17 "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from my eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."**

This relatively short passage is the only explicit positive exhortation in all this chapter. But how effective its terse phrases are! And how sound its psychology! "Put away evil...cease to do evil...put away evil from before mine eyes", for "the eyes of the Lord are in every place" (Pr. 15:3). The drastic immediate decision to forsake wrong ways (after the spirit of "if thy hand offend thee, cut it off"; Mk. 9:43-48) has its positive counterpoise: "*Learn to do well...seek ...judgment*", where the verbs imply a patient deliberate application to a new and better way of life.

And since the language of the preceding verses seems to be directed at the priests of the nation ("vain oblations...new moons...ye spread forth your hands...full of blood..."), the exhortation: "Wash you, make you clean" follows appropriately enough, for every priestly ministrations was to be preceded by the washing of hands and feet (Ex. 30:19-21). "I will wash my hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar" (Ps. 26:6 — a psalm of David and Jesus, the King-Priests).

"Wash you, make you clean" was all the more needful because the prophet addressed his reproach to a spiritually leprous people (Lev. 14:9). The very words seem to be borrowed from David's contrite confession of his own moral leprosy — "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Ps. 51:7); these are words which carry the profound insight that here is a cleansing the sinner can achieve only if God does it for him.

But this regeneration is helped on by a steady application to righteous ways — help to the oppressed, the fatherless, and the widow. The first of these should perhaps be: "set right the oppressor" . How Isaiah (and his contemporary, Micah; 3:9-11) felt it needful to harp on the duty to ensure just judgement and fair treatment for all classes and especially those whom hard circumstance laid open to injustice and oppression (v.23; 5:23,7; 10:2). There must have come in many abuses of this sort when Uzziah was stricken and "shut up", and Jotham weak, and Ahaz corrupt. Yet the explicit warnings of Moses' law went by default (Ex. 22:22-24; Dt. 10:18).

Indeed, there have been few epochs in which it was not necessary to urge the "pure religion and undefiled" which cares for the fatherless and the widows (Jas. 1:27). Yet it needs to be remembered that the apostle James was not stressing this Christian concern as a *fundamental* duty. His word for "religion" does not describe the essence of the dedicated life but its ABC, not the flesh and juice of the fruit but its rind. The life of care for the needy is only the beginning of Christian duty and consecration.

**1:18-20 "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."**

Now, after rebuke and exhortation comes the divine appeal (as in Mic. 6:2,3). The idea of God and men remonstrating and arguing with each other is truly remarkable, but not unique. Abraham spent long persuasion beating down God's price for Sodom (Gen. 18:23-32). At the burning bush Moses stuck his toes in against a redeeming return to Egypt, but was overborne (Ex. 4:1-17). Job demanded the opportunity to argue his case with the Almighty (23:3-7), but when he got it he crumpled up before the heavenly majesty. More than once Isaiah offered on God's behalf a court case between the Almighty and the people He was at loggerheads with (e.g. 43:26,9,10).

But in this instance, "let us reason together" is not as even-handed as it sounds, for the Hebrew verb means "reprove" (so translated in many places); when Paul "reasoned" (with Felix) of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come in Acts 24:25, using the LXX word from this passage, there was (one may be sure) a strong element of reproof.

Isaiah's antitheses are impressive: "sins scarlet...white as snow...red like crimson ...as wool." This is an effect he is good at; cp. 3 :24; 22:1 2,13. Crimson suggests "hands full of blood" (v.15). Scarlet may allude to the vivid robes of the nation's unprincipled princes (cp. 2 Sam. 1:24). With a neat play on words that the prophet is also very fond of, "scarlet" is unnecessarily put into an intensive plural: *shamin*, so as to suggest *shanaim*, double. They are to see themselves as doubled-dyed in sin.

The New Testament continues this play on words most effectively, for the LXX word here is one of double meaning. It also suggests palm-trees. Accordingly the Apocalypse has a picture of the redeemed in *white* robes washed in the *blood* of the Lamb, and greeting their Saviour with *palms* in their hands (Rev. 7:9,14).

Yet another play on words is in the phrase: "sins...red like crimson," for it is hardly possible to read this Hebrew word for "red" without being reminded of Adam through whom sin came into the world.

But what a transformation (or, rather, transfiguration; Mk. 9:3) is promised here that these red, red sins shall themselves be "as white as snow...as wool"!

The echoes of leprosy language again ring on the ear, for the leper, cleansed with "scarlet and hyssop", was to "wash his flesh in water, and be clean" (Lev. 14:4,9) — as David's sin-leprosy psalm has it: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow;" and as the snow comes from heaven (55:10) so it is emphasized that the proffered transfiguration will be God-sent, God-given, and not of a man's own manufacture.

There is a strange rabbinic fable that on the Day of Atonement the goat to be sent away into the wilderness had a scarlet fillet of the sins of Israel tied to its horns. Every year this scarlet material turned white (here, clearly, is the influence of Isaiah 1:18), but for the last forty years before the destruction of the temple (that is, from the crucifixion of Jesus) nothing of that kind happened!

The Almighty's appeal is very moving: "Be willing and obedient" — Come! Hear! (the same words as in 28:12c) — then, instead of your Land being devoured (v.7), "ye shall eat the good of the Land," precisely as the opening promises of Lev. 26 and Dt. 28 abundantly declare.

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"But if ye refuse and rebel", as Israel did with stubbornness and deliberate obstinacy (Ex. 16:28; Ps. 78:10; 81:11; Dt. 1:26), what retribution could be expected but that they be "devoured" by the horrors of war?

Nor was this threat to be taken as a mere explosion of pious indignation from a godly man deploring his nation's waywardness, "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (this is Isaiah's constantly repeated emphasis); (34:16; 40:5; 45:23; 48:3; 58:14), and therefore it is a word of truth and power. So repentance must be prompt and real.

**1:21-23 "How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water: Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them."**

Although A.V. encourages the reader to take this first chapter at one bite, there is actually a distinct break at this point, even though the two sections are both in the same strain. Isaiah has returned to the attack. He is not willing that his people should plunge headlong into judgment without having very clear and blunt warning. To think that the matchless appeal of v. 16-20 should evoke no response, but indifference! Isaiah proceeds to paint the picture in bold contrasting colours.

Jerusalem was formerly a faithful city, a city of truth. But now there is no spirit of loyalty. Like Hosea's Gomer, she is following her own selfish evil inclination to harlotry. What a contrast with the woman of corrupt life who came anointing Jesus with her tears and was told. "Thy faith hath saved thee"! (Lk. 7:50).

Jerusalem had been full of wholesome ways and righteous living, aye, and the Glory of the Lord as well (1 Kgs. 8:10,11). But now David's city was become like Gibeah of Saul. If righteousness came in to lodge, this was turned into a vile opportunity for sexual lawlessness and murder. The city of peace, the city of Melchizedek, king of righteousness, was now corrupted. In Ahaz's days the decline went on at express speed, and later on even the godliness of Hezekiah could make little impact on the majority. The faithful remnant has always been a remnant.

Besides adultery (v.21), both literal and in spirit, there was also adulteration (v.22). Standards of truth and honest dealing were shamelessly and deliberately distorted, precisely as happens in this equally shameless twentieth century. The silver of their redemption became dross (a Hebrew word which echoes "backsliders"). "Thy hucksters (LXX) mix wine and water" — the words hint at the most sordid trickery. The only other occurrence of this disreputable Greek word is when Paul uses it (2 Cor. 2:17) to disclaim corrupt methods in his preaching, at the same time implying just such a charge against his Judaistic adversaries. Yet when Paul was removed from the scene, the early church, already on a very slippery slope, proceeded literally to mix the wine of the Lord's memorial with water. The intention may have been to symbolize the piercing of the Lord's side on the cross. But instead, by that change and their corruption of Christian truth they unwittingly brought themselves under Isaiah's censure.

Specially the prophet went for his contemporaries, the administrators. With another characteristic pun he denounced the princes as unprincipled. They were "companions of thieves, loving gifts," that is, taking bribes in order to acquit the lawless. Instead of giving special care to orphans and widows, they were hungry for "rewards" (baksheesh) — the Hebrew here has another juggle with words: receiving bribes instead of offering peace offerings. Contemporary Micah has a sequence of similar indictments (2:2; 3:11; 7:3). In the last of these passages there is specific anticipation of Pilate being bribed to help forward the condemnation of Jesus.

In a trenchant little parable of a house cleansed of its evil spirit (Mt. 12:43-45) Jesus foretold how Isaiah's words would have a further reference to the moral decay of the nation in the first century. And because the warnings were not heeded, all came to ruin.

Already in the present day Israel has defected from its early idealism. Already faction and materialism make people cynical, and they give no heed to their own prophet. How long before judgment overtakes them?

**1:24-27 "Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies: And I will turn my hand upon them and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness."**

The triple Name of God, here introducing a threat of divine action, is specially impressive. The first — Adonai — very rarely has the definite article, as here. It is noteworthy that here and in the four other similar occurrences in Isaiah (3:1; 10:16,23; 19:4) it is always followed by "Lord of hosts" (with its emphasis on angelic activity) and by a pronouncement of impending retribution. "The mighty One of Israel", an infrequent title, suggests the role of God as the powerful leader of the flock of Israel.

He declares His intention to gain peace of mind, comfort, by avenging Himself on His enemies, His adversaries. Here is yet another sample of Isaiah's characteristic paronomasia, for comfort is *nacham*, and avenge is *naqam*, the comfort that comes from getting one's own back. And the enemies are God's own children (v.2,4).

There is double meaning behind the divine intention to "turn mine hand upon Israel." This means hard discipline for the good of his people (v.26,28). There is to be affliction but with a purpose, that out of it shall come much blessing. "I will bring my hand again" (the RVm. reading) might even imply more than one divine action against Israel (cp. Ex. 21:27). The figure of the smelter (v.22a) is very telling, especially if the very slight Hebrew emendation is accepted: "I will purge away thy tin in a furnace."

In practical terms this meant a reformation among the nation's leaders, a toning up of the standards of administration to be "as at the first," as in the wholesome days of Samuel and David. There might even be allusion to the days of Melchizedek (cp. "the city of righteousness"; v.26; Jer. 33:16 and contrast the earlier references to Sodom).

The outcome could hardly be more reassuring, for Jerusalem to be "called the city of righteousness, the faithful city." The common idiom: "thou shalt be called" belongs specially to Isaiah (both Proto- and Deutero; 10 occurrences, spread through the 66 chapters). This is to be the settled character of the New Jerusalem. The first of these two names is inescapably Messianic when the Holy City is ruled by its Priest-King as in the days of Melchizedek (Jer. 33:15,16). And "faithful city" implies holding tenaciously to the Lord through the direst trouble. This was to happen in Hezekiah's day, when Jerusalem was the only city not devastated by the Assyrians. The same will happen again, to the glory of God in the near future, but only when once again faithfulness and righteousness dwell there, fostered by the Messiah whom God has set on His holy hill of Zion (Ps. 2:1-6). Then "Zion's converts (LXX: captivity) shall be redeemed with righteousness." In Hezekiah's day 200,000 came streaming back from Assyria after the decimation of Sennacherib's army (see Part 1 ch.33. "The return of the captives"). Isaiah foretells that in Messiah's day there will be a comparable return from Egypt (19:18-25). Zion will be "redeemed with judgment," as in the days of the Exodus.

**1:28-31 "And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed. For they shall be ashamed of the oaks ye have desired and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen. For ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth, and as a garden that hath no water. And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them."**

Here comes a dramatic switch from reassurance for the faithful remnant to an equally firm promise of drastic action against apostasy. It is possible to infer that the religious perversion now specially inveighed against was a recrudescence of ancient Canaanite sex-worship under a more respectable Israelite disguise — a re-enacting of Adam and Eve in their garden nakedness (LXX uses the word Paradise). There, under a tree of life, these perverts gave themselves to enjoyment, and called it Paradise Restored. They "sacrificed in gardens"; there they "sanctified themselves and purified themselves (note the irony) behind one (special) tree, enflaming themselves with idols under every green tree...a man and his father go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name" (57:5; 65:3; 66:17; Am. 2:7). These, Amos hints, were the old Amorite practices. But though they felt themselves tall as a cedar and strong as an oak (like the sons of Anak), God destroyed them. And God now promises a comparable fate for these corrupted men and women of Israel.

It is noteworthy that, like their so-called "religion" the curses of judgment come coupled together: "transgressors and sinners...the strong and the doer of it...as tow, as a spark...destroyed together...they burn together." And the leaf of their tree of life fades away; and their garden withers because it has no refreshing moisture, no river of water of life (Gen. 2:6,10).

The text repeats the word *asher*, a double-meaning word which also suggests "happy" (the "grove" was called *Asherah*, the way to happiness). How appropriate all these details are after the earlier allusions to Sodom (v.9,10), which was "as the garden of the Lord" (Gen. 13:10).

A dramatic switch of pronouns (v. 29) brings the charge of base perversion home to Isaiah's people: "they...ye..." Ye are the people I speak about; take this warning to yourselves. But ensuing chapters suggest that in these pre-Hezekiah days the prophet's message was taken to heart only by a remnant of the nation.

There are shameful indications that in Israel today there is the same sex craziness and the same pursuit of "happiness." The same judgment hangs over them; they can be saved from it only by a faithful remnant.

In Speaker's Commentary, Kay draws attention to no less than 28 verbal contacts between this first chapter of Isaiah and Dt. 28-33, and another half-dozen references to Dt. 1. Is the point of this an implicit reminder that as the older faithless generation died in the wilderness so it will happen to these contemporaries of Isaiah, leaving the way for a great surge forward in godliness comparable to the new life of the nation which brought inheritance under Joshua-Jesus? But there is probably more to it than this.

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## Chapter 2

### 2:1 "The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem."

Whatever doubts may exist as to precisely where chapter 1 belongs in Isaiah's writings, there can be no such doubt regarding ch.2-5. They certainly belong to the reign of Uzziah. The correspondences between these chapters and the historical details of Uzziah's time are too obvious to be accidental. 2 Chronicles 26 has an impressive picture of a nation at the height of prosperity (2:6-16) and wrapped in luxury (3:16-23). It is a period with strong emphasis not only on expanding commerce (2:16) but also on military preparation and dependence on human strength (2:7,15; 3:2). The phrase: "ships of Tarshish" (2:16) matches the implication behind mention of the development of the port of Elath on the Red Sea (2 Kgs. 14:22). Uzziah's "engineers" (2 Chr. 26:15) are referred to as "cunning artificers" (3:3). Isaiah also makes sardonic reference to the way in which Uzziah's heart was "lifted up" (2:12,13,14; 2 Chr. 26:16). The frequent recurrence of "exalted, lifted up" (2:11,15,17; 3:16; 5:15) is specially significant. And the mention (6:1) of "the year that king Uzziah died" finally settles that ch.2-5 must precede that date.

**2:2,3 "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. Many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."**

It will be useful first to establish that Mic. 4:1ff is a quotation from this Isaiah passage, and not vice versa:

- a. Evidence has already been given that this part of Isaiah belongs to the reign of Uzziah. But Micah's prophesying began in Jotham's reign. Even allowing for Jotham's reign being a regency (see on 1:1), it is still possible to establish that the Micah quotation belongs to the later reign of Hezekiah, for its preceding verse (3:12) is explicitly said to belong to that reign, and the conjunction "But..." (4:1) comes in very strongly there.
- b. In Isaiah 2 there is readily-recognized allusion to Ps. 72 in the phrases "the top of the mountains", "judge", "glory", "mountains and hills", "all nations". Since these references are spread throughout ch.2, they serve to bind the chapter into one unit.
- c. The phraseology in these early verses of Isaiah 2 matches Isaiah's language in later parts of his prophecy — "the law shall go forth" (51:4), "judge, reprove" (11:3,4), "lifted up" (many times in Isaiah and not once in Micah).

It is interesting to note that in Zech. 8:22 that prophet combines Isaiah's "many peoples" with Micah's "strong nations". So evidently both of these prophecies were already in his Bible.

In Micah this heartening prophecy is set as a deliberate contrast to the judgment days when "Zion shall be ploughed as a field". And so also here, in spite of the interruption made by the introductory words of verse 1. Here is reassurance for the faithful remnant, after the ominous threats at the end of ch.1.

But which "latter days" did Isaiah mean? There is obvious heart-warming reference to the

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wonderful new age of the Messiah. This has always been indisputably clear. Taken at their face value the words can have no other reference; and saints in Christ can surely never relax from the eager anticipation which they engender. At no time yet have nations evinced a wholesale glad enthusiasm for the worship of the God of Israel at Jerusalem. At no time yet have they contemptuously turned swords into plough shares and spears into pruning hooks. Nevertheless the character of all Bible prophecy, and specially of these many eloquent chapters in Isaiah, requires that there be a more immediate reference of these lovely words to contemporary events.

Nor is this difficult to trace. After the materialism of Uzziah's time and the corruption of Ahaz's reign there would come not only the judgment of an Assyrian invasion but also the blessedness of a Hezekiah reformation. More than this, the impact made on all surrounding nations by the news that the God of Israel, and not Hezekiah's trivial army, had brought wholesale destruction to the invincible Assyrians would be such as to bring immense numbers of Gentiles from neighbouring lands to celebrate the glory of Jehovah and to learn with enthusiasm the religion centred in His temple on Mount Zion: "And many brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was magnified in the sight of the nations from henceforth" (2 Chr.32:23).

There was also a counterpart to this in the first century, after the resurrection of Jesus had routed the power of the great Enemy. Then the preaching of the gospel in "the last days" (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2), in "these last times" (1 Pet. 1:20), brought great numbers of Gentiles to worship the God of Israel with gladness. But that fulfilment was only partial, for then the men who held power in "the mountain of the Lord's house" were openly hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

So today the faithful, and also many thousands of "Gentiles" on the fringe of the true faith in Christ, look for the day when the words of this glorious prophecy will take on an almost unbelievable reality.

The very phraseology points to fulfilment of the great promise made to David. Psalm 72 is quoted — "the top of the mountains" (v. 16), "the Lord's house established" (2 Sam. 7:13). In this respect there is clear connection with the great Immanuel prophecies: "Hear ye now, O house of David...upon the throne of David to order and establish it...a rod out of the stem of Jesse" (7:13; 9:7; 11:1).

More specifically, "the mountain of the Lord's house" describes the altar of the temple on Mount Zion. *Harel*, the mount of God, is the name Ezekiel gives to the altar in the temple he describes (43:15), a detail which has led many to assume a special altar-mountain in the age to come — this comes through failure to recognize the metonymy by which "mountain" is applied specially to the altar because it is sited on *the* mountain of God (Ez. 40:2). The meaning of Jerusalem is: 'The Lord will see (provide) peace'. Moriah means either 'The vision of the Lord' or 'the Lord is providing.' Jehovah-jireh means: 'The Lord will see or provide' (Gen. 22:14). Isaiah now describes this: "Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to *the house of the God of Jacob*", that is, Bethel where angels ascended and descended (Jn. 1:51: *epi*, with accusative), the altar which Jacob raised up on his return to the Land (Gen. 35:3). This is in striking contrast with the ziggurat and altar by which, after the Deluge, men sought to perpetuate *their* religion.

Physically the temple mount of Zion is not "in the top of the mountains" or "exalted above the hills", but it is approximately the same elevation as those round about. The words are meant spiritually and even politically, for in some places "mountain" is used for a nation; e.g. "Thou (the Lord in Zion) art more glorious...than the mountains of prey" (Ps. 76:4) — with reference

to the near-by mountains upon which Sennacherib's army encamped; cp. also Jer. 51:25 (Babylon). The same idea is implicit in the contrast between the Lord's House being "exalted" and the triple use of the same word (v.12,13,14) with reference to the divine overthrow foretold for all forms of human vainglory which now are "exalted".

The picture of "all nations (Gentiles)" and "many peoples" converging as a wide smooth-flowing river sweeping on to Zion is a very lovely one. The word for "peoples" is that which in hundreds of places refers to Israel. Then in this instance, is it implied that these are Gentiles now become Jews in their religion? Or is the reference to the spiritual transformation which Israel is to experience? "Therefore they (the redeemed 'Jacob') shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord" (Jer. 31:12). The fall of Israel has meant the riches of the Gentiles, then how much more their fulness described here? (Rom. 11:12). Certainly there is a graphic contrast with the "trampling" of the courts of the Lord (1:12) which the prophet had already reprimanded.

There is also a remarkable parallel in the Psalms: "His foundation is in the holy mountains. The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. I will make mention of Rahab (Egypt) and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there. And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her" (87:1-5).

"Come ye, let us go up..." is a winning appeal taken up also by later prophets: "Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God" (Jer. 31:12; and so also 50:5). "Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts...Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem" (Zech. 8:21,22 — and also v.23).

This widespread eagerness to learn about God is not only an almost incredible contrast with Isaiah's indignant apostrophe in ch.1: "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah" (1:10), but also with the depraved indifference of the modern world. And the unexpected phrase: "He will teach us of his ways" implies an acknowledgement of innate inability to grasp all that He can teach. This humility is, of course, the necessary prerequisite without which God can instruct neither man nor nation.

**2:4,5 "And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD."**

This amazing picture of the law of God established among Gentile nations had only a shadowy fulfilment in those halcyon years of divine blessing at the end of Hezekiah's reign. The immense sensation created throughout a wide area by the destruction of the Assyrian army begat amongst the Gentiles round about a deep respect for the God of Israel. However, this was but a small foreshadowing of the world-wide transformation certain to take place when Messiah rules. "Judge" and "rebuke" are repeated emphatically in the later prophecy about his reign (11:3,4 s.w.).

And so also regarding the beating of weapons of war into instruments of peace. This is what doubtless happened quite literally with weapons gathered from the devastated Assyrian camp outside Jerusalem. There would be a desperate *need* to do this in that burgeoning time of Jubilee prosperity promised by Isaiah (2 Kgs. 19:29,30).

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But, of course, the real fulfilment of this gracious promise is yet to come, when Messiah abolishes war for ever. In the face of these words — "learn war *no more*" — it is not possible even to contemplate the position of a massive rebellion against Messiah's authority at the end of the millennial reign. ("Rev." H.A.W. p.229ff).

This matchless assurance of permanent peace is repeated, somewhat more obscurely, in another of Isaiah's Messianic prophecies: "All the armour of the armed man in the tumult, and the garments rolled in blood shall even be for burning and fuel of fire" (9:5). And so also in a psalm which is undoubtedly based on the destruction of Sennacherib's army: "He (the Lord) maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire" (Ps. 46:9). Contemporary Hosea has the same lovely promise: "In that day...I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them (Israel) to lie down safely" (Hos. 2:18).

Why, then should Joel demand the opposite of this: "Prepare war, wake up the mighty men...Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong" (Jl. 3:9,10)? This is the prophet's vision of the final frantic preparations for war (in Israel; v.12,16), before Messiah comes: "nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom."

But ultimately, they shall "learn war no more" — a sharp contrast with the unprecedented build-up of more efficient armaments which was actually going on in Israel at the very time Isaiah spoke this prophecy: 2 Chr. 26:11-15. Today Israel has been called "the world's fourth super-power", simply because of the dedication of nearly a half of its national income to the maintenance of a highly efficient war-machine which (as in Isaiah's day) is yet to prove disastrously futile (as foretold in 1:7).

At this point Micah inserts his alluring picture of "every man under his vine and under his fig tree, none making them afraid" (Why, Isaiah, did you leave this out?), with the emphatic assurance: "for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it"; so this is not the pipe-dream of a pious prophet, it is bound to happen.

It is no easy problem, to resolve whether verse 5 is to be read as an appropriate conclusion to v. 1 -4 or as a warning appeal introducing the sustained picture of judgment which fills the rest of the chapter.

There is one detail which makes the first of these options the more likely. That is the appeal: "O house of Jacob, come ye." There seems to be allusion to this in the promise of Jesus as the Messianic King: "The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over *the house of Jacob* for ever" (Lk. 1:32,33); cp. "the house of the God of Jacob" (Bethel) v.3.

There are also these considerations:

- (a) "Come ye" is a natural follow-on from the exhortation: "Come ye, and let us go up...", addressed by one glad Gentile nation to another. Thus the Gentile salvation in the first four verses is being used to provoke Israel to jealousy, precisely as Paul argues in Romans 11:11-14.
- (b) In Micah 4 the very close counterpart to this v.5 appears to be v.5 there: "For all the peoples (common word for Israel) will walk every one in the name of his God; but we (the faithful remnant, now fully justified) will walk in the (Covenant) Name of the Lord our God." Isaiah's corresponding phrase is: "in the light of the Lord", that is: the Shekinah Glory, as in 60:1: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee;" cp. also Ps. 44:3, a Hezekiah psalm.

From the fact that Isaiah says: "Let us ..." it may perhaps be inferred that the prophet was including himself in the picture. He was proclaiming his personal faith in his own resurrection to share in the joy and tranquillity of the Messianic Age; cp. the similar confident expectation in 26:19: "Thy dead men shall live, together with *my* dead body shall they arise."

**2:6-9 "Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers. Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots: Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their hands, that which their own fingers have made: And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not."**

The appeal to "the house of Jacob" is ended. The prophet turns away, to take sides against them before his God. The "therefore" is a mistranslation. "Indeed, thou hast forsaken them...". There follows a series of very weighty reasons. The appeal of verse 5 had to be made, but it fell on deaf ears.

The first indictment here is that "they are filled from the East", whether with reference to importation of material prosperity via the port of Elath (2 Chr. 26:2) or to tribute received from conquered Arabians and Ammonites (26:7,8). It was a time of feverish progress towards a golden era. They never had it so good. But since "filled with" is left without its object, it could be that Isaiah the punster meant his reader to supply *qesem*, divination, to match *qedem*, the east, the land of impotent magic, also "soothsayers like the Philistines", in the west. Instead of exporting its own revelation, spiritual and divine in origin, Israel was always great at assimilating the religious futilities of other nations. When inaugurated, their temple had been "filled" with the Glory of the Lord (1 Kgs. 8:10,11). Their priests had "filled their hands" (Ex. 29:9 mg.) with what was to be dutiful service in the sanctuary, but now they preferred foreign mumbo-jumbo.

"Soothsayers like the Philistines" was a good jibe to take the minds of the prophet's contemporaries back to the days of Samuel when no amount of priestly hocus-pocus could save superstitious Philistines from their sorry plight (1 Sam. 6:2ff) under the stroke of Jehovah. And more recently stricken Ahaziah had depended pathetically on Baal-zebul, god of Ekron, and died just the same.

Also, although the wizardry brought in from the east in the time of Balaam (Num. 23:7) had proved impotent against them, they now hoped to find it powerful on their behalf! Such childishness! — and Isaiah implied as much by his phrase: "they strike hands (RV) with the children (babes) of strangers." Or, was this the making of marriage contracts with Gentiles? "Learn not the way of the heathen" was the constant warning of their spiritual mentors (Jer. 10:2); but, heedless, "they mingled with the heathen, and learned their works" (Ps. 106:35).

Isaiah is withering about the elaborate futility of their prosperous civilization — not only full of divination but also full of silver and gold, full of horses and chariots, full of idols. Hosea, Amos, Micah all combine in exposure of this gross materialism, but there was no inclination to learn from this school of matchless prophets (Hos. 8:4; Am. 6:1-6; Mic. 5:10-15). "The valley of vision" provided authentic visions that were unpopular, so men took no notice. Warnings against Uzziah's glorying in armaments (2 Chr.26:11-15), in defiance of the express warning of Deuteronomy (17:16) went ignored. Dependence on the cherubim-chariot of the Lord was out-matched by a mighty array of military chariots and horses.

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And men preferred to worship the work of their own hands, treating as a formality, of little help, the worship of the God of their fathers. For this apostasy (which they somehow reconciled with the maintenance of the temple service; 1:11-15) there was a common enthusiasm: the mean man and the great man alike bowed down before a futile materialism and a pantheon of helpless emptiness. In later days (e.g. 44:9ff) Isaiah was to put an even keener edge to the satire with which he exposed and censured all the inexcusable idolatry to which his nation was dedicated.

So Isaiah pleaded not for, but against his own people. Lord, "forgive them not!" — "And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die" (22:14).

This is how things were in Israel in that far-off time. This is how things are, right now, in Israel. The idealism of Zionism has been eroded away by the irresistible appeal of western prosperity. They depend not on God but on the efficiency of their fighting forces. They produce one of the best tanks in the world, and blasphemously call it *Merchavah*, the chariot, the chariot of the Lord (s.w. 2 Kgs. 2:11; Ez. 1).

"Therefore forgive them not!"

And the New Israel glory in chariots of a different kind. Mean and great alike bow down before man-made things of superficial quality and glitter.

"Therefore forgive them not!"

Their Lord had not where to lay his head. *He* rode upon an ass.

**2:10-18 "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low: And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan, And upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up. And upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall, And upon ail the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures. And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols he shall utterly abolish."**

After denunciation comes the threat of appropriate judgment. The loftiness and pride of men in the materialistic achievements of men is to be humiliated by the might of God.

The key passage is 2 Chr. 26:6-15, with its long impressive catalogue of the unparalleled advances made by king Uzziah in agriculture and trade, in military might and success. For long years nothing could go wrong with his plans and projects. The golden age of Solomon began to look ordinary by comparison.

But not content with the blessing of such matchless prosperity, Uzziah began to consider himself to be the Melchizedek King-Priest promised to David (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 110:1 -4). He insisted on taking to himself the right to burn incense in the sanctuary before the Lord (on the Day of Atonement? Lev. 16:13). In the presence of the Glory even a true high priest must shroud himself in a cloud of incense "that he die not" (Lev. 16:13). But no amount of incense could save presumptuous Uzziah from the long drawn-out living death which was God's merciful judgment on him.

Josephus describes the outcome of this impiety in vivid terms: "In the meantime a great earthquake shook the ground, and a rent was made in the temple, and the bright rays of the sun shone through it, and fell upon the king's face, insomuch that the leprosy seized upon him immediately."

It may be taken as fairly certain that that earthquake was the cataclysm here described in Isaiah 2 (and also Zech. 14:5). And it seems a likely guess that it was not a shaft of sunlight through a broken roof but the Shekinah Glory of the Lord which left the king stricken with sin disease to the day of his death.

Isaiah has a tremendous piling up of language to describe the crash of judgment on this self-satisfied civilisation — "haughty (twice), exalted (twice), proud and lofty (twice), high (3 times), lifted up (3 times)." The might of God will cause all to be "humbled, bowed down (twice), brought low, made low."

And the tremendous drive and ability of Uzziah was replaced by the regency of his son Jotham, making futile attempts to emulate his father's grandeur (2 Chr. 27:3-6); and then by a weak and evil grandson Ahaz, so that in two generations the state and nation moved from its highest degree of prosperity and sophistication to a condition of pathetic weakness and corruption. (How like the decay of godless Britain!)

There is special denunciation of the nations' military might and defences. The "cedars of Lebanon" are a metonymy for "the house of the forest of Lebanon" (1 Kgs. 7:2,3; 10:17; Zech. 11:1,2), the mighty armoury built by Solomon.

"Oaks of Bashan" may be a similar allusion (see again Zech. 11:1,2), but in 2 Kgs. 24:15 the same word "oaks" is used figuratively for "the mighty of the land."

The "high towers" and "fenced walls" make specific reference to the elaborate defences of Jerusalem which crashed in ruins in that mighty earthquake, when "at a place called En Rogel (at the south-east corner of Jerusalem) half the mountain broke off from the rest, on the west, and rolled itself four furlongs, and stood still at the east mountain" (Jos. Ant. 9.10.4). When this disaster happened it would bring to the mind of everybody Isaiah's prophecy that "the day of the Lord shall be...upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up." But these phrases probably referred also to the high places, the centres of false worship which were tolerated in competition with Jerusalem's temple. "The idols (the Hebrew means 'worthless things', not-gods) he will utterly abolish." "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills. From whence cometh my help?" Not from the paganism exalted there but "from the Lord which made heaven and earth" (Ps. 121:1,2).

Yet another form of idolatry comes in for judgment: "the ships of Tarshish, and all the pleasant pictures." Solomon, Jehoshaphat, and Uzziah (1 Kgs. 9:26; 22:48; 2 Kgs. 14:22) had all attempted to boost the nation's prosperity with a fleet of merchantmen sailing east from Elath. Once again, as had happened in Jehoshaphat's reign, God's weather was to bring men's purposes to nought. If the epicentre of that earthquake was near the northern end of the Red Sea (the great rift valley), a mighty tidal wave (a tsunami) would wreck Uzziah's ships within minutes.

Context suggests that the "pleasant pictures" were elaborate figureheads installed over the cutwater of these ships. The LXX translators, with their rendering "goddesses", evidently had this notion regarding an unusual Hebrew term.

The law of Moses had insisted that one of the two necessary tests by which to assess the worth of a prophet was: "Does that which he foretells come to pass? (Dt. 18:20-22). This could only be assessed if at the outset of his prophetic career the seer gave at least one short-term prophecy which would be seen to come true fairly soon. Accordingly most of the prophets, from Moses to the apostle John, will be found to have included short-term prophecies of this character in their writings. Thus the bonafides of these men of God were established (B.S. 4.01).

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Isaiah was no exception to this general pattern. Here was his prophecy of Uzziah's earthquake before it actually happened, and then men knew for sure that there was nothing bogus about his pronouncements. In ensuing years, during the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah, evidence was piled on evidence to prove the divine character of his inspiration.

It needs to be recognised, however, that to see in this sensational scripture *only* an anticipation of Uzziah's earthquake is to be content with less than the important purpose behind it. All such prophecies as this are double-purpose utterances. The *real* fulfilment is with reference to the Messiah. There are several indications of this:

- a. It is called "the day of the Lord" which contemporary Joel applies to the great day of judgment at the end of the age: Jl. 1:15; 2:1,31; 3:14.
- b. Also, "in that day" is a typical O.T./N.T. phrase identifying the day of Christ's glory; see, for example, the 18 occurrences in Zech. 12,13,14; and also Mt. 7:22; 2 Tim. 4:8; Am. 8:9ff; 9:11.
- c. Verses 19,21 describe flight into "the clefts of the rocks" in search of safety. But in a massive earthquake, that is the very last thing that anyone thinks of doing. The instinctive reaction then is to get into the open. Nowhere else is safe. So reference to a literal earthquake can hardly be the complete explanation.
- d. What is finally decisive is the two-fold NT. interpretation of this prophecy. Paul unmistakably applies the three-fold refrain to the Second Coming of Christ: "They that obey not the gospel...shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (v.10,19,21; 2 Th. 1:9). Also, the Sixth Seal (Rev. 6:15) describes the great men of the earth "hiding themselves in the dens and rocks of the mountains", using the language of v. 19,21. And since the Sixth Seal is certainly not about Uzziah's earthquake, and since any interpretation of it which disallows reference to the Second Coming is not worth a second thought, it becomes not just possible but necessary to read Isaiah 2:6-22 as foretelling the dramatic advent of the Messianic Kingdom: just as v. 1-5 *must* be so read) ("Rev." H.A.W. Ch. 14).

The devastation of mighty buildings (Mic. 5:11) and imposing armaments is thus clearly foretold here (as also in Ez. 39:9,10). And reliance on mighty sea-going ships is denounced. Is it necessary to issue a reminder that recent developments in modern warfare have made it shoutingly obvious that in any future war navy ships, mercantile marine, and tankers will have the flimsiest chances of survival? "Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind" (Ps. 48:7).

Defences stronger than Jericho's (Heb. 11:30) will crash in ruins (Dt. 28:52). "I (the Lord) will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof" (Hos. 8:14). The Land of Israel is to suffer terribly in the days ahead. The godless materialism of its people calls for such a discipline.

**2:19-22 "And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth."**

**Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?"**

This description of a great shaking of earth and sea by a manifestation of the Glory of the Lord is apparently taken up by Haggai (2:6), for the context there likewise alludes to "silver and gold" and to the Glory of the House of the Lord of hosts, where he will give peace. And, in turn, Haggai's word is taken up in Hebrews regarding the "kingdom which cannot be moved" (Heb. 12:26-28). It is impressive to trace chain reactions of this kind through the writings of inspired men of God. It is a feature much more commonplace than is generally recognized.

This earthquake language runs through a number of other scriptures, clearly (in some instances) with reference to Uzziah's earthquake, yet all the time steering the attention of the reader to a yet greater occasion when God "ariseth to shake terribly the earth." There is no fun in the pun which/characteristically, Isaiah uses here: "When he ariseth to grind the ground."

Amos prophesied "two years before the earthquake" (1:1). He foretold how God would "make the day dark as night...calling for the waters of the sea and pouring them out upon the face of the Land" (5:8 — the devastating tidal wave of a tsunami). "Shall not the Land tremble for this?...it shall rise up wholly as a flood" (8:8). Micah likewise: "The Lord cometh forth out of his place...and will tread upon the high places of the Land. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft as wax before the fire..." (1:3,4).

Long years later, that great physical disaster was still talked about. Zechariah foretells an earthquake even more cataclysmic: "The mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof...and ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah" (14:4,5).

"When he ariseth to shake terribly the earth", men, even men who have engineered their own earthquake shocks with nuclear devices, will be filled with paralysing terror. There was a foretaste of this on that Easter morning when Jesus arose from the grave to shake terribly the earth (Mt. 28:2,4).

But when the last great divine intervention comes, men will be glad to cast away the not-gods, the worthless things, which they themselves have made and worshipped (the twentieth century is good at this), realising at last that such futilities are fit only for the totally blind, who are no better than moles underground or bats in the black recesses of remote caves.

It took the gospel to teach men in the first century that silver and gold, and the distractions men make from them to worship, are "corruptible things" (1 Pet. 1:18) with no power to redeem any man from anything. And until the Glory of the Lord is revealed, men will continue to reject Peter's assessment. And when that nerve-paralysing shock is sustained, men will flee to their own improvised shelters in "the clefts of the rocks" rather than rejoice in the marvel of a theophany out-matching that which was Moses' highest privilege when he was hidden in a cleft of the rock (s.w. Ex. 33:22 — here only).

Thus Isaiah's readers are called to share that experience of Moses, and to "cease from man whose breath is in his nostrils." "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord" (Jer. 17:5). In the time of Noah "all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, died" (Gen. 7:22), deserving no better fate.

"Cease ye" from such, is Isaiah's curt caustic imperative, for what was man framed from? — only from dust!

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## Chapter 3

**3:1-3 "For, behold the Lord, the LORD of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water. The mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, The captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator."**

The conjunction "For" requires that this prophecy be given the same two-fold application as chapter 2 — to the prophet's own time, and also to the Last Days.

The present tense: "doth take away" stresses an imminent fulfilment or the dramatic nature of the fulfilment when it comes. Uzziah himself, "the strength of the Lord," was taken away from public life, and so also was the help God had given him (2 Chr. 26:7).

"Stay" and "staff" are really the same word, masculine and feminine in form. In this case "the whole stay of bread and the whole stay of water" both link with Bethlehem, "house of bread" where also was a well whose waters were a memory of delight to David the fugitive. So here bread and water taken away may be a symbol of Israel bereft of good Davidic leadership (as certainly happened under Ahaz and seemed to happen in the time of Hezekiah's sickness, but didn't; 33:16; 55:1,3).

The masculine "stay" and feminine "staff" serve also to sum up the male and female sections of the nation, both under summary condemnation in this chapter (v.2-15, 16-24; and again in v.25,26).

The long catalogue of eleven classes of prominent men (v.2,3), and not twelve, as might be expected, suggests the figurative reference of verse 1 to the royal house, thus making up the twelve. In this context all the terms are used in condemnation (as also, very obviously, in Rev. 6:15). Judge, prophet, and prudent man are all bluntly denounced in the parallel passage in Micah 3:5-9. The last of this trio is to be understood as a diviner, a specialist in phoney fortune-telling. The prophet is, of course, the false prophet — another phoney. And the judge is denounced for cynical perversion of judgement. For "eloquent orator" RV reads "skilful enchanter", an echo of 2:6 — the man educated in the art of charming, so in these last days the reference could well be to the spell-binding orator, clever but insincere. "Cunning artificer" harks back to the enthusiastic mention of the "engines engineered by the ingenious" to make Uzziah strong both for aggressive war and defence (2 Chr. 26.15).

The parallel between this prophecy and the Sixth Seal serves to emphasize the reference of that judgment not to pagans of the fourth century A.D. but to Israel in the twentieth. In this respect Rev. 6:15 is very striking. Would the apostle John be guided to apply to pagans long after his own day language which Isaiah says explicitly is about Jerusalem and Judah?

**3:4,5 "And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable."**

The judgments of God may take more than one form. "Woe unto thee, O land, when thy king is a child" (Eccl. 10:16). The writer of Ecclesiastes was, very probably, Uzziah — in his later

life of repentance and exclusion from public life. He would live to see the regencies of Jotham and especially Ahaz making a thorough mess of the administration of what had been, under Uzziah himself, an efficient well-appointed kingdom. From now on, to the end of the kingdom of Judah, most of its kings were young or spiritually immature, or both. "Children were their oppressors, and women ruled over them" (v. 12).

"The child behaving himself proudly against the ancient" was specifically warned against in the Law of Moses (Lev. 19:32), but what would a reprobate like Ahaz care about that?

The word for "babes" — not to be taken literally, of course — is a most unusual one, deriving (probably) from a word for "gleaning grapes", the poor odds and ends of the vineyard crop — in human terms "riff-raff."

If a nation deserves this kind of leadership, God sees that it gets it. In the twentieth century the fine idealism which provided the early motive power for Zionism is now dissipated in contemptible indulgence in political chicanery and graft. Isaiah's prophecy is coming into its own again.

It is also true regarding the New Israel, that an ecclesia gets the leadership it deserves. The present generation has not been without its exemplification of this sorry truth.

**3:6-8 "When a man shall take hold of his brother of the house of his father, saying, Thou hast clothing, be thou our ruler, and let this ruin be under thy hand: In that day shall he swear, saying, I will not be a healer; for in my house is neither bread nor clothing: make me not a ruler of the people ... For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen: because their tongue and their doings are against the LORD, to provoke the eyes of his glory."**

There is a good deal of obscurity here, partly due to the allusive nature of the Hebrew text and partly through lack of fuller knowledge of the historical background.

"Thou hast clothing" is probably figurative, as also is the allusion to bread and water in verse 1. The over-all picture is one of a kingdom in a state of ruin and chaos, the kind of thing that came with alarming rapidity in the reign of Ahaz, who appears to have been one of the most wrong-headed and feckless kings to reign in Jerusalem. He made Judah naked, both religiously and politically (2 Chr. 28:19). The language here, so reminiscent of the despairing appeal made by the elders of Israel to Jephthah ("Be thou our ruler"; cp. Jud. 11:6), expresses the yearning of a segment of the nation for a more wholesome, more dependable government. Ahaz, himself co-opted to a regency, probably adopted the same device with his son Hezekiah, who from earliest days showed promise of godliness and dependability (see on 11:1-5). The conjunction here of "house" and "bread" suggests again an allusion to Bethlehem where Hezekiah was born (Mic. 5:2). But if this surmise is correct, then this prophecy, coming where it does, foretells the reluctance of the new boy-king to be so early associated with the responsibilities of a run-down country. "This ruin" echoes the summary of Ahaz's worthlessness: "they (the gods he worshipped) were the ruin (s.w) of him, and of all Israel" (2 Chr. 28:23).

Not only were the people dismayed and disgusted at the decay which came in so rapidly, but so also was their God. All this "provoked the eyes of his glory" — "I will set mine eye upon them for evil, and not for good...The eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom and I will destroy it..." (Am. 9:4,8).

**3:9-12 "The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sins as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves. Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him. As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths."**

Here is further reminder *why* affliction of Israel was inevitable — their spiritual life had gone rotten. Like king, like people! — and the shew of Uzziah's countenance literally bore witness against him when the leprosy rose up in his forehead. And as men of Sodom had declared their sin openly in the crudest of terms, so also had Uzziah asserted his bald intention to commit flagrant impiety. If only the people had declared that their sin was equal to that of Sodom, such an honest acknowledgement of sin would have been the first big step to repentance. But "the pride of Israel testified to their face: they did not return unto the Lord" (Hos. 7:10).

These "sinners against their own souls", brought themselves "the recompense of their error that was meet" (Pr. 8:36; Rom. 1:27). "The fruit of their doings" were "grapes of gall" from "the vine of Sodom" (Dt. 32:32).

So, "like people, like king!" The nation found itself ruled by a child — Ahaz in his early regency — and women were in authority; at this period the queen-mother had become a powerful influence in government (Athaliah, 2 Kgs. 11:1,3; and, later, the mother of Jehoiakim; Jer. 22:26). Amos referred to these "managing women" as "kine of Bashan" (4:1).

Also, alas, "like priest, like people" — "they that lead thee cause thee to err." AV margin is more correct: "they that call thee blessed", but instead of the normal word for the priestly blessing Isaiah has the sinister alternative "call thee happiness", with allusion to the *asherah* sex symbol which degraded Israel's religion so completely, calling sex the true "way to happiness". How like the twentieth century! And how like also will be the impending judgment!

Yet embedded in the mass of the nation was (as in Sodom) a faithful remnant, loyal to the old truth and the old way of life; and similarly, embedded in this sustained exposure of evil and irreligion there is an assurance for God's true people: "Say ye to the righteous (the word is singular, to suggest his scarcity), that it is good" — the Hebrew expression is straight out of Genesis 1, describing God now finding pleasure in His New Creation.

There is a remarkable connection here with Ecclesiastes, most probably written by Uzziah in his repentant old age: "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God...but it shall not be well with the wicked..." (8:12,13). These faithful ones too shall "eat the fruit of their doings."

**3:13-15 "The LORD standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people. The LORD will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and the princes thereof: for ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord GOD of hosts."**

It is the first, and by no means the last, of Isaiah's law-court figures (see, e.g. 41:1 -5, 21 -29; 43:8-12 — a good example of like characteristics in 1st and 2nd Isaiah). There is marked similarity also to 5:7. Is it possible that these verses belong there?

Here God is represented as being busy judging the judges. Those who should have been setting the tone of public life in the nation, themselves needed remonstrance, denunciation and discipline. Psalm 82 is marvellously like this passage in phraseology and idea, and may well be an Isaiah psalm appropriate to this very time (a Psalm of Asaph because handed over to the Asaph choir in the temple).

There is similar reproof for elders and princes. This was the period when the princes first became a strong political force in the affairs of the nation. Earlier there was no sharing of what was the king's own authority. Micah (3:9-11) couples them with the false prophets, as equally unscrupulous.

The sudden switch (in the middle of v.14) to more direct address: "ye!", is very dramatic. It is as though the angel of the Lord in the middle of presenting his case before the great Judge turns suddenly to denounce directly the men of influence who stand there in the dock on charge.

"Ye have eaten up the vineyard!" — it is an echo of the days of Ahab and Naboth. The vineyard is the nation itself (5:1-7; 27:2; Ps. 80:8ff — another contemporary psalm). Similarly, when Isaiah charges that "the spoil of the poor is in our houses", the words are not meant literally, for these men were far too splendid in their way of life to consider appropriation of any contemptible items of property belonging to the desperately poor. But selfish oppression of the lower classes is certainly intended. As in many a country today, men of influence and power waxed fat through oppression and sweated labour.

The figures of stone-breaking and grinding at the mill are very forceful, the more so because it is these men of authority who wield the hammer and turn the grinding wheel, and it is the harmless poor who are broken small.'

The invective of Jesus against the self-satisfied rulers of his time used the same figure about "eating up the vineyard", but with tremendous effect he inverted the other metaphor: "On whomsoever that stone shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Lk. 20:14,15).

Judgment came in Isaiah's day, and in later spiritual crises also. But the most devastating judgment of all is yet to come, and then all the world — believer and unbeliever alike — will be sorry for wayward Jewry.

**3:16,17 "Moreover the LORD saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: Therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will discover their secret parts."**

An earlier hint about the bad influence of women in Israel's national life (v. 12) is now taken up on a full-scale exposure of society's obsession with beauty-culture, display, and dress. No less than twenty-one items in this category are brought together in this catalogue of feminine fashion and charm. Many of them have a foreign flavour. This was one of the ways in which the house of Jacob was being "replenished from the east" (2:6). Two of the items listed — "moon ornaments, chains" (v.18,19) — are mentioned elsewhere only in connection with the Midianites (Jud. 8:21,26).

More than one bewildered reader has wondered how Isaiah, statesman and prophet, came to be so familiar with all these technicalities of the beauty parlour. In a word the answer to this probably is "Mrs. Isaiah" - she was a prophetess in her own (divine) right. There is probably a close link between her inspiration and the many allusions in 2nd Isaiah to women and marriage and babies.

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There are indications that this sustained exposure of the practical evils of feminine vanity was directed specifically at the women who were supposed to be dedicated to the service in the sanctuary of the Lord (on this, see B.S. 10.05).

The phrase "daughters of Zion" in this plural form is very rare (note 4:4,5); and it has to be remembered that many Biblical indications identify Zion with the Temple mount (contrast the modern howler about the S.W. hill of Jerusalem).

That superb Bible scholar Kay catalogues seven separate items mentioned here as having direct connection with the garments of the high priest, the best-dressed man in Israel. Now women of the temple, who originally had been glad to forego their personal vanities (Ex. 38:8), sought to out-do in appearance the most exalted man in the nation. Accordingly, Isaiah applies to these "haughty" women the very word which he has already used three times about "the loftiness of man" (2:11,15,17).

Women always like to catch the attention of men. But with their wanton (LXX: beckoning) eyes, these went out of their way to invite it.

A woman with a shapely neck is always proud of the fact, and likes to make the most of it. But the New Testament uses the word in a more solemn context: "All things are naked and *opened* (neck stretched out) unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13); an allusion to sacrifice.

But there was evidently a current cult of beautiful feet — as can well be imagined regarding women who went barefoot in the temple area: "walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet...bangles...ankle chains" (N.I.V.) — rather like the old nursery rhyme about "bells on her toes." The remarkable details about the death of Jezebel, priestess of the Phoenician Baal, suggest that the dogs left her feet because they were heavily hennaed (2 Kgs. 9:30,35).

Like the searing denunciation of men's achievements (in ch.2), there comes in here a like threat against all the futility of feminine finery — "A scab (the beginnings of leprosy; Lev. 13:2), and bald scalps" (N.I.V.). LXX has a word to describe their "comely shape", but Paul turns this phrase into its opposite: "uncomely parts" (1 Cor. 12:23), thus bringing sex-attractiveness into perspective.

**3:18-24 "In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon, The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, The rings, and nose jewels, The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils. It shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty."**

There is a nice ironical flavour about the way Isaiah goes inexorably on with his catalogue of jewellery and beauty-parlour equipment, every separate item of it dedicated to an impressive *superficial* appearance, and none of it concerned with what the woman is *really* like. The Pharisees of Jesus' day similarly had their spiritual beauty-parlour, being entirely concerned with what in their outward religious life would provoke the admiration and envy of others. Caustically Jesus called them to cease concern for outward trivialities and to concentrate on "those things which come from the heart (the mind)". By implication behind this reprobation by

Isaiah there is the same call to true godliness. These "daughters of Zion" doubtless preened themselves on their devotion to the sanctuary, but what use was it to turn the house of the Lord into a fashion show?

Translators and commentators produce a wide variety of explanations as to what some of these beauty items actually were.

N.I.V. makes "chains" into "ear-rings".

With its modern American associations, the word "mufflers" obviously needs emendation; and "veils" is probably a good alternative.

Again, "bonnets" is too Victorian in flavour, and must give way to "head-dresses" — but of what kind?

"Ornaments of the legs" are perhaps "ankle chains", but there is no satisfying modern curiosity as to how *they* improved handsome appearance.

"Head bands" were really "sashes", obvious eye-catchers. "Tablets" were, almost certainly, "perfume bottles."

"Earrings" should read "amulets" or "charms" — how appropriate to the house of God!

There were "signet rings" also, and — probably — "nose rings", difficult though it may be to imagine women of a civilised race going in for such things.

"Wimples" may have been elaborate head-dresses such as are worn by some orders of nuns, but RV suggests "shawls" for the shoulders.

The intriguing phrase "crisping pins" can hardly be right, for it describes the "bags" in which Gehazi brought back the two talents of silver gained by deception from Naaman. Those bags would have to be considerably bigger than a small vanity purse, and at least as capacious as the out-size hand-bag favoured by some modern women.

Modern versions turn "glasses" into "mirrors", but instead LXX has "see-through garments".

All such aids to beauty and allurement will be of no avail when judgment falls, declares the prophet. No longer fragrance, but stench; no elaborate hair-styling, but baldness; and sackcloth for a brassiere, and the ugly brand of a slave on a well-kept complexion.

"In that day"! — it is sad to think of the elaborate trivialities of women's vanity achieving such an end as this. But so it transpired when Assyrian Huns and Vandals swept through the Land; and so it will be yet again, in the dark days ahead.

But what is to be expected when God is ignored, and men and women, especially women, worship themselves?

**3:25,26 "Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war. And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground."**

How will judgment fall so savagely on the proud empty-heads in Zion's temple so completely dedicated to the vain-glory of silly self-decoration and show? — by the stroke of war, and not just the chaos of earthquake foretold in chapter 2. The men whom they are set on bewitching with their frippery and nauseating artificiality will fall before Assyrian onslaughts. And these women, called "gates" because of their nominal duties at the doors of the temple, will sink to the ground in misery and hopelessness. Long years later Jesus echoed the LXX phrasing when he foretold how judgment would in time "lay Jerusalem even with the ground" (Lk. 19:44); and he then went on, precisely as in Isaiah, to tell a censorious parable of God's vineyard (Lk. 20:9ff).

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There is no commentator who can resist comparing this picture of wretched Jerusalem, sitting helpless on the ground, with the coin struck by Vespasian after the A.D.70 devastation: a woman (*Judaea capta*) miserable and helpless under a palm tree.

It was only the virtues of Hezekiah and his faithful remnant which saved Jerusalem from this very experience in Isaiah's own day.

The experience of the adulterous woman brought before Jesus likewise serves to underline the longsuffering and forgiveness of God, for that very incident is linked with this prophecy by a remarkable echo of phrasing.

When all accusers had removed themselves from the scene which they now found so uncomfortable, "Jesus was left alone, and the woman (standing), in the midst" (Jn. 8:9; note here that the word 'standing' is not in the original text). It would seem that in her repentance she subsided on to the ground at the feet of her judge. Remarkably, the Hebrew word for 'desolate' means also "freed from guilt", the same word that is used in the trial of bitter waters, when the woman is declared innocent (Num. 5:19,23). By contrast, those whose names had been "written in the earth" were "ashamed" and "forsook the Lord" (Jer. 17:13).

Thus prophecy and gospel combine in declaring to Israel that, no matter how vain their life or how unfaithful their history, their repentance will yet bring freedom from all past guilt.

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## Chapter 4

**4:1 "And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by thy name to take away our reproach."**

The conjunction "And", together with the repetition of "in that day" (from 3:18) suggests that the chapter break may be misleading. Then verse 2 has another "in that day." Thus, the two chapters are really one. Yet whereas in ch.3 the emphasis seems to be markedly contemporary, there is no mistaking the strong Messianic emphasis in ch.4.

The commentators assume that here is a picture of severe depopulation through the ravages of war, seven women being glad to seek protection from one man. But more probably this is about "daughters of Zion", women of the temple service, who were to find themselves banished from abuse of their holy duties at the time of the sweeping reformation brought in by the vigorous young king Hezekiah (2 Chr. 30). The Hebrew verb "take hold" is a very obvious play on his name. It is the first of many such examples in Isaiah's prophecies. There is a constant juggling with the name of the godly king whom Isaiah so greatly admired.

These words, then, are to be read as a repentant appeal by certain of the reprobated temple damsels that they may be allowed to continue in their religious duties. 'Let us continue to have thy name called upon us (Hezekiah means '*Jehovah* hath taken hold — of us'), even though it means that we have no share in the food and other perquisites normally provided for temple staff.' (On this see B.S. 10.05).

These women are evidently to be seen as a faithful few from among the greater numbers who (in ch.3) have come under prophetic censure.

The pattern is to be the same in the last days. Kay suggests equation with the seven churches of Asia — Gentiles turning to Christ, the "One Man", at a time when Jewry in general was fit only for condemnation. But even those seven were by no means as admirable as they might have been. In the time of those early ecclesias the name of Christ did not take away reproach, it brought it. "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye" (1 Pet. 4:14).

More probably, there is here a symbolic picture of a faithful remnant in Israel in the 20th century turning to faith in Christ as the Messiah. In recent years (1988) there have been signs of such a development.

**4:2 "In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel."**

There is here a marked change of tone. Isaiah still speaks of "that day", but now there is comfort and reassurance for "Israel's escapers."

The primary reference of these words is to Hezekiah, the godly leader, and to the startling salvation which God wrought in his days. The appropriateness of the prophet's phraseology, right through to chapter 66, to the vivid events of that reign is readily traceable in every chapter. In this early section it is prophecy soon to be fulfilled, within a generation. In the body of the book — chapters 6 to 35 — there is even more immediacy. In what is often referred to as "2nd Isaiah", there is a building on the exciting events of Hezekiah's reign in order to present yet more fully the great work of the Messiah.

But all through, as has been seen already in these early chapters, the real theme is Messiah and the salvation he brings to his "Israel."

Thus, in the first instance, this verse foretells (even before 7:14) the birth of a scion of the house of David who will be "beautiful and glorious", both in the eyes of his God and before the nation. "Them that are escaped of Israel" is a phrase foretelling the amazing deliverance (e.g. 49:8-13; Jl. 2:32) of the multitude of captives driven off by Sennacherib; and "the fruit of the Land" anticipates the unequalled prosperity of the countryside in the year of jubilee which God explicitly promised (2 Kgs. 19:29,30) and then gave (Is. 61).

But "the Branch" (*tzemach*) is also undoubtedly the Messiah (Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). In a whole lot of places the corresponding verb also carries this idea (consider 43:19; 45:8; 55:10; 58:8; 61:11; Ps. 85:12; 132:17; Ez. 29:21; Lk. 1:78; Heb. 7:14). Yet in "Ministry of the Prophets", R.R. applies this verse to Israel!

There is also a different word *netzer*, but with essentially the same idea, in the familiar prophecy (11:1) of "a Branch out of the stem of Jesse" (the same root comes in the Hebrew text of 26:3; 42:6; 49:8 — all Messianic passages).

There is here a delightful assemblage of descriptive words: "beautiful, glorious, excellent, comely." The second and third of these occur together in Exodus 28:2 describing the garments of the high priest "for glory and beauty." And the first of the four is turned by LXX into a word which the New Testament uses about the Glory of the Lord (Lk. 17:24; Acts 12:7; 2 Cor. 4:6). So also "excellent" describes God's awesome "majesty" in judgment (2:10,19,21).

**4:3 "And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem."**

Again there is here a hint of a testing tribulation for the holy city, but with a more explicit declaration of safety for God's faithful remnant ("he that *remaineth*" is the same as Elijah's lament: "I only am left;" 1 Kgs. 19:10). Although the whole of Israel was called to be "an holy nation" (Ex. 19:6), in fact only this remnant were actually "called holy", and were written "for life" in the faith-testing experience of Sennacherib's invasion. It is demonstrable (33:20; 31:5; 30:29; 26:20; 29:1) that that siege came to its climax at the time of a Passover comparable with the great Passover of Hezekiah's reformation. Thus, the godly, who, in spite of the invasion threat honoured the Lord with their Passover feast, were saved from the destroying angel as their forefathers were in Egypt. As the name of God was written on their homes in blood, so now the faithful remnant was written: "For life in Jerusalem."

Later chapters expand considerably this theme of God's saving of Jerusalem and his faithful ones there, for it provides such a splendid foreshadowing of the final deliverance of the holy city by the Messiah (cp. Jl. 2:32).

The "Book of Life" idiom concerning "those who are written" is a lovely one scattered profusely through the Book of Scripture. Moses was willing to have his name blotted out of God's Book, that Israel might be forgiven (Ex. 32:32). In Ezekiel's time false prophets, deceiving the people with false writings, were themselves not written in "the writing of the house of Israel" (13:9). But for those who fear the Lord and speak often concerning him there is "a book of remembrance written before him" (Mal. 3:16). All things concerning Messiah were written beforehand, clearly and explicitly "In thy book all my members were written, which (later) in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Ps. 139:16). But his wilful enemies were "blotted out of the book of the living and were not written with the righteous" (69:28). On the other hand, for those who are truly Christ's, their names are "written in heaven" (Lk. 10:20), "in the book of life" (Phil. 4:3). This is the Book taken by the Lamb out of the right hand of Him that sits on the heavenly throne, and which is therefore called no less than five times "the Lamb's Book of Life" (Rev. 13:8; 3:5; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27). It is known that from ancient days, and certainly in the time of Jesus, family records were preserved in the temple (the present passage in Isaiah refers to this): but "the general assembly and church of the first born" have their names "written in heaven", in a heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 12:23). Consequently, in the last great "time of trouble, such as was not since there was a nation even to that same time...God's people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the Book" (Dan. 12:1).

**4:4 "When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning."**

Does this verse belong with what precedes or what follows? The word for "when", hinting at a contingency or possibility rather than a certainty, usually begins a new sentence or a new idea. And it will be seen by and by that this harmonizes with v.5,6.

"The filth of the daughters of Zion" (it is a filthy word, too) is the prophet's summary of the elaborate description of their finery (3:16-23), or his impression of inner defilement in spite of outward graciousness. He saw them "as an unclean thing, and all their righteousness as filthy rags" (64:6). "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed

from their filthiness" (Pr. 30:12). Bathsheba may wash herself most thoroughly from her uncleanness, yet if without a word she lead the man after God's own heart into disaster she has no cleanness in the sight of God. "Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God" (Jer. 2:22). It was as true of the nation in general, as of its fashionable daughters.

"The blood of Jerusalem" especially, that is its murders (1:15,21) and its acquiescence in the foul practice of passing babies through the fire to Moloch (2 Chr. 28:3), comes in for special reprobation.

All these evils must be "washed away," or else "purged" by "a spirit of burning." These were the alternatives John the Baptist set before the nation in his time — either the water of repentance or the purging of the threshing floor with unquenchable fire (Mt. 3:10,11). So also Jesus: the branches of the Vine are either cleaned by the husbandman so as to bear more fruit or they are cut off and cast into the fire (Jn. 15:2,6).

It is an interesting exercise in interpretation to sort out whether or not the "spirit" of judgment and burning is to be read as a "blast" (RVm), and if so what kind of blast?

Already (1:25,31) Jerusalem has been threatened with purging by fire, as in a metal-worker's furnace. And powerful verses in chapter 30 reinforce this idea: "Behold, the name of the Lord cometh from far, burning with his anger...his tongue as a devouring fire...And the Lord shall cause his glorious voice to be heard...with the flame of a devouring fire...the breath of the Lord like a stream of brimstone" (30:27,30,33).

This judgment came at the time of Sennacherib's threat against Jerusalem. God "sent a blast upon him," though precisely how is not clear. Was it hurricane, or the whirlwind of the Lord (Ez. 1:4)? However the destruction came, it was so near to Jerusalem that the inhabitants saved from the invader, must have been in a state of mortal terror when a spirit of God, "the angel of the Lord went forth and smote in the camp of the Assyrians" (37:7,36).

There will certainly be a counterpart to this in the last days when the awe-inspiring violence of the Lord's deliverance accomplishes the same double purpose of scattering assembled enemies of Israel and also bringing the nation to its knees in fear, repentance and thankfulness. "I will rain upon him (the invader), and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire and brimstone...So the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that day and forward" (Ez. 38:22; 39:22).

**4:5,6 "And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the city the glory shall be a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain."**

It is a wonderfully impressive picture of Zion sanctified and protected by the presence of the Shekinah Glory. Almost every term employed is special to such a meaning:

1. "Every dwelling place" (RV: the whole habitation) — the word always refers to the sanctuary of the Lord.
2. "Mount Zion" means the temple area.
3. "Assemblies" invariably describes a holy convocation.
4. "Cloud" — there are only two possible occurrences out of a great many where this word does not refer to the Shekinah Cloud; e.g. the cloud of the Glory with Israel in the wilderness.
5. And so also, often, the word "smoke"; e.g. 6:4; Ps. 18:8; Gen 15:17; Jl. 2:30.

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6. "Shining" also, in all occurrences, refers to the Glory of the Lord.
7. So also "flaming fire" frequently; e.g. 10:17; 29:6; 30:30.
8. "Defence" should be read "bridal canopy" (comment on this later), but the idea implied is that of the Glory defending Zion; cp. the pillar of cloud and fire protecting Israel (Ex. 14:19), and see also Ps. 105:39; Zech. 2:5.
9. So also the words "shadow...refuge...covert."

Very clearly these verses fill out yet more explicitly the picture already given of a Jerusalem, and especially of a temple and its environs, not only purged of abuses but sheltered and blessed by the protecting presence of the visible Glory of God.

This is the first prophetic intimation of precisely how God would save Jerusalem from disaster. The "spirit of judgment and burning" when God sent a "blast" (s.w.) by means of an angel against the camp of the Assyrians is matched by a spirit of protection which the same Glory of the Lord exercised over Zion — and this because in it was "the Branch of the Lord" (godly Hezekiah) and a faithful remnant of repentant "daughters of Zion." And — it will be shown later — this happened at Passover (the word "assemblies" is probably a Hebrew intensive plural for one specially important holy convocation).

But all that, itself yet future, was to be only a prototype of the greater deliverance which Jerusalem will need before long when Messiah, the true Branch of the Lord, is in the midst of his people. Then there will be mighty "kings of the earth who set themselves against the Lord and against his Anointed." But the holy city and its faithful remnant will be completely protected by an overshadowing "canopy" of Shekinah Glory. The overwhelming of Sennacherib's army will be matched by a comparable out-pouring of judgment, and the Holy Land will know the horrors of war no more. Can it also be inferred that this awe-inspiring crisis will come at a Passover? At that time "a Man shall be a hiding place from the wind (the Spirit)" (32:2). He will spread his skirt of protection over the repentant ones of Jerusalem. Thus he will be "a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall" (25:4).

The Epistle to the Hebrews, written shortly before the A.D.70 cataclysm, looks back in several phrases to this Isaiah passage, as though implying a protection then for the Lord's faithful: "Ye are come (as though for Passover — and the siege began at Passover) unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the God of the living creatures...and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven...Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and the blood of sprinkling (as at the first Passover)..." all of these expressions seem to link up with Isaiah 4 and its background.

But in the great Day yet to come the canopy of protection will be a bridal canopy — this is the normal meaning of the word (Ps. 19:6; Jl. 2:16 only), for Christ will have come to be united with his Bride. And as the Glory of the Lord *filled* the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34,38), so now there will be "a *fulness* of him that filleth all (his redeemed) with all (grace and blessing)".

No wonder Isaiah uses that great word "create", for it will be a glorious New Creation.

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## Chapter 5

**5:1,2 "Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes."**

The immediate problem to be resolved here is: Does this Song of the Vineyard run on to the end of verse 7, or is it just verses 1,2, with the rest added as divine commentary?

Careful attention to the pronouns points to the second conclusion; and the Lord's version of this song in his parable of Matthew 21:33-44 confirms the idea. "*His* vineyard" (in v.1) becomes "my vineyard" (in v.3ff). Verses 3,4 are not "song" but expostulation. Verses 5,6 are an angry threat of judgment, followed in v.7 by God's self-justification for the rigorous treatment meted out.

There are close resemblances to the Song of Songs. In particular, "my beloved" occurs only there, and is there identifiable as the Shepherd who becomes wooer and at last Bridegroom of the maiden who is the central character. So also here, "my beloved" is probably, in the first instance, Isaiah himself, soon to be married to the singer who is later called "the prophetess" (8:3), a term which indicates that she too spoke inspired utterances on God's behalf. But since Isaiah, the well-beloved, is before the nation acting on God's behalf, when later he says:

"my vineyard", he means, of course, God's vineyard of Israel and Judah, as defined in verse 7.

But indeed that specific definition can hardly have been needed, for from the time of Jacob's prophecies to his sons this figure of speech has been familiar. Isaiah himself had already used the metaphor with great effect: "the daughter of Zion left as a booth in a vineyard" (1:8), and princes denounced for "eating up the vineyard" (3:14). And before very long Psalm 80 (an Isaiah psalm?) was to employ the same figure with reference to the ravaging of God's Land by ruthless Assyrian invaders: "A vine brought out of Egypt...a vineyard which God's right hand planted" — the allegory is sustained through most of the psalm, and — like the vineyard song now being considered — takes on an impressive Messianic meaning. Both Jeremiah (2:21) and Ezekiel (15:1-8) make vivid caustic use of the same figure, and it burgeons into yet greater fruitfulness in Christ's two parables, of Vineyard (Mt. 21:33-44) and True Vine (Jn. 15:1-6).

In Isaiah's own day this kind of parable was specially appropriate because of the intense development of vineyards in Uzziah's reign: "husbandmen and vinedressers in the mountains and in Carmel (which means 'God's vineyard'): for he loved husbandry" (2 Chr. 26:10).

And now to the details here:

"A very fruitful hill" is really a despairing translator's paraphrase. Literally: "the horn of a son of oil." Of course, there is a characteristic play on words here: "horn...vineyard" (*qeren...kerem*). "Horn of oil" comes only in 1 Sam 16:13 — the anointing of David; and "my beloved" is really "my David." So there is double allusion — not only to God's Land given to Israel, a Land flowing with milk and honey, but also to the line of David as its appointed rulers. And "fenced it" is another paronomasia playing with the names of Uzziah and Hezekiah. Truly, God did fence Israel in — with high mountains in Lebanon, desert in the Negeb, the Great Sea to the west, and the deep Jordan valley to the east.

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The "stones gathered out" were Canaanite stocks and stones. Literally, "he threw stones", but this must mean "he threw them out".

But was the Land planted with "the *choicest* vine"? In one sense, yes; for Israel are the seed of Abraham, God's friend. Or is the phrase used in irony about what only *seemed* to be a choice vine. The Hebrew is literally: "vine of Sorek", with sardonic allusion to what a woman of Sorek did to God's dedicated Nazirite (Jud. 16:4).

The strong substantial tower contrasts markedly with the flimsy booth which describes Jerusalem in its later helplessness (1:8). This "tower of the watchmen" (2 Kgs. 17:9) was the ever-present order of prophets (Jer. 6:1 7) raised up by God as unflagging reminders that "the Name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe" (Pr. 18:10).

The "winepress" was the temple and its sacrifices.

Then the Almighty "looked", waiting patiently for the vineyard to fulfil the purpose He had with it. But instead of the finest grapes, there were only stinkers — this is the literal meaning of Isaiah's deliberately-chosen word of abomination. What a contrast with "the Branch of the Lord beautiful and glorious" (4:2)! Yet Moses had foretold that it would be so: "Their vine is of the vine of Sodom...their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter" (Dt. 32:32,33). And a century after Isaiah, Jeremiah had the same reproach: "I planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed (from Abraham): how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me!" (2:21).

There was a bitter disappointment in heaven, yet was there earnest intercession also: "Destroy it not; for a blessing *is* in it...as the new wine in the cluster" (65:8) — there was always a faithful remnant, often obscured amidst a mass of corruption. So God promised: "I will not destroy them all". But at the earlier time of Isaiah's parable it seemed that nothing could withhold judgment.

**5:3,4 "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?"**

Here is an appeal to reason such as could hardly be brushed aside. "Come, let us reason together" (1:18). But, just as Nathan's parable told to guilty conscience-stricken David invited him to condemn himself and thus be led to repentance, so now Jerusalem and Judah are appealed to, to condemn the worthless vineyard which in the parable represents themselves. Could the divine owner have possibly adopted any other measures than those already employed? (2 Chr. 36:15). Whoever else, *He* is not to blame.

Then wherefore? Are soil or climate to blame? No! it is "a very fruitful hill." Even the vine was a vine of good stock. And yet it has proved perverse! Here is a mystery to baffle even a heavenly Husbandman.

**5:5,6 "And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it."**

The appeal (v.3,4); Tell me! what should I do to my vineyard which I have not already done?'

has apparently gone unanswered. So answer comes from the Owner Himself: The hedge round it will be fired; the wall will not just be allowed to deteriorate but will be violently broken down; and the vineyard itself will be trampled into ruin — by "the boar out of the wood, and the wild beast of the field" (Ps. 80:12,13). The entire place will be let go to ruin. All effort at husbandry will be abandoned! The wilderness will assert its savage authority. The curse of Eden — "briers and thorns" (32:13) — will flaunt itself in every corner. And all this not because it is now "the field of the slothful" (Pr. 24:30-34), but because of the utter disgust of the Owner at the futility and discouragement attending his most painstaking endeavours.

More than this the Owner reveals himself now as the Lord of hosts of angels (v.7) with power to command the clouds that they will withhold their blessing (Lev. 25:21; Is. 55:10,11). What happened in the time of Ahab and Elijah was only a token of later divine displeasure showing itself yet more markedly in the withholding of spiritual blessing from Israel. The word of Moses had been like "the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass" (Dt. 32:2). But now dew on Gentile ground all around but not on Israel's fleece (Jud. 6:39), "a famine of hearing the word of the Lord" (Am. 8:11; 4:7), The beneficent message of the prophets would be withdrawn.

**5.7 "For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry."**

That first word: "For", explains the bitterness of this judgement: This vineyard and this planting is God's special delight; from its very beginnings He has looked forward with anticipation and intense pleasure to growth and prosperity. And now, this! Instead of so much good, so much bad. The wild grapes have the same look as the good ones, but they are just not fit to eat or turn into wine. And this sharp disappointment is expressed in carefully-chosen words which sound the same but are the exact opposite. Instead of judgement, oppression. Instead of righteousness a cry of the oppressed. Not *Mishpat*, but *mispach*. Not *tz'daqah*, but *tz'aqah*. Not rule, but misrule. Not exactness, but exaction. Not equity, but iniquity. Not right, but fright.

Isaiah has plenty of examples of this literary device, obvious enough in Hebrew, but tricky in translation.

Does this parable, and its commentary, have to end on such a sour note?

Indeed, no! else God's purpose with Israel is a failure. The parable is resumed at 27:2, when the command to the clouds is reversed, and briars and thorns are burned together. There is a heart-warming climax: "He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit" (v.6). But the time for that is not yet, but it is very near.

**The parable of the vineyard — N.T. version and N.T. commentary**

In Matthew 21:33-44 (and Mk. and Lk. parallels) Jesus told the story again in greater detail. The meaning of the parable is so straightforward as not to call for commentary here. It can hardly be accident that a *vineyard* in "a horn of a son of *oil*" is matched by *Gethsemane*,

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vineyard of oil, which is otherwise meaningless. The householder's apparent puzzlement — "What shall I do?" — is a literal echo of Is. 5:4 LXX. "I will send my *beloved* Son" similarly leans, very obviously, on Isaiah. And Christ's question to his hearers: "What will the Lord of the vineyard do?" matches the exasperation expressed in the earlier story: "Inhabitants of Jerusalem, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard."

Instead of righteousness, there was a cry, a mighty shout bidding Pilate "crucify him" (Mt. 27:21 -23). Hence the fulfilment of the Woes pronounced by Jesus just after *his* vineyard parable (Mt. 23:13ff), the counterpart to those in Isaiah 5:8ff.

There can be little doubt that James also, in his epistle (5:7), makes direct allusion to Isaiah's parable: "Behold, the husbandman (God) waiteth (s.w. Is. 5:7) for the precious fruit of the earth (till it receive the early and the latter rain)...Be ye *also* patient..." And to this day the Husbandman, and those who share His hopes, look for the Israel vine to bring forth a good crop. But now, for long centuries, only thorns and briars, fit only to be burned (Heb. 6:8; Is. 5:6,5RVm.). Even the treading down (v.5), which Jesus also foretold (Lk. 21:24) is yet to be resumed (Zech. 14:2; Mic. 7:13).

Happily, in due time, all the depressing features of Isaiah's parable will be reversed: "The seed shall be prosperous, the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things" (Zech. 8:12).

**5:8-10 "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth! In mine ears said the LORD of hosts, of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitant. Yea, ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and the seed of an homer shall yield an ephah."**

This is the first of a sequence of six Woes in this chapter (v.8,11,18,20,21,22). But 10:1 -4 reads very readily as yet another (if so, how displaced?); and 6:5 is yet another, of a much more personal character.

With the exception of 6.5, all these Woes concern social abuses which Isaiah was not alone in denouncing. The Law of Moses exposed the land-grabber as a menace to society: "The inheritance of the children of Israel shall not remove from tribe to tribe" (Num. 36:7). "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine" (Lev. 25:23). Always there must be the right of redemption — at any time, for a cash payment, but in the Year of Jubilee a free restoration; and verse 6 (=Lev. 25:21) hints at such a Year being due; but this makes difficulties with an already difficult chronology.

Micah (2:1,2) and Amos (2:7; 4:1,9; 5:11) both expose as irreligious the acquisitive spirit. It is not the *methods* by which lands and houses were acquired which these men of God denounced but the fact that they were acquired. Everyone knew the spirit of God's Law about such things. Even weak vicious Ahab had a bad conscience about Naboth's vineyard (1 Kgs. 21:1-7). But in Isaiah's day the evil flourished nevertheless, but the entire nation saw the example of their land-greedy king ("in the low country, and in the plains...in the mountains, and in mount Carmel;" 2 Chr. 26:10), and the wealthy set about doing likewise. Thus the poorer folk were squeezed out: "there was no room in the midst of the Land" (3:14; Hos. 5:10).

Isaiah reinforced his denunciation of this selfishness and oppression with a pointed and unusual reminder that his words were not his own: "In mine ears said the Lord of hosts" (22:14; 2 Kgs. 20:4,5). The inevitable judgment — a ravaging of all these fair estates — was

being foretold in good time. Ahaz was not yet king (though he may have been regent), but it was not until much of Hezekiah's reign had run its course that the promised retribution caught up with this pride and greed. And even though the threatened desolation were to appear, as happened (on the face of things) through natural circumstances, such as Assyrian invasion (24:3-7) or locust swarm (Jl. 1:10-12), it must "of a truth" (verily!) be seen as the hand of God. Had not Moses said that it would be so? (Lev. 26:20,31).

The result: ten acres of vineyard yielding only 8V2 gallons of grapes, about one five-hundredth of a normal harvest; and the crop from a cornfield only one tenth of what was sown!

What a reproof of king Uzziah's insatiable enthusiasm for husbandry!

In later generations the same reproof was called for. Evil king Jehoiakim took no notice of the courageous denunciation from the lips of Jeremiah (Jer. 22:13,14 — another Woe!), and paid for his heedlessness with the vilest of deaths.

The apostle James castigated his Sadducee contemporaries for following the Johoiakim pattern (5:4 especially). And the holy Pharisees were just as materialistic. So Jesus trounced them for their selfish prosperity: "Behold, your House (the finest house ever built) shall be left unto you desolate" (Mt. 23:38).

To what extent are these signs of this materialism among the Lord's people today?

**5:11,12 "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the LORD, neither consider the operation of his hands."**

Another mighty social evil, so serious as to merit yet another "Woe" later in this series. It was, doubtless, a speedy consequence of the great surge of development in husbandry (by new methods?) in Uzziah's reign (2 Chr. 26:10). Extension of vineyards meant, of course, a big stimulus to wine production and so to overindulgence. It is easy to infer that the prophets saw this as a major factor in the decline of the nation's morale and morals. Not only Isaiah but also Amos, Joel, and Hosea were scathing in their scornful denunciation of alcoholism made respectable (Is. 28:1-9; Jl. 1:5; Am. 2:8; 4:1; 6:6; Hos. 4:11; 7:5 — and also contemporary Pr. 31:4,5; 20:1; 23:29-32).

Evidently devotion to liquor had got past the status of an occasional indulgence or celebration (and that is bad enough in itself). Now it was become part of the nation's religion. As Abraham had risen up early to proceed to the offering of Isaac, and as depraved Israel had risen up early for the licentious worship of the golden calf (Gen. 22:3; Ex. 32:6), so now the men of Judah dedicated themselves at all hours to drunkenness. Beginning in the early hours, they later slept it off in the heat of the day so as to be able to resume in the evening.

In these orgies the example was set by priests and was rationalised by evil men whose specious talk gained them the reputation of prophets: "If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people" (Mic. 2:11). More than this, the jollity of these occasions was increased by the way in which the instruments of the temple orchestra made this dissipation respectable (Am. 6:5,6; 1 Sam. 10:5). Holy feasts and "the work of the Lord" in his temple (v.13) were prostituted to debauchery. And, in another sense, "the work of the Lord" — His judgment was even then taking shape — was given no consideration by these heedless inebriates. "His work, his strange work...his whole work on mount Zion and on Jerusalem" (28:21; 10:12) was airily and tipsily dismissed as beyond the sober consideration of a steady drinker. "Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it", they said derisively (v.19).

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It may be that Isaiah intended his excoriation of their drunkenness in yet another sense, for this is certainly the idea in a later prophecy: "They are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes, the prophets: and your rulers, the seers, hath he covered" (29:10).

The nation was certainly getting in a bad way.

**5:13,14 "Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge: and their honourable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst. Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it."**

The repeated "Therefore" puts beyond cavil why the retribution spoken of is fully determined by God. It is a visitation so sure as to be spoken of as already accomplished. They are still "my people," and that very fact is the ground of their punishment: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Am. 3:2).

God's people were destroyed — were destroying themselves — through lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6). "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Is. 1:3). And here (5:13), LXX emphasizes that it is lack of knowledge *of the Lord*.

History repeated itself. An even more intense tribulation came on Jerusalem in A.D.70. The Lord's most detailed prophecy of that downfall ended with a sorrowful: "because thou *knewest not* the time of thy visitation" (Lk. 19:44).

"Thy honourable men are famished" is really a paraphrase, correct in idea, as the parallelism shows, Literally: "his glory is mortal men of hunger" (Mt. 5:6). It is a picture of rich self-indulgent revellers made haggard by privation. The LXX addition: "dried up with thirst *for water*" is attractive, as making a sardonic contrast with the abundance of wine in verses 11,12. Compare the Lord's warning about 20th century high-living: "surfeiting, drunkenness, and cares of this life" (Lk. 21:34).

In the judgment now foretold, the Grave opens its mouth *without measure*. Is there here an allusion to what literally happened to Korah and his fellow-rebels (Num. 16:30-33)? Significantly the Hebrew text uses a singular verb for all four items: "their glory...multitude...pomp...rejoicing;" all are lumped together in one great destruction. And then (in 14:11) the same vivid figure describes the fate of the divine agent of wrath; he too suffers in like fashion (cp. also 10:15,16).

**5:15,16 "And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled: But the LORD of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness."**

Here verse 15a repeats 2:9, and verse 16a is like 2:17c. So either Isaiah is quoting what he has already written (as being specially appropriate here), or these two verses have somehow been transplanted from chapter 2 (cp.10:1-4, which may have had a like experience).

The words "bowed down" and "humbled" occur repeatedly in chapter 2 (in v.9,11,12,17).

Over against this human unworthiness stands God the Holy One (the holy El; cp.6:3), whose judgment will proclaim the stark contrast, as it did in the judgment on Nadab and Abihu ("I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me;" Lev. 10:3), and on the exclusion of Moses and Aaron from the Promised Land ("God was sanctified in them"; Num. 20:13). In Isaiah's day Assyrian invasion was to take a vast number of the unrighteous into captivity, and also the fire of the Lord was to destroy the unholy invaders. And, very similarly, this 20th century will see the situation repeated in an unholy Israel — God that is holy will be sanctified.

**5:17 "Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat."**

If, as seems probable, this verse runs on from verse 14, it presents a picture of drastic social change as a result of Assyrian invasion. The poorer and more devout people (the "lambs") who had been dispossessed by wealthy and unscrupulous landlords are one day to find themselves better off, thanks to redistribution of property by good king Hezekiah in his year of jubilee (37:30,31; 61:1-4) —but this only after much ravaging of the land ("waste places") by invaders. There is a somewhat similar picture in chapter 7:21,22.

Zephaniah, echoing this Isaiah passage, uses the same literal-figurative language: "I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty...I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord...they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid" (3:11-13).

It is tempting to read Isaiah's expression for "after their manner" as "according to the word (of the Lord) about them." And LXX, by one change of letter, has "lambs" for "strangers." If, however, this is not acceptable, the reference is to Gentile invaders (1:7). But a more forward-looking interpretation could apply this passage to the "vineyard" taken away from Israel and given to Gentile strangers, specially regarding the preaching of the gospel (Mt. 21:41,43).

**5:18,19 "Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope: That say, Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!"**

This third Woe does not make much sense until the figure of speech employed is clearly recognized. An idol called Iniquity, or alternatively Sin, is set up on a cart. Its devotees attach ropes, and dutifully draw it in procession like an Hindoo juggernaut. Very probably there is allusion here to the idolatries introduced by king Ahaz, the outstanding one of which was an Assyrian deity (2 Kgs. 16:10). Thus this denunciation, certainly known to the Assyrian kings, made Isaiah a marked man, to be put to death most miserably when captured in Jerusalem. This is why the prophet, a leading statesman also, was not included in the deputation (36:3) sent to negotiate with Rabshakeh.

Isaiah uses the same kind of derisive language, only now with strict literality, when describing the plight of Assyrian idols at the time of Sennacherib's retreat from Jerusalem. Dragged on a cart by weary beasts, they are unable to help their devotees at all, or to help themselves from being captured by pursuers. All this is implied in chapter 46:1,2.

With similar language Paul refers to Judaistic devotion to the Law as "a yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1). What a contrast with the call of Christ to those weary and heavy laden (with an Iniquity and Sin which are an inevitable inheritance): "Take my yoke upon you...my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt. 11:29,30).

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However, Isaiah's current contention was with scornful men of Jerusalem who satirically (as in 28:10) chided the prophet with having a futile message: 'You prophets say, but nothing happens! Why doesn't your Holy One get a move on, and *do something?*' It is typical *tu quoque*: 'You say our gods are helpless. Well, what about yours?' (cp. 66:5).

So many of the prophets had to cope with this kind of challenge: Amos (5:18-6:3), Jeremiah (17:15), Ezekiel (11:2,3; 12:22,23,27), Zephaniah (1:12), Malachi (2:17; 3:1); Jesus also (Lk. 17:20), and last of all, Peter (2 Pet. 3:3,4).

Was it in answer to this scornful jibe: "Let him *make speed*, and *hasten* his work," that Isaiah called his new-born son *Maher-shalal-hash-baz* (8:3)?

Nor was this the only answer. From now on Isaiah gave repeated emphatic assurances: God has said He will act, and He will!:

"Hearken unto me, ye stouthearted, that are far from righteousness: I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory" (46:12,13).

"I the Lord will hasten it in his time" (60:22).

"Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance...he will come, and save you" (35:4).

The relevance of these passages to the Last Days is clear enough. In these times there are plenty of people who scorn the idea of God coming to the rescue (after due discipline) of a decadent and violent civilisation, but that scorn will not in any way deter ultimate divine action.

Isaiah's contemporaries were scornful enough. Echoing the prophet's favourite title of the God (1:4; 5:24) he represented, they derisively demanded: "Let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, and (then) we shall know!" "Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us" (30:11).

These perverse contradictory attitudes had their answer in the remarkable vision of the Almighty — "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of hosts." It was answered also by the trenchant threat of judgment with which these Woes conclude (v.24-30).

**5:20 "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"**

How easily men come away from the wholesome principles of the Word of God, and with high self-esteem proceed to fashion their own more palatable morality! The psalmist may well say: "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth" (119:103). But for a big proportion of mankind the wisdom of the Word is only bitterness. The natural man finds these waters bitter, and he feels justified in complaining at their astringency. It is only the Tree that can make them sweet (Ex. 15:25).

So also with the appointed burnt-offerings of the Lord. The burning of the flesh sent a column of acrid smoke ascending up to heaven; yet always "the Lord smelled a sweet savour" (Gen. 8:21, and many others), because behind every true burnt-offering there was the offerer's spirit of thankfulness, repentance, and re-consecration to God.

Human judgement almost invariably makes the wrong choice, the wrong assessment, swinging to the wrong extreme, making the wrong decision. Said worldly-wise Caiaphas: "It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (Jn. 11:50). But God turned this Caiaphas foolishness into wisdom. The high priest proposed evil, and called it good; therefore, woe unto him!

In every generation men dedicate themselves with avidity to the worship of Mammon, and call it their greatest good. And how many there be who find "the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb", only to learn that "her end is bitter as wormwood" (Pr. 5:3,4), as deadly as AIDS.

Even a godly woman like Naomi could get her perspective wrong: "I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty" (Ruth 1:21). Yet that full-ness had brought little comfort in the land of Moab. By contrast, now she was back in Bethlehem and, with such a daughter-in-law, she was more "full" than she knew.

Always, then, let a man mistrust his own judgement.

But Isaiah found himself in the midst of experienced influential men who through folly or wilfulness were turning God's laws upside down. Woe unto them! When a man is self-afflicted with this kind of twisted outlook on life there is no hope for him.

One of the greatest curses of modern times is this double-speak. It has poisoned every aspect of human relations. A mighty military machine of frightening potentiality is called Defence. An aggressive political campaign is called a Peace Movement. Wholesale criticism and disparagement of the Word of God is paraded under the respectable name of Scholarship, whilst those who try to be honest with Holy Scripture are reckoned stupid or in darkness. A pseudo-science of psychology is called into being to give a flamboyant sanction to self-indulgence and all kinds of immorality. Thus sin is blithely abolished.

However good they were at this sort of thing in Isaiah's day, or in the time of Caiaphas, the twentieth century has completely outpaced them. It has even left its plain mark on the ecclesias.

#### **5:21 "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!"**

This fifth Woe was directed, very probably, at the statesmen in Ahaz's court, men who had all the confidence in the world in their own powers of judgement and of political manoeuvring. The same men — Shebna, and people of that ilk — were the plague of the reign of Hezekiah: "The wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid. Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their words are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?" (29:14,15). "Woe to the rebellious children, said 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" (30:1, and see v.2 and 31:1,2). A vivid passage, in 28:9ff, expresses in caustic terms the contempt these self-confident schemers had for the innocence and ingenuousness of the faithful remnant.

This Woe says its warning briefly to all generations. Right up to the present day, among the people of the Lord there are always those with a sublime confidence in the utter Tightness of their own judgements. "Wise in their own eyes", they find it impossible to believe that they may be mistaken, and therefore they find it not only possible but easy to believe that their decisions are utterly right and unimpeachable.

The emphasis of Scripture is all the other way: "Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from (this) evil" (Pr. 3:7). "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceits? There is more hope of a fool than of him" (26:12) — in other words, such a man is the worst kind of fool. Yet often enough it is such who, by sheer self-confidence, muscle themselves into positions of high influence. Expressing their opinions in strong dogmatic fashion, they get the reputation of being "safe", and therefore to be followed.

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But the word of Jesus was: "I thank thee, Father, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

The great curse of the Judaists in the first century was their utter inability to believe that they were wrong. "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Rom. 1:22; written about Jews, not Gentiles as is often supposed; B.S. 13.02). "I would not have you to be ignorant of this mystery (the gospel going to the Gentiles), lest ye be wise in your own conceit, that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until..." (11:25). Could it be that a similar "blindness in part" is happening to the New Israel, and especially the Judaists among them?

**5:22,23 "Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!"**

The two halves of this sixth Woe do not seem to hang together. If there is a connection between the two it is via Proverbs 31: "It is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink: lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the judgement of any of the afflicted...Open thy mouth (not for drink, but to dispense even-handed justice), judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy" (31:4,5,9). How seriously strong drink weakens a man's will to do what is right!

But the emphasis here is on taking a reward, a bribe. And this suggests that perhaps the word "Woe" has fallen out from the beginning of verse 23 which in that case would be Woe 7.

If however the two verses are kept together, the main idea seems to be: Woe to them who are heroic in their drinking exploits but who are cowards at standing up for the rights of the poor.

**5:24 "Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel."**

Here the denunciation and threat of judgment is in general and figurative terms. Very soon, in later chapters (and in later prophets: Jer. 5:14: Mal. 4:1) it becomes much more specific.

The figure of an irresistible wall of flame roaring with a loud crackle through a field of stubble and a pile of winnowed chaff is very telling. But the one word "consumeth", which really means "reduces to feebleness" (s.w. 13:7) tells the reader that this chaff is a people subject to the flame of divine anger (in most of its occurrences the word for "flame" means the divine fire).

Ezekiel's parable of the vine (15:4) insists that the worthless vine of Isaiah's parable (5:1-7) is fit for nothing but burning. And in his next chapter (6:6) the divine fire sanctifies the prophet to pronounce his nation's judgment by the destroying fire of God.

Hosea (9:16) and Amos (2:9) both echo the outcome of all this — God's people with a root reduced to rottenness and the glory of their fine flower no better than chaff or dust.

And all this because the law of their God is cast aside and the word of their Holy One is despised.

Yet not all the nation, for repeatedly Isaiah has comfort for the faithful few: "The remnant...shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward" (37:31).

John the Baptist — a great man for harnessing the message of Isaiah — warned his own generation that they too were under threat: "he (the Messiah) will throughly purge his floor...the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable" (Lk. 3:17).

And Jesus continued the warning when he laid a curse on the fig-tree nation so that it "dried up from the roots" (Mk. 11:20).

And at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit with visible "tongues of flame" (as here) devoured the stubble of Jewish hostility to the Holy One of God (Acts 2:3,4,17-19) and warned against sweeping judgment by "fire and vapour of smoke."

The very word "despised" (LXX: troubled) is picked up by Luke to describe how in the midst of promiscuous Athenian idolatry "Paul's spirit was *stirred* in him" to expose the futility of the empty religion from which these clever clever men were now commanded to repent.

**5:25 "Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still."**

There are some indications of a dislocation in Isaiah's text here. The refrain at the end of this verse comes four times over at 9:12,17,21; 10:4. And the Woe at 10:1,2 would suitably belong here along with the other six Woes in chapter 5. Certainly there would seem to be greater tidiness if 5:25-30 were transferred to follow 10:4, and 10:1,2 transferred to this place. But this is conjectural, and for that reason the words will be dealt with in the order of the familiar text.

The detail here about the hills trembling is probably an echo of Uzziah's earthquake, which had most likely happened by this time and was being cited as a warning of judgment to come. Specific reference is to the temple mount. Josephus asserts that it was on one of the Feasts of the Lord that Uzziah made his wilful attempt to assume the role of high priest. At the crucial moment "a great earthquake shook the ground, and a rent was made in the temple, and the bright rays of the sun (the divine Glory?)...fell upon the king's face, insomuch that the leprosy seized upon him immediately" (Ant. 9.10.4).

The sinister phrase: "carcasses torn in the streets" points to something worse than Uzziah's earthquake. What that will be is intimated by the use in the Apocalypse of the same figure (11:8). There the Two Witnesses, clearly symbolic of the faithful remnant in Israel in the Last Days, are ravaged by the Beast and left lying in the street of "the great city where their Lord was crucified" (see "Rev," H.A.W. ch.25).

**5:26-29 "And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth: and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly: None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken: Whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent, their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind: Their roaring shall be like a lion, they shall roar like young lions: yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry it away safe, and none shall deliver it."**

First, a reminder that the proper place for these verses may be, more correctly, after the series of ominous warnings of the Lord's hand still outstretched in judgment (cp. Jer. 21:5), that is, after 10:4.

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The setting-up of an ensign for the Gentiles is to rally them, a considerable confederacy of sycophant supporters (Ps.83), to a suitable point from which to launch their attack on the city of God. But the Hebrew verbs and pronouns are singular — "he...him," the reference being to Sennacherib, the mighty monarch directing the campaign.

They come, at the "hiss" or "whistle" of the Almighty, with astonishing efficiency, "with speed swiftly" — a fitting response to the mocking challenge thrown at the prophet of the Lord by unbelieving contemporaries: "Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it" (v.19). Indeed, they did!

Attention has been drawn to the remarkable fact that although these verses provide the first vivid picture of Assyrian invasion, before ever it happened, not a few of the phrases seem to be specially selected to suggest angels of the Lord in action, invisibly in control of the entire ambitious project from start to finish: None weary or stumbling; they neither slumber nor sleep (cp. Ps. 121:4); and sharp arrows (Dt. 32:23), and chariot wheels like a whirlwind (cp. Ps. 83:13; Nah. 1:3; Ez. 10:13) all strongly suggest the cherubim chariots of God; the roaring like a lion (Jl. 3:16; Hos. 5:14; 11:10), and none able to deliver (Ps. 50:22; Dt. 32:39) alike imply irresistible divine power at work.

By and by Isaiah is to make explicit affirmation that this Assyrian onslaught is a veritable act of God: "The Lord bringeth up upon them (Israel) the waters of the River...even the king of Assyria and all his glory" (8:7). Sennacherib is "the rod of mine anger...against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge" (10:5,6); he is also "the axe which boasts itself against him (the Lord) that heweth therewith" (10:15).

Yet a further feature of these vivid verses is the degree of coincidence with Joel's even more vivid prophecy of the same exciting crisis: flame and stubble (1:19; 2:3,5), burning "with speed speedily" (3:4); none of the attackers "weary or stumbling" (2:6-8); the thunder of horses' hoofs and of wheels like a whirlwind (2:4,5); the roaring like a lion (3:16), and in that day (2:1) darkness in the heavens (2:2,10; 3:15) — all these details serve to unify Isaiah and his contemporary prophets.

Later, it should be possible to develop the idea that the Sennacherib invasion was a prototype of the last great invasion of God's Land, as foretold in Ezekiel 38 and Psalm 2. For the present, then, let these verses be read in parallel with those Scriptures, and there is here, truly, a picture of an overwhelming force coming up "like a cloud to cover the Land." The outcome also proves to be the same.

**5:30 "And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea: and if one look unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof."**

It is instructive here to note the double figure of speech. In verse 29 the aggression of the invaders is like the roar of lions. Here it is like the roar of the sea. So also in Revelation (10:3; 1:15), where the mighty heavenly Voice is described by both similes. It is, then, unwise to read into "many waters" the idea of many nations (cp. Ps. 18:11,16).

Here the climax of retribution is one of unrelieved gloom, but in later prophecies of the same crisis there is reassurance for the Lord's faithful (8:14; 17:6; 25:4; 26:20,21).

The emphasis on blackness and darkness is difficult to understand in a literal sense, so far as

the primary reference is concerned, but in other places (13:10; 24:23) there is a suggestion of eclipse or mighty storm. But the frequent use of this kind of language in prophecies of the last days suggests that one of the outstanding phenomena at the time of the Lord's coming will be a day of unnatural darkness comparable to the day of the crucifixion, and that these places in Isaiah should be read with reference to it.

Joel describes the day of the Lord as "a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness" (2:2,10; 3:15). Zechariah has similar but more mysterious language: "And it shall come to pass in that day that the light shall not be clear nor dark" (14:6) — does this mean a day of darkness with a manifestation of divine light? The Olivet prophecy, in a passage which certainly refers to the Second Coming, describes "the sun darkened, and the moon not giving its light" (Mt. 24:29). Compare also: Am. 5:18,20; 8:9; Zeph. 1:14-17.

In the LXX, the word "sorrow" becomes *aporia*, perplexity — the very word so effectively used by Jesus in his Olivet prophecy: "on the earth distress caused by Gentiles, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring" (Lk. 21:25). Such details encourage the student to look for a further fulfilment of Isaiah's grim passages.

## Chapter 6

**6:1 "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple."**

Isaiah wrote a chronicle of the reign and achievements of Uzziah, and doubtless much of the record in 2 Chronicles 26 was abstracted from that (see v.22 there).

Here he does not say: "In the first year of Jotham...", because both Jotham and Ahaz reigned as regents whilst Uzziah the leper was still alive. But: "In the year that king Ahaz died" (14:28) is appropriate because *his* regency became kingship. The prophet could have written concerning much of his long prophecy: "In the year that king Hezekiah was going to die, but didn't." In the context of what Isaiah now writes, there is much allusiveness to the startling events which put an effective end to the reign of proud Uzziah:

- a. It is God who is King (v.5; Ps. 48:2), not Uzziah.
- b. And He also is, somewhat remarkably, described as priest, for the word "train" means a high-priest's garment (Ex. 28:33,34); this is appropriate to His later manifestation in Christ who comes "in the glory of his Father" (Mt. 16:27), and is himself described as "a priest upon his throne" (Zech. 6:13).
- c. In contrast to the unseemly self-exaltation of Uzziah, the Lord is "high and lifted up". These are the very words that are used about Christ (Is. 52:13; Jn. 12:38-41,32). But the same words also tell of the utter humiliation of all human pomp that is "high and lifted up" (s.w.w. 2:11,13,14).
- d. There is great earthquake also, for "the posts of the (temple) door are moved at the voice of him that cried," precisely as earthquake rocked and split the temple (according to Josephus) at the time of Uzziah's impious presumption. Amos (9:1) has the same description.
- e. "And the House was filled with smoke," that is, of incense (note the allusion to the altar of incense in verse 6). This too is a reminiscence of Uzziah's attempt to fill the role of priest, burning incense before the Lord (2 Chr. 26:16).

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- f. Isaiah's description of himself as "a man of unclean lips," in other words a leper (Lev. 13:45), is a reminder of the stroke of leprosy very deservedly put upon Uzziah. Isaiah was himself a priest, surely, or he would not have been in the Holy Place to witness this awe-inspiring vision. Nevertheless he confessed his unworthiness and this saved him from the death which mortal men die in the presence of the Glory of the Lord (Lev. 16:13).

In passing, it is worthwhile to note how many of the prophets were priests: Moses, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Samuel, Elijah, Habakkuk, Zechariah, Malachi, Zacharias and John the Baptist. There were probably others.

What is the implication behind the word "also"? — "I saw also — besides other visions revealed to me (2:1)", or "I also — like other prophets, like Amos (9:1) and Micaiah (1 Kgs. 22:19) and David (Ps. 18:6ff) — saw the vision of heavenly glory"? It is important to avoid the assumption that what Isaiah saw was a vision of Christ glorified. This is based on a misreading of John 12:41: "These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him. What Isaiah saw was the glory of the Father, that glory which came to be shared by His Son (Dan. 7:13) and with which he will be endowed when he comes again (Mt. 16:27; 24:30).

But certainly in this context Isaiah "spake of him," for there is the authority of Jesus himself for reading Isaiah 6 as a prophecy with a later Messianic fulfilment. Isaiah has a later impressive allusion to this Shekinah vision: "Thus saith *the high and lofty One*, that inhabiteth eternity, *whose name is Holy*: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also (Isaiah!) that is of a contrite and humble spirit..." (57:15; compare here 2 Cor. 10:5 sww.).

There is probably a designed ambiguity about the word "lifted up", for this reading depends on the Massoretic pointing. It could just as easily, and by the tiniest vowel adjustment, read: "bearing (sin)", which is the very sense in which Jesus used it when he spoke of the Son of man being "lifted up" (Jn. 12:34).

May it be assumed that, accompanying the vision, Isaiah also saw a mighty assembly of angels such as Micaiah and John saw (1 Kgs. 22:19; Rev. 4:1,8; 5:11)? This seems right.

For "his train" LXX and other versions read "his glory filled the temple." But this is precisely what happened at the dedication of both Tabernacle and Temple (Ex. 40:34,35; 1 Kgs. 8:10,11). So here is the implication of a New Temple — but not a building; instead, the whole earth (Land?) is to be filled with the glory of the Lord (as Nu. 14:21 declares). So here is yet another pointer to a greater and more wondrous fulfilment in Messiah's day.

In the first century those who came to appreciate the glory of God in Jesus of Nazareth would recall that priests dedicated to fulfilling the procedures of the Law of Moses were driven out of the Sanctuary by the overpowering presence of the Shekinah Glory!

**6:2,3 "Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."**

Here it is necessary, first, to give some care to identification of the seraphim. Are these divine beings angels? Are they the same as cherubim?

First, then, let it be said that the cherubim are not angels, but are symbols associated with angelic activity and particularly with the chariot of the Lord. It is not for nothing that the rabbis gave Ezekiel ch.1 the title Merkavah. the Chariot (note that that chapter takes the horses of Zech. 6 and Rev. 6 for granted).

Like the cherubim of Rev. 4:6,8, the seraphim have six wings (why only four in Ez. 1:6 has never been explained), and they have the same hymn of praise.

It is possible that what Isaiah saw were cherubim, but that he calls them seraphim because their characteristic cherub faces were covered. But the Biblical associations of the word, and of its corresponding verb, are rather special.

The noun describes the fiery flying serpents of the wilderness (Num. 21:6,8; Is. 30:6; Dt. 8:15), and — at one step removed — the ruthless Assyrian invader (Is. 14:29). The verb very often describes the refining, cleansing fire of God, especially in judgment or retribution. On this, compare how the fire of God features in the Apocalypse. Since the Hebrew language has no less than fourteen words for "burn," it is important to emphasize this specialized meaning.

Thus one is led to consider particular reference to God's angels of evil, those ministering spirits to whom is committed the control of all aspects of evil circumstance, as men see it — those experiences which certainly happen by the will of God but which men of finite judgement would fain do without. Perhaps Psalm 104:4 makes a distinction between these two types of angel: "Who maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flaming fire." And it may be that the seraphim covered their faces in the divine presence because their sphere of operation is the somewhat negative aspect of "evil" which this vision is specially related to.

Kay, easily the finest of all commentators on Isaiah, evidently leaned to this idea. After speaking of the seraphim as "God's instruments inflicting the righteous penalty of sin," he adds: "he whose ministers they were, was in the midst of them, 'high and lifted up', to heal all who looked to him in faith."

It is interesting to note that these ideas may have been carried (by Israelite captives?) to other nations. At Persepolis (Persia) and Gozan (Assyria) human figures with six wings have been found; and the very word seraph has been encountered in Egyptian religious inscriptions.

The picture presented by Isaiah's words is not easy to grasp. The Hebrew means "above it (the temple) or "above Him". But LXX reads "round about Him", and this is certainly the idea in Micaiah's vision of the council in heaven (1 Kgs. 22:19) and in John's apocalyptic vision (Rev. 4:6). There the six-winged living creatures are "in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne." This is mysterious until it is realised that the ark of the covenant, with its cherub figures, was regarded as God's footstool (1 Chr. 28:2). But the ark was shrouded by the veil, with its inwrought cherubim, and by curtains every panel of which had the same kind of figure. Thus the language of Revelation 4 is literal and exact.

If indeed these seraphim were associated with God's dispensation of evil, there is some appropriateness in their faces being covered, for if it had not been for the Fall in Eden their grim work would not be necessary. Again, there is this relevant fact that at the very time when Isaiah saw this vision, the original brazen serpent (seraph) was the centre of idolatrous worship. For this reason seraphim might well hide their faces. Soon it was to be called Nehushtan, "that brass thing," (2 Kgs. 18:4), or maybe "Second Serpent" (Gen.3).

But also the *feet* of the seraphim were covered. Was this to suggest that temporarily they were at rest from their adverse activity (contrast Dan. 10:6 and Rev. 1:15, where imminent action is implied).

However, the seraphim flew, and yet Isaiah did not see them disappear. So perhaps there is here a suggestion of hovering in readiness to do the will of the Almighty — compare the protective hovering of angels at the first Passover (Ex. 12:13; *pasach* means 'to hover or flutter').

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One of these seraphim cried to another, apparently reminding him that their work was not for themselves but for the glory of God, even though it be concerned primarily with a ministry of evil (as Greek *heteros*, LXX, might well imply).

So: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts", this Lord of hosts of angels. Even when bringing hard experience and discipline on His people, even then He is holy. But why the triple form when there are four of these divine creatures offering this hymn of praise? Probably with reference to their faces and their feet and their flying — three different phases of their service. Or, four seraphim each crying "Holy, holy, holy" glorifying God on behalf of all twelve tribes of Israel. "In His temple doth every one speak of His glory" (Ps 29:9) — even as they bring judgment these heavenly servants proclaim the glory of their heavenly Master. Even when this work is afoot, "the whole earth is full of His glory." But regarding the primary reference of this Scripture it is probably correct to read: "the whole Land (of Israel)", that is, both northern and southern kingdoms, even though at this very time an irresistible Assyrian invasion of the north was preparing, or may have already begun.

By and by it will be seen that there is yet further reference here to the glory of Christ.

**6:4 "And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke."**

Isaiah is to be pictured as standing in the Holy Place. The structure which he saw rocking on its foundation was that from which the veil hung. The veil itself took up three-fifths of the 20 cubit space between the walls, and at each side of it there was a 4 cubit door of olive wood (1 Kgs. 6:31,32).

It was an earthquake like that which happened at the moment of king Uzziah's sacrilegious presumption (2 Chr. 26:16), and may have been the shattering act of God which Isaiah himself had already foretold (ch.2). It is tempting to read the details of Amos 9:1 with reference to the same occasion: "I saw the Lord standing upon (Heb. a/,beside) the altar: and he said, Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake..." If this was the same as that which Isaiah experienced, then the two prophets were in the Holy Place together at the time of the morning or evening sacrifice.

The mention of smoke here is really in contrast with the incense of Uzziah, for, combined with earthquake, it signifies the wrath of God against His people: "Then the earth shook and trembled: the foundations also of the hills were moved and shaken, because he was wroth. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured" (Ps. 18:7,8. cp. Ex. 19:18; Dt. 29:20).

There is a close parallel to all this in Rev. 15,16, where there are cherubim and a hymn to the praise of God; the temple is filled with smoke, and the wrath of God is expressed in a violent earthquake (15:1,3,7,8; 16:18,19). It is quite inadequate to recognize these similarities and not go a step further in order to recognize also that as Isaiah 6 had a fulfilment concerning the Land of Israel in the prophet's day and again in the time of Christ, so with the Vials and their prelude.

**6:5 "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."**

What a contrast with the Isaiah of the earlier utterances! He had pronounced six (seven?) vigorous Woes against the spiritual decay of his nation (ch.5), and had added to one denunciation the prayer: "therefore forgive them not" (2:9). But now, in the presence of divine

Glory, he was made aware of his own utter worthlessness — and this on two counts: his own uncleanness before God, and his association with a nation even worse. Like Daniel (ch.9) and Nehemiah (1:6,7) and many other men of God, he had no disposition to dissociate himself from those whom he had been inspired to denounce.

Paul's "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7:24) echoes LXX at this place, and thus encourages the idea that by "the body of this death" he meant his own innate perversion and propensity to evil that belongs to all the race, the universal sin-disease, the law in his members warring against the law of his mind.

Again, LXX establishes the link between Isaiah's "I am undone" and the humiliation of Peter's Pentecost crowd when "they were pricked in their heart" (Acts 2:37).

"Unclean lips" is no allusion to unworthy speech (though indeed it might well have been: 5:19,20), but to moral leprosy — Isaiah and people alike stricken with the incurable sin-disease. The leper was commanded to go with rent clothes, and head bare, and lip covered, as he made his warning cry: "Unclean, unclean!"

(Lev. 13:45). There is too an impressive shape about the Hebrew sentences, for with special emphasis self is pushed to the very end.

When Uzziah was stricken with leprosy in the Holy Place (where Isaiah now was), the priests hustled him out of the Sanctuary, and by their man-handling of him shared his defilement (2 Chr. 26:20), but how the mere sight of the King, the Lord of hosts, the King of Glory (Ps. 24:10) was sufficient to stamp on Isaiah's mind his own desperate need of cleansing.

His confession of this need was the first necessary step: "God, be propitiated to me, *the sinner*" (Lk. 18:13). Such a prayer of understanding has its answer: "This man went down to his house *justified*."

The time was soon to come when, with overpowering majesty, the Glory of the Lord would appear with even more shattering effect to the sinners and hypocrites in Zion, driving them to the confession "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (33:14).

But, happily, there is also to be a time when the Lord "will turn to the people (Israel) a pure lip (*not* a common or universal language, but a cleansing of their unclean lips) that they may all call upon the name of the Lord" (Zeph. 3:9).

**6:6,7 "Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged."**

There was no hope that Isaiah might in some way make himself "clean" before God, for "leprosy" was the incurable disease. So it must be done *for* him. And it was.

But not by the seraph. If holy fire was to be the cleansing agent, could not this "fiery one" fulfil Isaiah's need through contact with himself? To this the Bible's insistent answer is No! the Redeemer of a fallen race must be himself one of the same family: "Verily he taketh not on him the nature of angels...it behoved him (he ought) to be made like unto his brethren..." (Heb. 2:16,17).

So, in symbol, a *live* coal from the altar of burnt offering, where there has been sacrifice of complete self-consecration, now achieves what would otherwise be impossible. The disciple of unclean lips finds "remission of sins" as he drinks from a cup sanctified by the blood of Christ (Mt. 26:28).

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But, even so, an angelic agency was and is necessary in this all-important divine operation. They are "all ministering spirits (yes, even God's angels of evil are this!), sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14). How often has this been *perceptibly* true in the experience of many who found their way into redemption by "accident"!

The live coal of divine fire touching the prophet's lips made him fit to continue in the heavenly Presence. The repetition (in v.7) emphasizes that it was only because of this. "He toucheth the hills (with divine fire), and they smoke" (Ps. 104:32). And the same was true of Isaiah, as the rest of this message abundantly proves.

One is tempted to believe that when Jeremiah's mouth was touched (1:9) it was similarly by a live coal from off the altar.

Thus Isaiah's iniquity was taken away. Devout and willing servant that he was, he nevertheless had iniquity which now was "turned aside", for "every thing that may abide the fire...shall be clean" (Num. 31:23).

Thus "his sin was purged." The verb here is the only hint in this unusual Scripture to suggest that it may have happened on the Day of Atonement. But if so, what a remarkable emphasis that some other better covering of sin was necessary than what that most impressive ritual of the Law provided.

**6:8 "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me."**

There is an echo here of Micaiah's account of a council in heaven (1 Kgs. 22:20). Elsewhere, too, there are hints enough of this idea (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; and also Ps. 89:7; Zech. 14:5, where 'saints' means God's immortal holy ones), so it is not to be written off as poetic imagery. The plural pronoun "us" is not to be juggled with. This is no plural majesty. Yet there is hardly a commentator who can resist the temptation to make a far-flung illogical inference about the doctrine of the Trinity.

It is remarkable that with such limitless heavenly resources at hand (Dt. 33:2; Ps. 68:17; Dan. 7:10; Rev. 5:11), the Almighty should look for an effective human messenger and should *have* to look for such!

Isaiah's reaction to this devastatingly awe-inspiring experience might well have been a shrinking away into silent reluctance. But instead, the declaration of sins forgiven impelled him to a willingness to go as the Lord's messenger, although not knowing whither he went. And so also it should be with all others who experience a like blessing. Can it be that if there were a clearer conviction of forgiveness there would be a greater multitude of zealous witnesses for the Truth of God?

There remains to be settled the tricky question about this heavenly vision: Does it describe Isaiah's first commission as a prophet (see on Jer. 1:6-8 in "Of whom the world was not worthy"), and if so why does it appear here, instead of preceding chapter 1? Or is it to be read as a renewed charge, and if so what was there specially important about 6:9-13 (by contrast with ch. 1-5) to warrant this nearly unique experience?

In view of the signs of dislocation in these early chapters, one is inclined to the first of these explanations. Can it be taken as a touch of modesty on Isaiah's part that he tucks this remarkable passage in here instead of putting it where it really belongs, at the very beginning of this great work?

**6:9,10 "And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."**

Sent to his wayward nation, the bearer of a forbidding message, Isaiah is not only prophet but

also apostle. The reader is not told *how* he fulfilled his commission. Apart from a few details in chapters 7,8 and 39 there is practically nothing to tell how he went about it.

The sequence of ideas up to this point is impressive:

- v.5: The vision of divine glory takes all the spirit out of him: "I am undone."
- v.5: There is confession of utter unworthiness.
- v.7: Confession leads to cleansing..
- v.8: The glad response of a forgiven sinner: "Here am I; send me."
- v.9: The commission: "Go, tell this people."

"This people", a phrase with a scornful or indignant ring about it, had been used to describe Israel in the wilderness — at the episode of the golden calf and the people's murmuring about their daily manna; and Isaiah was to use it often enough in censure of this nation's ungodly spirit (8:6,11,12; 9:16; 28:11,14; 29:13,14).

It is fashionable in some quarters to water down the astringent quality of the message Isaiah had to impart, by suggesting that there was no determinism, no act of God in stopping ears, blinding eyes, and making minds impervious to truth. Instead, so they say, the language here is simply an idiomatic way of declaring beforehand what God knew was bound to be the outcome of the trend into apostasy.

It is true that in some places this is an appropriate approach. For example, Jeremiah was appointed "to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build and to plant" (1:10), yet he did none of these things; he was God's mouthpiece declaring that these events would happen (cp. also Hos. 6:5).

But here the details are too specific to allow for such an idiomatic meaning. Here the words mean strictly what they say:

- a. Where this passage is quoted in John 12, there is the introductory explanation: "Therefore they were *not able to believe* because again Isaiah said..."
- b. "Make the heart of this people fat... " means just that. The Hebrew Hiphil carries the idea: "Cause their heart to be fat..."
- c. "Lest they see with their eyes..." etc. is clearly a divine *prevention*, not just a foretelling of what is bound to happen.
- d. The use Jesus made of these words has the same austere meaning: "Whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables..." (Mt. 13:12-15, where Isaiah's words follow immediately). The Lord chose parables as a medium of instruction because, whilst wonderfully enlightening to those who had the valve of their will set the right way, to the critical and unwilling the parables intensified their spiritual *blindness*.
- e. Deuteronomy 29:4 is revealing: "Yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day." There is an enlightenment which God may impart, or may withhold (as here), or may even prevent (as in Isaiah 6).

Such mysteries are not readily understood. Paul includes this unbelief of Israel as one of the unsearchable judgments of God, one of His ways which are past finding out (Rom. 11:32,33).

It may be taken as certain that this judicial blindness came on Isaiah's contemporaries as a well-deserved judgment, leading on to the tribulation of the Assyrian invasion. But no less

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than five citations of these words, on three separate occasions (Mt. 13:14,15=Mk. 4:12=Lk. 8:10; Jn. 12:39,40; Acts 28:25-27) establish that the words are also to be read as a prophecy of the blindness of Israel concerning the gospel, in the first century and ever since.

"Understand with their heart and turn, and be healed" is clearly alluded to by Paul in the same context: "But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it (their heart) shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away" (2 Cor. 3:15,16). Paul was alluding to the synagogue custom of having a veil drawn across the Testimony, the Ten Words, when the reading of the Law is in progress.

There are a few details about the wording of this part of the prophecy worth commenting on further:

1. In Matthew 13, the quotation follows LXX version precisely.
2. For "perceive not", LXX uses a different word for "see", a word which is often used for a divinely-given insight, a vision.
3. In the Hebrew text the pronouns are singular: "his eyes...his ears...etc." with reference to Israel, the nation.
4. In the phrase: "shut their eyes," the verb is unusual. Here some commentators (with inadequate reason?) read "daub, anoint". But the essential idea is "delight" i.e. they *comfort* their eyes by shutting them against the blaze of heavenly Glory. (No essential contradiction here with a,e, above).
5. "Understand with their heart" is, of course, not to be taken literally. The very common Hebrew idiom puts "heart" for "mind". The emphasis is on man's thinking, not on his emotions. Bible students need to remember this, for the usage (and the error!) is common in both Old and New Testament.
6. LXX and Mt. 13:15 (Gk) follow a sequence of subjunctives with an indicative: "and I *will* heal them." It is a firm promise.
7. In Mk. 4:12 the same phrase reads: "and their sins should be forgiven them." This is actually the Targum paraphrase, adopted here by Jesus as an excellent equivalent of the essential meaning of the Hebrew.
8. The ABCBA structure of verse 10 is worth noting: "heart...ears...eyes... eyes...ears...heart."

**6:11,12 "Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land."**

What did Isaiah's anxious enquiry signify? On the face of it, he meant: "Lord, how long do I go on proclaiming this austere message?" — until at least condign punishment falls on the nation. But it is remarkable that all other examples in the prophets of "How long — ?" seem to mean: 'How long will your judgment last when it comes?' (cp. Jer. 12:4; Dan. 12:6; Zech. 1:12; Ps. 90:13; Rev. 6:10).

The desolation of the northern kingdom came in two main stages. Zebulun and Naphtali were devastated by Tiglath-pileser III, the Hitler of the ancient world, and Samaria was destroyed by Shalmanezar V and Sargon II (the former of these died during the campaign). But Isaiah's message was concerned primarily with Judah, and their turn came in 701 B.C. when the entire country, except Jerusalem itself (1:8), was swamped by the tide of invasion under Sennacherib. In his inscription that evil heart boasted of capturing 46 fortresses, and of dragging away into captivity no less than 200,000 prisoners, a number vastly in excess of those accounted for a century later by the inroads of Nebuchadnezzar.

This desolation is an inescapable feature of the rest of Isaiah's prophecy; but, happily, in the second half of his prophecy, so also is the utterly unexpected return home of this wretched captivity.

This deportation of populations (5:13) was an instrument of empire first invented by Tiglath-pileser (and copied by Hitler). These stricken people of Israel were removed "far away" to Babylon which the Assyrians had lately conquered. But there was also "a great forsaking in the midst of the land" by refugees who fled in all directions, and especially to Egypt (e.g. 19:18). But here LXX reads: "and those places having been forsaken shall be multiplied" (the Hebrew text might just possibly mean this). This, if correct, is an anticipation of the startling restoration which ensued after the cataclysmic destruction of Sennacherib's army.

But though the invaders did these evil things with gusto, here the emphasis is an "act of God" — *"the Lord removed men far away"* (and this because "they removed their heart far from him"; 29:13). The Assyrian was but a tool in God's hand (8:7; 10:5,6). This is a philosophy of history of which men in their cleverness — and especially modern men — have no grasp at all.

**6:13 "But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof."**

The Hebrew of this verse is unpleasantly difficult, as the AV. italics bear witness. But the main idea is clear enough. As Israel's tithe was "holy to the Lord" (Lev. 27:32), so there was to continue in the nation a remnant who were truly His, and from the impending time of tribulation "they shall return" — Shear-jashub. The idea is repeated with a change of figure: Israel, looking like a prosperous well-established tree, will be burnt up, yet nevertheless even if the stump be cut down (NIV), survival will still be possible, for "there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again ... through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant" (Job 14:7-9).

The word translated "cast their leaves" is that which is employed to describe "an abominable branch cast forth" (14:19) and two abominable kings; Jehoakim and Jeconiah, similarly discarded by an angry God (Jer. 22:19,28). The same word is used also for the rubbish gate of the temple (1 Chr. 26:16), and has probably inspired Paul's expression for the "casting away" of Israel (Rom. 11:15).

Nevertheless the "tree" of Israel will survive through the "holy seed" foretold in the next prophecy (7:14), the rod out of the stem of Jesse, the Branch out of his roots (11:1), the Branch of the Lord who will be beautiful and glorious (4:2), the dead Tree of Golgotha a veritable Tree of Life.

This theme of the nation's tribulation and survival constantly recurs in Isaiah. Its primary reference is to the amazing destruction and revival of Judah in Hezekiah's reign. Its more basic meaning is to the casting off of Jewry and an ultimate re-gathering and prosperity through the salvation brought by a rejected Messiah.

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## Chapter 7

**7:1 "And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it."**

One could wish to know fuller details about the historical background to this prophecy. An inscription of Tiglath-pileser mentions both Menahem of Samaria and Rezin of Damascus as paying tribute to Assyria. So evidently at the time of this prophecy, whilst the Assyrian king was busy with fighting to the north and east of his capital, these two vassals rebelled and set about forcing Judah to join an anti-Nineveh confederacy. Refusal meant facing their combined invading armies. Verse 6 shows that they were determined to have a nominee of their own ruling in Jerusalem. 2 Kings 15:37 sets this development in the last year of Jotham. It may be inferred, then, that Ahaz was co-opted to the throne as regent — "in the days of Ahaz" requires such a conclusion. The mention of "the house of David" (v.2) where one could expect explicit reference to king Ahaz, also supports this idea.

This chapter now goes on to make the remarkable prophecy that both Samaria and Damascus would be plundered, and that Assyria (whose "friendship" with Judah was bought by a massive "present"; 2 Kgs. 16:7,8) would turn enemy and overrun Judah, and yet would be broken, the house of David continuing inviolate.

It is important to recognize the shape of the narrative here: verse 1 summarizes the main development and then proceeds to tell its story in greater detail. This is a not uncommon feature of Biblical narrative (e.g. Gen. 14:1; 21:1; 22:1; Ex. 24:1,9; Mt. 10:5).

From the histories (2 Chr. 28:5-15; 2 Kgs. 16:5,6) it is evident that a successful inroad was made by the invaders, but the plan did not come to full fruition. Jerusalem remained uncaptured. (Note RV: "went up to Jerusalem".) The singular verb "could not", either implies two separate campaigns by the two allies, or — more likely — that Pekah was much the weaker of the two partners. The numbers given in Chronicles (28:6,8) appear to have suffered the distortion which is traceable in so many Old Testament figures. The fact that a coup d'etat could be successfully mounted in Israel by a mere fifty Gileadites strongly suggests this (2 Kgs. 15:25).

The phrase: "they (Syria and Israel) could not prevail against it (Jerusalem)" actually quotes the Hebrew text of Num. 22:11 — Balak's intention to rid himself of God's people. But as that purpose came to nought, so also this.

**7:2 "And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind."**

Syria, with a long memory reaching back to the days of David's empire (2 Sam. 8:6), was doubtless glad of a chance to settle old scores by uprooting a dynasty which had now lasted nearly three hundred years. And Ephraim, with a constantly smouldering resentment of Judah's long-established leadership of the twelve tribes (1 Chr. 5:2), now saw an opportunity to turn the tables.

The Hebrew text may mean either that "Syria hath rested on Ephraim" (that is, the Syrian army had already moved south into Israel), or that "Syria has taken the lead over Ephraim" (Pekah having only lately usurped the throne).

The reaction of both king and people was the same — a panicky swithering between alternative policies. How well the figure of the wind-blown trees of the forest describes the vacillating attitudes of this decadent people. Some doubtless said: 'Why not join the confederacy, and with combined strength stand up to growing Assyrian might?' More boldly, some probably advocated: 'Fight the two of them. God is on our side.' Another scheme was to buy Assyrian aid by sending to Nineveh all the treasure that could be spared. This was the policy which had already been followed by Israel before the Syrian alliance developed, and it had been repeatedly denounced in very blunt terms by Hosea (5:13; 8:8,10; 10:5-7). Ahaz must have known this, but even this was the weak, short-sighted scheme that he came to adopt. It is probable that at the time when the events of verses 3-4 developed, the plan outlined in 2 Kgs. 16:7,8 was already being implemented. Why could not Ahaz and his princes — "O house of David" — rest in faith on the great promise God had made to David (2 Sam. 7:12ff) that this royal line would continue? But no! It was conveniently forgotten that the promise also said: "if he (any succeeding son of that line; Ps. 89:30-32) commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men (Is. 10:5,24), and with stripes of the children of men" (2 Sam. 7:14). Ahaz was to learn the hard way.

The two allies launched their attacks separately; Israel made a successful invasion right up to the walls of Jerusalem, took much plunder and many useful hostages, and retired (2 Chr. 28:5ff). And meantime Rezin sent a flying column (round the east side of Ammon and Edom?) to wrest from Judah the control of Elath, the highly important port on the Red Sea (2 Kgs. 16:6).

**7:3 "Then said the Lord unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shear-jashub thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field;"**

There is a problem in the narrating of this incident in the third person. Why does Isaiah not write: "Thus said the Lord unto me..."? In chapter 8 (verses 1-3,11,16-18) he has no qualms about using the pronoun "I" (had he been a twentieth century Christadelphian he would doubtless have dignified himself with the ubiquitous "we"! ). Is it absurd to consider that "the prophetess" may have written this part of the record?

Panicky Ahaz was evidently inspecting what was intended as a major piece of engineering to cover the spring at Gihon and at the same time lead its waters inside the city walls to the foot of a convenient shaft. Such a splendid scheme had not been attempted earlier (not even in the days of Uzziah, the enterprising engineer; 2 Chr. 26:15) because it only became practicable after the great earthquake at the end of his reign. Josephus tells how "before the city, at a place called Eroge (En-Rogel), half the mountain broke off from the rest on the west, and rolled itself four furlongs (this distance is a palpable exaggeration), and stood still at the east mountain, till the roads, as well as the king's gardens, were spoilt by the obstruction" (An. 9.10.4). (See on 2:10-18).

Thanks to the characteristic irresolution of Ahaz the better idea of driving a conduit through the rock to Siloam was let go until the more energetic days of faithful Hezekiah (22:9).

The present encounter between king and prophet took place close to En-Rogel, hard by the main north-south road along the Kidron valley where it passes underneath the steep rock Zoheleth. Here was the fuller's field, that is, the place where new cloth was repeatedly washed in the waters of the spring and then laid out for treading and for drying in the sun. Later, because of the identical sound of

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*keves* (fuller) and *keves* (lamb), this became the place of assembly of sacrificial lambs for the temple — hence the "sheep-gate" (Jn. 5:2) and the mention there of an intermittent water flow.

Ahaz had with him not only the engineers but also princes of the house of David and also the daughter of the high-priest whom he was soon to marry.

Isaiah was bidden to take with him his infant son Shear-jashub that both prophet and child might be a sign to the king, just as the children of Hosea were intended as signs to the nation.

Shear-jashub (meaning: "a remnant shall return") declared the unhappy fact of a nation astray from God, all except the faithful remnant (6:13; 10:21) to which Isaiah's message had already made more than one allusion. But "Shear-jashub" also gave the assurance of both physical return of those soon to go away into captivity (37:31) and of a spiritual revival, with the people turning back to God (Hos. 14:1; Jer. 3:12,14), so that he could turn again to them — which thing actually happened very literally in the more wholesome days of Hezekiah (2 Kgs. 20:11). Isaiah and his little boy would be all the more effective witness as the father comfortably carried his trusting infant in his arms, so that Ahaz might see "how that the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went" (Dt. 1:31). "Underneath are the everlasting arms" (Dt. 33:27; cp. Hos. 11:1,3).

Perhaps also there was special significance in the alternative meaning of *shear*: One's flesh; kith and kin, as though declaring that the "return" foreshadowed would come about through a scion of the royal family, the one whom Isaiah explicitly foretold a few minutes later.

**7:4-6 "And say unto him, Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be faint-hearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah. Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying, Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal:"**

This assurance was given entirely in the spirit of the commandment (Dt. 20:3,4) that in time of battle the army be encouraged by a priestly exhortation to faithful dependence on God (cp. 30:15; 57:20). By all means take all possible precautions (so "take heed" implies), but also relax, "be quiet" — there may be here another of Isaiah's characteristic puns by which he implies: "offer sacrifice."

In describing the invaders there is no lack of contemptuous phrasing. "These two *tails of smoking* firebrands" implies two torches burnt down to their stumps, and now merely smouldering. What a contrast with the "devouring fire" of Jehovah! (5:24; 33:14). More than this, the avoidance of the dual form in Hebrew implies that Syria and Ephraim were not really united. Hadn't they spent long years fighting each other? And even now they were intent on the two separate campaigns, Israel going against Jerusalem whilst Syria made its overland attack on Elath in the deep south.

Immediately after "firebrands", LXX has a markedly different reading which can hardly have been invented: "for when my fierce anger is over, I will heal again." This is what happened — Pekah's invasion met with considerable success, even though there was no direct attack on Jerusalem itself; hostages were taken (the figures of 2 Chr. 28:6,8 are surely distorted!), but thanks to the rebuke and intercession of the prophet Oded (otherwise unknown), they were treated well and sent home again.

Pekah is not referred to by name. Isaiah always calls him, with evident contempt,

the son of Remaliah (=the high mighty one of the Lord!). Menahem, king of Israel, had meekly given fealty to the Assyrians (2 Kgs. 15:19,20), so most probably Pekah had made his easy coup d'etat with a mere fifty men (2 Kgs. 15:25), posing as an anti-Assyria patriot. His reign was to end in national disaster and his own assassination.

Isaiah proceeded to reveal the full plan of the invaders to Ahaz (cp. 2 Kgs. 6:12), and by that very fact told him that his own scheme of an alliance with Assyria (2 Kgs. 16:7) was also fully known to the Lord.

The intention to "vex" Judah may possibly mean "waken it up" that is, to active participation in the alliance. Or "make a breach therein" may carry the idea: "split it in two." The very different LXX reading supports the former of these: "and having conferred with them, we will turn them away to our side." But the intention to replace Ahaz by the son of Tabeal suggests violence such as king-making in Israel normally involved. Had not Baasha, Zimri, Omri, Jehu, Menahem, and Pekah all come to the throne by violence and assassination?

Kay has a particularly interesting suggestion regarding "the son of Tabeal." The name, meaning "God is good", is Aramaic, and is obviously modelled on Tab-rimmon (1 Kgs.15:18). Tabeal was perhaps grandson of Naaman, the godly Syrian general who was healed of his leprosy, and who went back home determined to erect an altar to the God of Israel and to worship Him in the midst of Syrian idolatry (2 Kgs. 5:17). How likely it is that he would have his descendant named "God is good"!

Such a nominee would surely be acceptable to all parties — to Syria, as belonging to an old loyal Damascus family; to Israel as descended from one blessed by Elisha the prophet; and to Judah, as a worshipper of the true God (in contrast to Ahaz and his pagan altars) and as descended from a healed leper (in contrast to Ahaz, the grandson of leprous Uzziah).

But the Law of Moses had explicitly required that "thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shalt choose; one from thy brethren..." (Dt. 17:15).

**7:7-9 "Thus saith the Lord GOD, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin; and within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people. And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."**

Here is an expression of divine contempt for the invaders of His Kingdom. True, there had been times, and there were more to come, when God would use Gentile powers to discipline His wayward people (e.g. v.20; Jer. 27:6), but this was not such: "It shall not stand." These human pyramids will topple. Syria propping up the self-importance of Damascus, and Damascus ministering to the pride of Rezin, were of no consequence. Not a word said about Rezin promoting glory of that not-god Rimmon!

And what good was that other pyramid: Ephraim...Samaria...the son of Remaliah, who was no honour to the God of his fathers?

But let Ahaz learn that in Jerusalem there could be stability: Jehovah...Judah... mount Zion...the house of David — but this only if the house of David were itself stable; and how could that be with a vacillating Ahaz on the throne?

Isaiah read the king's mind, and exposed his weakness in a characteristic play on words: No belief, no relief! If not firm in faith, then not firm in fact! "Ye shall not be

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established", he said, deliberately echoing one of the key words of the great Davidic promise — it comes four times in 2 Samuel 7:12-16, and so also does the divine title, Adonai Jehovah, used here (v. 18-21).

"Not established!" Then there *would* come a divine chastisement (through Ahaz's Assyrian friends), even though Syria and Israel crumpled up.

But embedded in this passage is an interpreter's headache: Ephraim broken, ceasing to be a nation, within 65 years. It is true that Isaiah has other chronological prophecies (16:14; 21:16; 23:17), but it is easy to see that they are different in character from this one, for *long* before 65 years had elapsed, the northern kingdom had been swept away.

Attempts have been made to run this period on to the days of Esarhaddon who brought in the last foreign settlers to take the place of the northern captive tribes (Ezra 4:2), but this would be utterly pointless to stiffen the backbone of Ahaz. Running the period back to the time of Jehu, the first of a line of usurpers, similarly lacks convincingness.

W.A. Wordsworth suggested, with a slight modification of the Hebrew text: "within six, even five years" — that is, five years for Syria, and six for Ephraim: "The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant from Syria" (17:3) — both powers swamped by the rising tide of Assyrian power.

This reading harmonizes tolerably well with the rest of Isaiah 7, especially verses 14,16: "Before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings."

**7:10-13 "Moreover the LORD spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD. And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?"**

The king in his perplexity was being led by Isaiah to seek reassurance: Throw yourself upon God, and He will openly show you that your trust is not misplaced. As likely as not, Ahaz, with his bent for the importation of foreign religions, had already sought for (and had gotten) a sign from some priest of mumbo-jumbo, and it would be the kind of sign which in itself meant nothing (Dt. 13:2 warned against such). "Ask a sign of *the Lord thy God*" was Isaiah's imperative — "in the depth or in the height." What did he mean by this?

Isaiah's later declaration: "Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me" (45:11), suggests something more fundamental than just a startling phenomenon.

John Carter drew attention to a remarkable sequence of Scriptures using this idiom:

"The Almighty shall bless thee with the blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts and the womb" (Gen. 49:25). Jacob's blessing of Joseph, the great prototype of Messiah, is repeated in Moses' blessing of Joseph (Dt. 33:13; and cp. 30:12,13).

"Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it" (Is. 45:8).

"Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind (the Spirit?) in his fists?...what is his name, and what is *his son's name*, if thou canst tell?" (Pr. 30:4).

The suggestion is that here is an idiom of Messiah, the greatest of all blessings God offered to His people. Now, to "the house of David", which had been the subject of a great and abiding promise, is the offer in time of crisis of a special renewal of that promise.

It may be that the prophet's language involved an even more specific figure of speech, for there was (and is) in the temple area a spring of water which percolates through some fissure in the rock to emerge in the Kidron stream, near Gihon. It has been stated that at times of specially copious sacrifice (e.g. Passover), the blood poured out at the base of the altar tinged the waters of Gihon — hence the alternative name: the Virgin's Fountain.

Since the context of this prophecy is "the conduit of the upper pool" (v.3) and the urgent problem of the city's water supply in time of siege, the "height" and "depth" may be with allusion to this temple and Kidron phenomenon, in a similar way to which Jesus harnessed the familiar ceremony of water-pouring at the Feast of Tabernacles (see "Studies in the Gospels", ch. 108; and note 8:6).

Or it may be that by "the height" Isaiah meant God in the temple and by "the depth" he meant She'ol (RVm), the very sign which was given to the next generation in the person of Hezekiah whose disease took him to "the gates of She'ol" (38:10), but who was also lifted up so that he "went up into the house of the Lord the third day" — as fine a type of Messiah as can be found anywhere in the pages of Holy Scripture.

However, the proffered sign was rejected by hypocrite Ahaz. He was already committed to buying the cynical aid of Tiglath-pileser (2 Kgs. 16:7,8). Besides, if he did ask and get his sign, then very soon all the nation would know that he was under a moral obligation to follow the divine directive and by that very means make an enemy of the king of Assyria.

So he cloaked his refusal in false piety, with allusion to Moses' precept: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Dt. 6:16) — a Scripture which clearly meant: You shall not tempt God by disbelieving Him. And the immediate context of it was: "Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you" (v. 14), which sin Ahaz was already dedicated to (2 Kgs. 16:10-16). It is significant that although Isaiah had said: "the Lord thy God", Ahaz said only: "the Lord", making an omission which proclaimed out loud his pathetic faithlessness.

Indignantly the prophet of the Lord addressed himself now not only to the king but to all his entourage: "Hear ye now, O house of David (this is referred to in Mt. 1:20); is it a small thing for you to weary men (who slave away to make this conduit), but will ye weary my God also (by refusing to call him your God and by turning away from His proffered help)?"

But the days were to come when a much more extreme situation led good king Hezekiah to quote in faith the very words of Isaiah on this occasion (2 Chr. 32:7,8 = 7:4 and the Immanuel prophecy of v. 14): "Be not afraid nor dismayed ...with us is the Lord our God, who fainteth not neither is weary" (Is. 40:28).

**7:14 "Therefore the LORD himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."**

For the most part the commentators leave this prophecy in a tangled mess. It is hoped that this discussion may prove to be more lucid. First, it must be acknowledged that this is certainly a prophecy of Messiah's birth.

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The New Testament says so; therefore it is.

But not only a prophecy of Messiah! The immediate context and especially verses 15,16 require some sort of reference also to contemporary events. It was a sign to Ahaz — "shall give *you* a sign" — but if meaning is confined to the Virgin birth, that would be no sign to Ahaz at all.

Also, the much neglected principle has to be taken into account that with hardly any exceptions Messianic prophecies have also a reference to events which have just happened in the prophet's own day or are just about to happen. It is no exaggeration to say that the Bible has literally scores of examples of this characteristic.

With these basic considerations in mind it is necessary to pause and note the arguments which rule out various alternative interpretations.

A great favourite is that Immanuel was another son of Isaiah. The sheet-anchor for this is 8:18: "Behold, I and the sons whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts." Thus Immanuel is classed with Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz. But since the former of these was already born, it becomes necessary to invent for Isaiah a second wife who at that time was still a virgin. Also, as will be shown in the commentary on chapter 8, the "sons" of Isaiah spoken of there are his disciples, and not his natural children. There is also evidence of 8:18 which speaks of Judah as "Immanuel's land", thus implying, as did also the sign to Ahaz and the house of David, that Immanuel was not a son of Isaiah the priest but of Ahaz the king.

The correct view, then, almost certainly, of this Immanuel prophecy is that in the first instance it foretells the birth of Hezekiah, the matchless prototype of Messiah. Against this there is only one argument to be advanced. This will be examined by and by.

In support there are these considerations:

1. The argument from "Immanuel's land" and the sign to Ahaz just mentioned.
2. The fact that every chapter of this prophecy, from chapter 7 onwards right through to chapter 66, readily fits Hezekiah and his times just as easily as it fits the Messiah. From here on, the two-fold application presents little difficulty. Thus, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.
3. The ensuing sequence of passages about the child born to sit on "the throne of David" and to be the "rod out of the stem of Jesse" (9:6; 11:1) fit the preceding prophecy about an Immanuel born to Ahaz as a hand fits its glove.
4. The remarkably similar passage in Micah 4 about a woman in travail (v.9,10), the captivity of God's people in "Babylon" (=Assyria, as can be shown), and the ultimate triumph over invading enemies, is linked (5:2) with the birth of one who is to rule God's people in the Messianic pattern and thwart Assyria's evil intentions (5:4-6). Here the primary reference to Hezekiah is undeniable (as also in Micah 7). So the close resemblance to Isaiah 7 strongly suggests a Hezekiah prototype there.

In passing it may be mentioned that the only alternative to equating the "virgin" with the maiden whom Ahaz was about to marry is to pick up Micah's allusions to "the daughter of Zion" (4:8,10; Is. 37:22). But even thus there may be a real woman who is herself a figure of the holy city.

The only difficulty here, strongly pressed by many commentators, is the chronology, thus: Hezekiah began his reign at the age of 25 (2 Kgs. 18:2), and therefore, since Ahaz reigned 16 years, he was already 9 years old at the beginning

of Ahaz's reign, (aged 20), at the time of Isaiah 7. Acceptance of these figures imparts a high degree of improbability into the record, by having Ahaz beget his son at the age of 10. Since there are signs that in the ancient copies numerals were not written in full but were indicated by letters used with numerical value, it would need only the smallest distortion in the text to make Hezekiah 15 at his accession (and not 25) This would then mean that he was born about the end of the first year of the reign of Ahaz, precisely as has been already inferred from Isaiah 7 and the Syria-Israel threat. It would be natural, too, that Ahaz should marry very soon after coming to the throne.

It is possible to consider 7:14 in greater detail:

The prophet's "Therefore" is forceful, as implying: "because of your faithlessness, Ahaz, the Lord himself will give you a sign" — a happening with special meaning.

The Hebrew word *almah* quite evidently, in all its other Bible occurrences, means a virgin a mature unmarried woman. "It would most naturally be used of a virgin betrothed" (W.A. Wordsworth). And the definite article: "the virgin" suggests one known to the king, very probably actually present: "this virgin", whom the king was shortly to marry: Abijah, the daughter (grand-daughter?) of Zechariah, the high priest (2 Chr. 29:1; 24:20).

The Hebrew verbs: "conceive...bear...shall call..." all have an element of uncertainty about them because of possible differences of pointing. They are best read as futures. LXX and two other ancient versions: "Thou (Ahaz) shall call his name...", thus reinforcing the primary interpretation already suggested. There is no lack of examples in Scripture of a new-born child being named by his father (8:3; Gen. 4:1,25; 21:3; Hos. 1:4; Lk. 1:63) or by mother (Gen. 29:32,33; 30:18,20,23; 1 Sam. 1:20).

The name given, Immanuel, does not mean 'He is God-with-us' (as the churches like to read it), but: 'God is with us' (the faithful remnant; 8:10)! Hezekiah was probably known by this lovely name until the time of his own accession.

It is time now to turn attention to the fitness of this prophecy to the birth of Jesus.

Now, Isaiah's "Behold" is even more appropriate. And as the baby Immanuel was a sign in Ahaz's desperate days, so also the baby Jesus: "This shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes" (Lk. 2:12) — and found in the city of David, as Isaiah's sign and Micah's prophecy both required.

More than this, the Hebrew for "give you a sign" uses the verb *nathan*, thus indirectly intimating that the line of Ahaz, going back to Solomon crowned at *Gihon* (1 Kgs. 1:38) was to be superseded by an Immanuel descended from Nathan, son of David (Lk. 3:31).

It is surely important that the translation: "virgin" (and not "young woman") should find such pointed support from LXX, for its Greek: *parthenos*, put into that translation at least 150 years before Christ, means "a virgin", no other meaning is possible. By contrast the later Greek versions done for the diaspora *after* the time of Christ show their Jewish prejudice by switching to *neanis*, a young woman.

There are, of course, other Old Testament prophecies anticipating the virgin birth of our Lord; e.g. Gen. 3:15; Ps. 22:9; Is. 49:1.

It has been remarked that the word of Gabriel to Mary: "thou shalt conceive *in thy womb*" (Lk. 1:31) has an element of redundancy. Was this to emphasize that it was to be indeed a literal virgin birth; the angel's words were not at all figurative.

"God is with us" is a beautiful idea which runs right through Scripture.

"Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest", God

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promised Jacob (Gen. 28:15)

Moses pleaded for an extension of this promise: "Wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not that thou goest with us?" (Ex. 33:16).

And Israel learned that "the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Josh. 1:9). but hesitating Gideon lacked this confidence: "If the Lord be with us why is all this befallen us?" (Jud. 6:13).

Solomon prayed for this divine presence with Israel (1 Kgs. 8:57). And of course this was specially true in Hezekiah's day: "The Lord was with him, and he prospered whithersoever he went forth" (2 Kgs. 18:7). Accordingly, he exhorted his men: "With him (the Assyrian) is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles" (2 Chr. 32:8; Dt. 20:4).

How emphatically was this true about Immanuel himself! "He that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone, for I do always those things that please him" (Jn. 8:29). True also of those in Christ who please him: "And he shall be with them, walking in the way...the way of holiness (Is. 35:8; see RVm). "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

It is the final consolation: "They shall be his people and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3).

One other allusion, at somewhat greater length. Nicodemus came to Jesus, saying: "No man can do these *signs* except *God be with him*," that is, I recognize that you are the promised Immanuel. So Jesus carried on the allusion: If you would belong to me, then you must have a divine begettal, as I had: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:2,3). And when Jesus died, Nicodemus was marvellously born from above, after the pattern of his Master.

**7:15,16 "Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings."**

These words are usually taken to signify that the Immanuel child would grow up in the country, being reared on the simple fare of country folk. But this is, in itself, too trivial a meaning. Just as "wrapped in swaddling clothes" was a *sign* that the divine child born in Bethlehem truly shared this frail sin-cursed nature of the human race, so also here there is a lovely figurative intimation that he would "feed on rich stores of covenant blessing" (Kay).

To "refuse the evil, and choose the good" means more than knowing what is good to eat. It implies "moral or spiritual reprobation or approval" (Kay). It means a love of God's law which is "sweeter also than honey or the honey comb." And "butter — the clotted cream which ancient Phoenicians may have taught Cornish-men the trick of making — means rich feeding of a special kind: "Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness" (55:2). Even as a new-born babe this child desired the sincere milk of the word, that he might grow thereby (1 Pet. 2:2).

However, there is a problem of translation here. For "that he may know..." (AV, RVm) reads in RV as: "when he knoweth." Does the sentence express cause or effect? In this kind of phrase the most usual meaning of the Hebrew prefix is: This divine food will *lead him on to know* the best course in life to follow.

The later life of Hezekiah showed how true this was of him. And since it is impossible to attribute such outstanding good to the influence of such a worthless father (except by revulsion from an obviously bad example), it is most probable that

Hezekiah had to thank the lasting influence of a good mother.

Who were the two abhorred kings who were to be swept away? The context offers two possibilities — either Rezin and Pekah, now threatening Ahaz's kingdom (v. 4), or the kings of Assyria and Egypt (v.17,18) who were to make Hezekiah's land their battleground. The phrase: "*Before the child shall know...*" seems to point to the former of those evil powers.

But the real value of this passage is in its reference to Jesus. The Law of Moses commanded that a king over God's people should "write him a copy of this law in a book" (Dt. 17:18). And this, doubtless, Jesus — born king of the Jews — did in his early days. The gold brought by wise men would serve to equip him with all the necessary material, and thus through many a patient and laborious hour he would feed on "butter and honey", with the result that "he refused the evil — even when it was presented to him in the form of universal empire (Mt. 4:8); and he chose the good — even when it was surrounded with the horrors of "the hour of darkness" (Mt. 26:42,53) (Kay).

The AV reading suggests identification of the two kings as being Herod the Great and his almost equally evil son Archelaus who were both off the scene before Jesus came to his barmitzvah. But RV points to desolation of the Land of Israel, ruled over by Edomite and Roman. This judgment was already inevitable before ever Jesus came to the final choice which crowned his obedience to the will of heaven.

**7:17-20 "The LORD shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father's house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; even the king of Assyria. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the LORD shall hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. And they shall come, and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys, and in the holes of the rocks, and upon all thorns, and upon all bushes. In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired, namely, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the feet, and it shall also consume the beard."**

The policy followed by Ahaz was to prove more disastrous than anything in the history of the kingdom so far, for his hiring of the Assyrians to save him from other lesser foes was to teach those rapacious empire-builders how very desirable God's Land was, from the point of view of climate, prosperity and strategic position. Thus Sennacherib attempted, and others of his dynasty succeeded, in establishing a domination of the Holy Land which was to be continued by Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Ahaz! this was your bequest to your people!

The king succeeded in sub-dividing his nation into three irreconcilable parties: Those (like Ahaz himself) who favoured a treaty with Nineveh, those eager to lean on Egypt (in spite of Isaiah's later caustic denunciations) and the faithful remnant led by Isaiah and his fellow-prophets.

God's retribution, outlined beforehand in this prophecy, against faithlessness, was to bring both Egypt and Assyria to a mighty quarrel over Immanuel's Land, ravaging it thoroughly in the process.

In earlier times Moses had referred to the power of the Pharaohs throughout Canaan as "the hornet" (Ex. 23:28), because that was a well-recognized symbol of Egypt's royal line. But now, more appropriately, Isaiah speaks of the multitudinous Egyptian armies as the mosquitoes from the delta of the Nile (the rivers). The figure appears to be renewed in a reference to "the land buzzing (or, reverberating) with wings, beyond the rivers of Ethiopia" (18:1).

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And the bee assiduously gathering its honey is a most fitting symbol of the Assyrian marauders dedicated to the gathering of plunder.

These opposing campaigns centred on Judah would leave a land of desolate valleys, thorns and bushes, its people hiding in the holes of the rocks. This, Ahaz, is what your faithless politicking will lead to.

The one to do the most damage would prove to be the Assyrian. His thorough plundering of the Land would be as clean as the action of a keen razor. A necessary part of the purification of a leper was the shaving of all his hair (Lev. 14:9). And had not Isaiah already described the body of Israel as leprous throughout (1:5)? Indeed, this new figure of speech almost spelled out the name of the enemy, for the Hebrew word 'shave' comes close to 'Tiglath'.

**7:21-25 "And it shall come to pass in that day, that a man shall nourish a young cow, and two sheep; And it shall come to pass, for the abundance of milk that they shall give he shall eat butter: for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land. And it shall come to pass in that day, that every place shall be, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, it shall even be for briars and thorns. With arrows and with bows shall men come thither; because all the land shall become briars and thorns. And on all hills that shall be digged with the mattock, there shall not come thither the fear of briars and thorns: but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen, and for the treading of lesser cattle."**

The primary reference here continues to be to the Assyrian invasion in Hezekiah's time. The triple allusion to "briars and thorns" is ominous — a land made desolate by the arrows and bows of these ruthless conquerors. Rich vineyards, normally hired out at a high rental, would be reduced to barrenness.

And yet, quite paradoxically, there is comfort in the prophet's admittedly obscure hints of blessing and prosperity — small flocks and herds producing an astonishing abundance of butter and honey for "everyone that is left", the land digged (LXX: thoroughly ploughed; there shall no fear come thither).

These opposites are readily reconciled once it is recognized that God's promise of deliverance from Sennacherib's hordes was accompanied by the rich sign of a fantastically prosperous Year of Jubilee, which would also include a Jubilee release of the many Jews who were dragged away into servitude by the Assyrians (see 2 Kgs. 19:29-31, and Is. 61:1,3). But that sinister expression: "every one that is left" (1:8; 4:3; 6:12) intimates a considerable loss of life throughout the Land in the course of the bloody campaign.

However, the Immanuel prophecy being echoed in the words "butter and honey", there is good reason to look for a further fulfilment with reference to the times of Messiah; and since in verse 15 that phrase has an evident spiritual meaning, so here also.

In the Last Days, the picture will be essentially the same as it was in Hezekiah's time: the nation tranquil under their divine King; a mighty invasion from the north, only Jerusalem escaping; a tremendous Passover deliverance; the enemy routed; then wonderful peace and unbelievable prosperity.

"In that day" (v.21,23) is the characteristic prophetic phrase (as in 4:1) for reference to the days of Messiah (cp. Zech. 12,13,14).

There is also a clear link with the earlier parable of the vineyard: "a thousand

vines" which will be "laid waste...not pruned nor *digged* (s.w: here only), but...briers and thorns" (5:6). Yet, instead of these, there will be the fir and the myrtle (55:13) with their figure of the rich blessing of God (Is. 49).

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## Chapter 8

**8:1,2 "Moreover the LORD said unto me, Take thee a great roll, and write in it with a man's pen concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz. And I took unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah."**

This placard Isaiah was commanded to write and exhibit was no small insignificant affair, but a "great roll" that would draw plenty of public attention, whether displayed outside the prophet's house or in the temple court. One marvels that commentator after commentator talks about a wooden or metal tablet covered with wax. How could a wax surface stand up to the heat of a Palestine sun? And in any case the Hebrew word definitely implies a *roll*. All its cognates have precisely this idea.

This is by no means the only allusion to writing to be found in Isaiah (v.16; 29:11,18; 30:8; 34:16), and also in the other prophets (Jer. 36:4; 32:14; Hab. 2:2,3).

In this instance the display of a placard was necessary to draw public attention to the special significance of the naming of Isaiah's son when he was born, and also to underline that emphatic witness, when the time came (v. 17) that the prophet would find himself banished from public life. There was to be not only open witness by the scroll, but also a sealed document (v. 16) for a confirmation of the message if it should be challenged in later days (so also in the time of Jeremiah, in his redeeming of worthless property at Anathoth).

The instruction to write "with man's pen" seems pointless until it is realised that the word for "man" describes man in his weakness and feebleness. In this context it must surely mean the brush a poor man would use. The inscription was to be a warning about the desolation and misery war would certainly bring, so the very character of the writing was to suggest something of the same idea.

"Speed-spoil-haste-prey" is truly a strange name for a new baby (cp. 10:6; 42:22; 24:3; Hab. 1:6; where 'that bitter and hasty nation' is another allusion to Assyrian — and not Babylonian — invasion).

First the placard, set in Jerusalem, and then in later days Isaiah's child, a mere toddler, seen with his father in street and temple, were intended as both comfort and warning — comfort in the assurance of retribution on Damascus and Samaria (v.4; the present threat to Jerusalem), but also warning that a like fate was also to overtake Judah (v.7,8) because of blatant unfaithfulness.

The Hebrew prefix is well translated: "Concerning" (though it could also mean "belonging to"), as in the title of Psalm 72, a psalm written in hope with reference to (not, by) Solomon, yet not truly fulfilled in him. So also with the title of the Song of Songs.

Isaiah's poster was made all the more important and significant by being officially or legally attested by prominent witnesses.

Urijah the high priest is spoken of as a faithful witness, so at this time he was a true and godly man, yet later on he was to show himself a weak minion of an idolatrous and evil king when at Ahaz's bidding he removed the brazen altar of burnt offering

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from its proper site in the temple court and installed instead an Assyrian altar which the obsequious king, eager to please Tiglath-pileser, insisted on importing to Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 16:10-16). Some have suggested that, from the first, Urijah was a lackey of the king's and an enemy of Isaiah — remarkable for a man whose name means "Jehovah is my light", with reference to the Shekinah Glory (2:5; 9:2; 10:17).

The other witness, Zechariah, the son of Jeberechiah, was almost certainly Ahaz's father-in-law and grandfather of Hezekiah (2 Chr. 29:1) and, it may be safely assumed, a wholesome influence on that godly king not only through his mother but also personally. His name means: "Jehovah hath remembered", and to this godly memorial Hezekiah made pointed reference in the time of his dire sickness. The remarkable coincidence of the prophet Zechariah carrying the same patronymic 200 years later may perhaps be explained as emphasizing the descent from Jehoiada, the great high priest ("The Blessed") whose administration had saved Judah, in earlier days, from complete spiritual collapse (but there is no strong evidence for this).

**8:3,4 "And I went unto the prophetess: and she conceived, and bare a son, Then said the LORD to me, Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz. For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria."**

It will not do to say that the prophetess is given this title simply because she was Mrs. Prophet. Deborah (Jd. 4:4) and Huldah (2 Chr. 34:22) are each called "prophetess", although apparently not married to a prophet. And in the cases of Hosea, Ezekiel, and Moses (Hos. 1:2; Ez. 24:18; Num. 12:1), the ordinary word "wife" is sufficient.

But if she prophesied, where are her prophecies? Here are one or two facts for consideration:

- a. In 5:1, "my beloved" is masculine, and therefore spoken by a woman, surely.
- b. In 40:9, "O thou that bringest good tidings to Jerusalem" is *feminine* (contrast: "thou (masculine) that bringest good tidings to Zion").
- c. Isaiah 40-66 abounds in references to women and marriage and babies. These details "prove" nothing, but are worth bearing in mind.

Before the birth of the child, people would have opportunity to get familiar with Isaiah's placard and its early sharp impression doubtless faded somewhat. But now the naming of the baby (by his father, for what mother would give her child such a name?), and this probably in the temple at the time of his circumcision and in the presence of his two well-known "godfathers", would again arrest public attention.

Now all the family were prophets. The names of the two boys would steer attention, one to God's care for His faithful remnant, and the other to inevitable affliction of the nation because of its apostasy. Except for Immanuel, no children would be better known in Jerusalem than these two boys, and especially the second, for well before he was two years old and shaping his earliest words, the grim prophecy of his name would begin to be fulfilled in Syria and Israel — and later on in Judah (v.8).

The prophecy seems to require fulfilment regarding the two northern kingdoms at about the same time, before the child reached the age of two. The first Assyrian devastation of Syria ended Rezin's reign (2 Kgs. 16:9), and there must have been a serious but unchronicled plundering of Israel about the same time. This was in

Tiglath-pileser's reign. The complete overthrow of both kingdoms was finally accomplished by Shalmanezar V (2 Kgs. 17:6; 18:9,10).

**8:5-8 "The LORD spake also unto me again, saying, Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son: Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel."**

It looks as though there were divided policies in Jerusalem. Ahaz inclined towards a servile alliance with Assyria (2 Kgs. 16:7,8). Another party (the princes? — men who were to play an evil role in Hezekiah's reign) evidently favoured joining a coalition with Syria and Israel.

Here then — "forasmuch...now therefore behold" — was the main reason for a further emphatic Immanuel pronouncement. God was angry at the double refusal of the gracious Immanuel promise and of the sombre Maher-shalal-hash-baz warning. The word of the Holy One of Israel was despised (5:24). "Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon, therefore this iniquity shall be unto you as a breach ready to fall" (30:12).

"The waters of Shiloah" which were now "refused" were, in a literal sense, the sweet waters of the Virgin's Fountain for which there was evidently a plan to drive a conduit to a spot inside the city wall. This would mean adequate supplies for the defenders, and at the same time would deny this necessary source to a besieging army (2 Chr. 32:4). Two thousand years later, when the Crusaders besieged Jerusalem, this was their experience precisely.

There are signs that in Ahaz's reign such a scheme was begun, and discontinued: the waters which were to emerge within the city at Shiloah (later, Siloam) were "refused".

Isaiah saw this as an impressive figure of how the nation was set on rejecting faith in God and His covenant with the house of David. These are "waters...which go softly", and also invisible, underground, for faith is like that. There is nothing visibly impressive or sensational about it.

By contrast, men find it so much easier to put dependence on "the waters of the River Euphrates, strong and many." So Ahaz made his Assyrian alliance and paid for it.

It is remarkable that hitherto Assyrian expansion seemed deliberately to have kept away from Judah. Even though their tide of aggression had swept as far as the northern tribes, no attempt had been made to swallow up the prosperity centred round Jerusalem. Could this be because Jonah's mission as a prophet of Jehovah was still remembered in Nineveh?

But soon developments would be startling — "Behold!" Syria's Abarna and Pharpar and Israel's Jordan would find their waters lost in the overflowing tide of Euphrates (cp. 17:12,13). But later, in good king Hezekiah's time, "though the waters thereof roar, and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof", there would be a hidden "river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God" (Ps. 46:3,4). Siloam, and what it symbolized, would prove to be Jerusalem's salvation.

That phrase "*the Lord* bringeth up upon them..." insisted that neither politicians

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nor power-drunk dictators were in control, but Jehovah. He was not only "with us", with an ever-watchful eye on Immanuel's land, he was also against them, these powers smaller than Assyria and making immediate threat against Judah.

Even so, this drastic Assyrian discipline would reach Judah also: "he will pass through Judah" might mean: "he will change (his policy) in Judah" (from alliance to hostility, from aloofness to expansion); "he will overflow, and go over (Hebrew text: 'he will hebrew'), — a flood of mighty waters overflowing (28:2) — reaching even to the neck", that is, with only the head (Jerusalem) not swamped. Isaiah had already insisted on this, speaking of "the daughter of Zion ...as a cottage in a vineyard" (1:8). He was to repeat his witness to this (30:28), against all innate probability, and be proved startlingly correct.

The sweeping character of this Assyrian invasion is couched in somewhat unusual terms: "The stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel." The allusion is, remarkably enough (but with complete accuracy) to the "cherubim" which were an essential part of Assyrian religion. Layard unearthed an impressive avenue of these figures leading to the entrance of the temple of Ashur — winged ox-lions, with human faces. The idea was either borrowed from the religion of Israel, or was part of the inheritance of religious ideas which had come down from the Flood, and earlier. The phrase: "all his *glory*" (v.7) strongly supports this idea.

And as the wings of the cherubim filled the full breadth of the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem's temple (2 Chr. 3:11), so now there is the threat of Assyrian "glory" filling Judah from side to side.

Yet the mention of "thy land, O Immanuel" makes clear that the Assyrian would have no right to be there. It even hints that for this, and especially for his pride and despite to the God of Israel, there would yet come retribution — a punishment explicitly promised in 10:11.

God repeatedly declared concerning the Holy Land: "the Land is mine" (Lev. 25:23). Then if that Land is described as Immanuel's, must not that child of promise belong to God's family, and must he not also be the natural heir to the throne, to rule over the Land on God's behalf?

Since the prophecy was obviously to have an immediate fulfilment, must there not be an Immanuel in Isaiah's time as well as in future Messianic days? These expectations could only be fulfilled in Hezekiah, and certainly not in any son of Isaiah's, as not a few commentators maintain.

**8:9,10 "Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us."**

There comes in here a tone of defiance against the confederates coming against Judah. "People" is the usual word for the tribes of Israel and is therefore appropriate to the northern kingdom. "Far countries" is a good phrase to describe Syria, stretching away to the north-east.

"Associate yourselves" is a double meaning word in Hebrew — either "work evil" or "behave like a flock of sheep", the first describing their malign purposes, and the second the motive behind their confederacy, like the sheep bunching together for protection (against Assyria).

"Broken in pieces" foretells (as in 7:8; 9:4) the failure of the plan, contemptuously described as "speaking a speak". It shall not "rise up", i.e. to accomplishment, for "God is with us". The same language is used also against the Assyrians regarding

their later purpose to overrun Judah. They too shall be "broken in pieces", because "the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Ps. 46:7,11).

**8:11,12 "For the LORD spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying, Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid."**

The conjunction: "For", links with the mention of Immanuel: 'Because I — Isaiah — belong to the faithful remnant who put their confidence in God, and not in politics, therefore I am charged to deliver this message.'

There is an implication of a certain unwillingness to take on this onerous, and even dangerous, duty. The word 'instructed' is often associated with chastisement. And "with a strong hand" might even present a picture (figurative, of course) of the Almighty lifting His hand to box the prophet's ear (cp. the use, in 5:25, of the word 'smitten' in a similar context). There is also a marked similarity of phrasing in Ezekiel 3:14 (a *very* reluctant prophet; cp. Ez. 1:3; 8:1; 37:1; Jer. 15:17). It is interesting to note also that "strong hand" anticipates the name of Immanuel-Hezekiah (s.w. 40:10).

The explicit commandment to Isaiah and his faithful disciples is: "Walk not in the way of *this people*." It is the language of divine disgust and reprobation (v.6,11; 6:9). Others clamoured for "a confederacy", but not so the godly remnant. The usual association of this political word is with rebellion against a true ruler — "Treason!"

Syria and Israel were set on rejection of the authority of Assyria, whom they had lately accepted as overlord. Some in Judah proposed joining in this confederacy. Others, and king Ahaz especially, leaned towards confederacy with Assyria, against the northern neighbours. Some, so later developments suggest (19:1; 30:2), wanted a secret alliance with Egypt.

And Isaiah and his godly few were regarded as harbouring treason because they would have none of this political manoeuvring, and instead made "Immanuel" their watchword (v.8). To those who were traitorous to the nation's best interests, this loyalty to God was treason (cp. Jer. 26:8-19).

As in ancient days God's people had been bidden forget their fear of such stout foes as Og, king of Bashan, and the sons of Anak (Dt. 1:29; 31:10), so now once again. But just as the Fear of Isaac was Jehovah (Gen. 31:42), so also "their fear", the fear of Assyria, was the god Ashur. "Fear not their fear, neither be afraid."

But Ahaz did. Whether for superstitious or political reasons he had the altar of Ashur, which had been set up by the invaders at Damascus, copied and installed in the courts of the Lord in Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 16:10-16). So God finally cast him off.

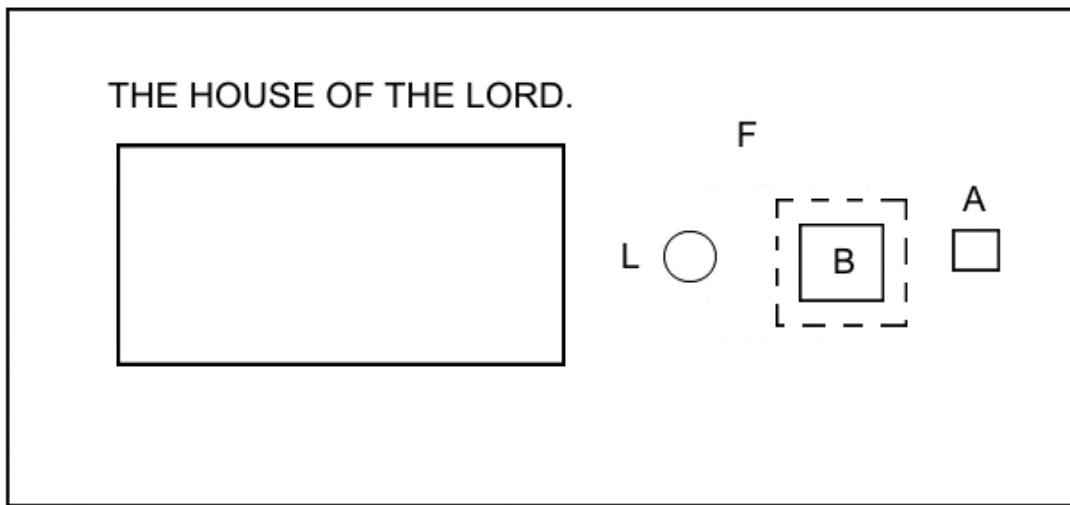
Long centuries later an inspired apostle used the force and power of this Isaiah prophecy to put backbone into persecuted Christians. They faced oppression and worse from brutal Nero and pagan Rome. To save themselves, all that was needed was a trifling religious compromise: 'acknowledge Caesar as a god. Burn a pinch of incense on this altar to his honour, and all will be well!'

But no! counselled Peter. With us is God — we serve Immanuel: "if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts..." (1 Pet. 3:14,15). And those who stood firm came through, for by and by the persecutions died as suddenly as Nero died.

**8:13-15 "Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken and be snared, and be taken."**

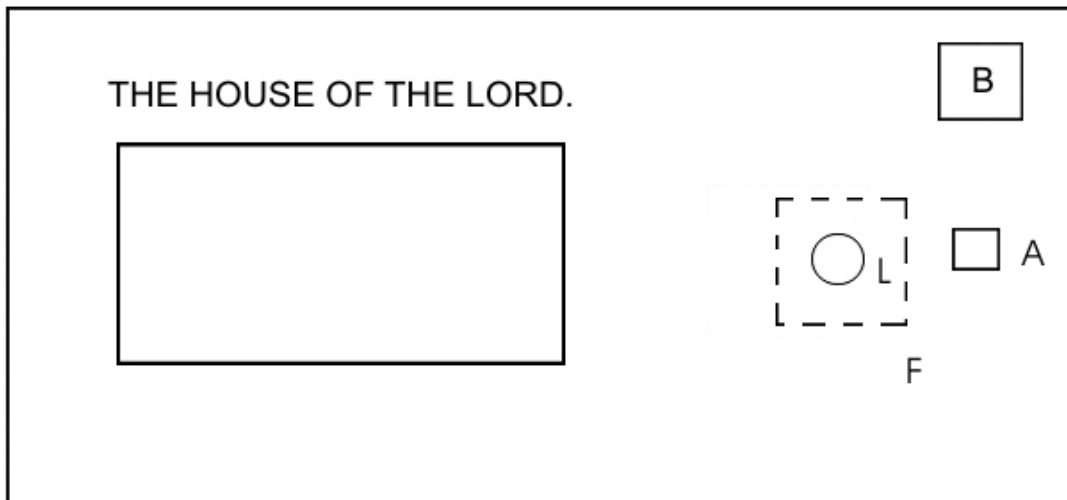
The background to this remarkable passage is the record (2 Kgs. 16:9-16) of how Ahaz's political subservience to Assyria became also a religious subservience. Tiglath-pileser III called a conference at Damascus of various subject kings, and Ahaz, eager to be bolstered up by Assyrian might, and paying heavily for it in tribute, was glad to be there, to show his loyalty and friendship.

This toadying to the authority of the overlord went even further. The altar of Ashur, installed there at Damascus, Ahaz now obsequiously instructed his high-priest Urijah to copy and have set up in Jerusalem in the courts of the Lord. There the long-established arrangement had been on these lines:



But Ahaz immediately found that this new altar, a relatively small one (so the archaeologists now know), was over-shadowed by the large brazen altar of burnt-offering which had stood there since the time of Solomon.

Accordingly he had this true altar moved away to the north side of the temple court. But the solid rock foundation on which the great altar had stood remained as both an eyesore (from Ahaz's point of view) and an obstruction — "a stone of stumbling and rock of offence." So this undesirable arrangement was remedied to some extent by moving the brazen laver on to this rock base. Thus the traditional pattern — sanctuary, laver, altar, all in line — was preserved. But of course Isaiah's faithful remnant would have nothing to do with worship at this pagan altar. They, "sanctifying the Lord of hosts himself", still brought their offerings to the true altar, now thrust aside.



The original rock platform on which the altar of burnt offerings stood formerly was now associated with false worship imported by Ahaz. It was not only a stone of stumbling that people might literally trip over, it was also (religiously) "a gin and an snare" to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, many of whom were "snared and taken" by this garish but worthless religious innovation.

Later (see commentary on 28:16), when Ahaz was dead and Hezekiah's reformation was in full spate, this Assyrian altar was thrown out and the former hallowed arrangement restored in a temple spring-cleaned to the glory of God. The original rock, "a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation", was once again associated with true worship of the true God.

The New Testament's use of this Isaiah passage is quite fascinating and splendidly in harmony with the ideas already expounded.

Paul (in Rom. 9:32) combines the two "stone" passages (8:14 and 28:16) as referring to the same stone: "Behold, I lay in Zion (this is 28:16) a stumbling stone and rock of offence (this is 8:14): and whosoever believeth in him shall not be ashamed (28:16 LXX).

Similarly Peter (in 1 Pet. 2:6,7,8) also identifies the two, and both of them with the stone of Ps. 118:22: "The stone which the builders disallowed is made the head of the corner", a passage which is often misread as meaning the top-most stone of a building or archway. In fact, the word for "corner" is also used for "rulers, governors (19:13; Jud. 20:2; Zech. 10:4), and "head" in the sense of "chief" is also common. And since the word for "stone" suggests "Son" (a common association of ideas in Scripture), there is implicit in this association of prophetic passages reference to a Man who is prominent, yet despised and rejected, and who is also an altar!

Peter has a further allusion to Isaiah 8; "But if you suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you..." (1 Pet. 3:14,15).

The context here is that of the Nero persecution (c. A.D.65), so — very aptly — Peter quotes from a passage in Isaiah which, as will be shown later, was written in the time of persecution of the prophet and his faithful remnant.

It can now be demonstrated that the temple re-organisation demanded by Ahaz provides an admirable type or parable of the rejection of Christ. (And note v. 18: "for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts").

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He, the true altar, was set aside in favour of a false worship. Nevertheless, because of the unbudgeable rock platform on which the altar had been founded, although removed by apostates, he was now still there, literally, a stone of stumbling for men walking across the temple court. So, by a further modification he now became associated with the laver of God's sanctuary — his name was inseparably linked with the cleansing of baptism!

Just as Hezekiah's reformation brought a restoration to the *status a quo*, Christ will yet come to be fully acknowledged as the true altar of God, in a temple cleansed and re-dedicated to Jehovah. There are also other details here worthy of a second look: *How* is one to "sanctify the Lord of hosts"? By believing Him, that is, by faith. The judgment on Moses and Aaron was: "Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore..." (Num. 20:12). Or, in other words, "let him be your fear, and let him be your *dread*." This last word is specially significant, for it is almost indistinguishable from "your Moriah", the altar where Abraham was willing to offer his son, his only son, whom he loved. And it was there where he said: "God will provide himself a lamb, my Son"; and in due time the Lamb was provided, a Son of Abraham. And the altar of burnt-offering referred to here in Isaiah's prophecy was on the very rock where Isaac was bound for sacrifice (Gen. 22:2,8,9; 2 Chr.3:1).

This "altar" is not said to be *in* a sanctuary, but "for a sanctuary", that is, a place of safety like a city of refuge. How remarkable, then that in three Scriptures the *altar* of the Lord is spoken of as though it were a seventh city of refuge (Ex. 21:14; 1 Kgs. 1:50; 2:28).

Again, "rock of offence" carries more than one meaning. "Rock" here does not mean a small stone, as in the name Peter; it means the living rock, solid and massive; it is one of Isaiah's special words for the God of Israel (10:26; 26:4; 30:29). Yet LXX turns this phrase into "rock of death" or "rock of a corpse", thus suggesting an altar as a place of sacrifice, or as implying a *man* who died as a sacrifice!

Commentators often take "both the houses of Israel" to mean the northern and southern kingdoms, but this is inadequate. The dramatis personae in this drama are king Ahaz and the high-priest Urijah. So this sign was a rebuke to both. Kings and priests in Israel were alike to be supplanted by one who is both King and Priest — *and* Altar!

"And many (the word might be 'rabbis!') among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken." Here are five devastating words about the men of the Law. And Jesus used this very Scripture against the men of the Law, and he did so immediately after quoting the prophecy of "the stone which the builders rejected" (Ps. 118:22,23). He then added (from Isaiah); "Whosoever shall fall on that stone shall be broken," following with the sharp contrast provided by the stone of Nebuchadnezzar's image (which is an altar-stone, "cut out without hands", according to Ex. 20:25): "On whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Dan. 2:34,35; Mt. 21:42,44).

**8:16,17 "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait upon the LORD that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him."**

The opening imperative is singular, addressed to whom? Is it God's instruction to Isaiah, or is it Isaiah's instruction to his scribe, as the phrase "my disciple" seems to

suggest? If the former, then: "Bind thou up the testimony" ends what had begun with: "the Lord spake thus unto me with a strong hand" (v.11). Then the prophet adds his own instruction: "Seal the law among my disciples", among those who, in v.18, are called his sons. The word for "testimony" is not identical with that used for the Ten Commandments, and yet mention of "the law" puts this witness of Isaiah's on the same level as Moses.

Since it is "sealed up", the message is not to be immediately understood: "Read this, I pray thee...I cannot, for it is sealed" (29:11). Was not Daniel bidden "shut up the words, seal the book, even to the time of the end"? (Dan. 12:4,9). There is marked contrast here with the earlier message about the two kings of Israel and Syria, and the impending inroads of Assyria. Isaiah wrote primarily for the days when Immanuel (Hezekiah) would be on the throne and the law of God taken seriously. But this "testimony" is also "the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 19:10) — it is about him and his disciples.

In what sense was Isaiah to "wait upon (wait patiently for) the Lord"? Either in seeking more revelation from God, or (as has been suggested) made to go into banishment from Jerusalem, because of the unpopularity of his message. This patient waiting is several times associated with divine revelation or with expectation of its fulfilment: "The Lord will *wait* that he may be gracious unto you...blessed are all they that *wait* for him" (30:18). God waits patiently until the response of His people is right; and His faithful remnant wait and wait for events which do not happen soon enough. How appropriately does the Hebrew language use the same word to describe a fisherman's hook — he too sits and waits patiently until all at once there is the pleasant sudden surprise of a bite.

Habakkuk, Isaiah's contemporary, had to school himself to a like patience: "I will set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me." And he was bidden: "Though it tarry, wait for it" (Hab. 2:1,3). Habakkuk's tower was not literal, but a figure for his spirit of expectation. So also Zephaniah: "Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up..." (3:8). The Lord has prepared great things "for them that wait for him" (Is. 64:4). And to this day "the earnest expectation of the Lord's New Creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19) — the Greek word implies "wait with outstretched neck", such is their eagerness.

"I have waited for thy salvation (from Egypt), O Lord" (Gen. 49:18) declared Jacob, an old man, but he did not live to see it. However, his people "stood still and saw the salvation of God" on the shores of the Red Sea (Ex. 14:13; 15:2). And Jacob's bones, carried into Canaan, will one day be clothed with new life (Gen. 47:30) and with the salvation he longed to see.

There is a marked contrast between Isaiah "looking for him", that is, for the expected additional revelation, and the Lord "hiding his face from the house of Jacob" who have been declared unworthy and apostate. It is the difference between manifestation in a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud, as when Israel came out of Egypt (Ex. 14:20). God was hiding his face from the nation, as has been symbolized by the way in which the faces of the cherubim were covered in the earlier theophany to Isaiah (6:2): "Your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (59:2; Dt. 31:1 7,18; 32:20). Again, what a contrast with the gracious high-priestly blessing: "The Lord cause his face to shine upon you (Num. 6:25,26).

It may be useful here to trace the remarkable parallels between Isaiah himself and the Messiah in whom he took delight. Like the name Jesus, Isaiah means 'the salvation of Jehovah'. And the prophet's experience, as described in chapter 6, is also

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an anticipation of Christ's — he belongs to "a people of unclean lips"; yet, touched by the divine fire he willingly goes about an intensely discouraging task of warning and judgment: "Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy..." — these very words became the prelude to the Lord's campaign of parables. But there was also assurance of a faithful remnant.

And now, in ch.8, the prophet has to leave his followers, at the fiat of an apostate ruler, but also according to the will of God, for he is to "wait upon the Lord." All the wisdom they needed was in the Law and in the Testimony which he personally had bequeathed to them. So there must be no attempt to find comfort in false religions sublimely cocksure that men's spirits are immortal (v. 19). The inspired Word, and that only, could impart an utterly dependable instruction.

Remarkably, Isaiah knew that he and his disciples — "the children whom the Lord hath given me" (v. 18 and Heb. 2:3) — provided a type of far-reaching importance. "Children" (sons) is usually, but quite mistakenly taken to mean Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz. But the context plainly requires the idiomatic usage: "followers", as in the phrase: "sons of the prophets" (and many other places). In Heb. 2:12,13 it is impossible to believe that the Lord's disciples would be referred to as "brethren" and as "children" in adjoining verses. The phrase: "I will look for him" (v.17) is also quoted (from LXX) in Heb. 2:13: "I will put my trust in him." And it is noteworthy that "*Sanctify* the Lord of hosts himself" (v. 13) is echoed in Heb. 2:11: "he that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified."

But without such leads from the New Testament how many would read the gospel of Jesus Christ in these words of Isaiah?

**8:18-20 "Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion. And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter; should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."**

"Behold!" — this opening statement appears to be addressed in imperative fashion to his contemporaries, bidding them remember the divine type which he and his disciples present. The ideas are worked out in Hebrews 2. Plumtre blunders badly here in his comment "How little the writer of that Epistle cared in this and other quotations for the original meaning of the words as determined by the context." Was not Hebrews written against an apostasy of Jews from the divine truth in the Christ, whom Isaiah so aptly pre-figured? The next verse (v. 14) emphasizes that as "the disciples are partakers of flesh and blood, he (their Prophet and Teacher) also himself likewise took part of the same." And the threatened bondage under Assyrian yoke is interpreted (v.15) as a figure of the bondage of the fear of death shrouding all Christ's disciples. In various ways Ezekiel also filled a like role for the benefit of his contemporaries (12:6; 24:24), and so also Joshua the high priest in the time of Zechariah.

Nor was this acted parable a thing of Isaiah's devising. It was "from the Lord of hosts which dwelleth in Zion." Nor need Ahaz, installing a pagan altar in the temple court, and handing over the "separate place" to an Assyrian garrison (2 Chr. 28:21), think that the God of Israel no longer dwelt in Zion, for here was his altar (Is. 28:16); "His fire was (still) in Zion, and His furnace in Jerusalem" (31:5,9).

Isaiah turned now to his faithful remnant, being intent on shoring up their faith

against the false religious practices now become so very fashionable. A craze for spiritualistic séances was sweeping through their world. Assyrians (14:10) and Egyptians alike (19:3) were caught up in it, and God's people (who were always inclined to this religious rubbish; Ps .106:28; Dt. 32:17; 1 Sam. 28:8) were now as bad as any (29:4).

So quite deliberately, Isaiah chose his words so as to warn his followers by mean's of the tragic experience of Saul, the king of such potentialities, who nevertheless failed so badly because he did not let the Lord be his fear and his dread (v. 13). Phrase after phrase looks back to 1 Samuel 28: "familiar spirit...wizards (the knowing ones)...seek...elohim (28:13)...calling out of the ground (LXX)...no morning for them." The plain implication was:

Remember how Saul ended in disaster against the Philistines, and now see Ahaz similarly crash in ruin before his enemies. In seeking instruction and guidance for the living, is there any sense in going to those who are *dead*, or to those who "remain among the graves, and lodge in the monuments" (65:4)?

The positive exhortation to the faithful was: Seek to the old Law, which came through Moses, and to the new dependable revelation made known by Isaiah and his fellow prophets. And this was the kind of answer they were to give to their misguided contemporaries.

The plainest answer of Moses' Law was: "There shall not be found among you...a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord..." Instead, "the Lord thy God will raise up (out of the dead) unto thee a prophet...like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken" (Dt. 18:10,11,15). and accordingly on the morning of Christ's resurrection, angels quoted Isaiah's words: "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" (Lk. 24:5).

Whereas this "sign" (like that of the two sons) had been for the enlightenment (or mystification!) of the wayward nation, for the faithful there was a direct warning: *Not* familiar spirits and wizards, but "the Law and the testimony" (v.16,20). This was to be the touchstone of truth, the slogan of the Lord's remnant, just as in "the day of Midian" (9:4) the indomitable few had cried. "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon."

On the other hand, for those who give themselves to religious perversions and human imaginings "there is no morning light," neither for the Assyrian overlord, "Lucifer, son of the morning" (14:12), nor for Urijah, the weak high priest, falsely called "the Lord is my light." Saul's familiar spirit had meant for him no morning light of hope and success, but only disaster and death. And that is how it is for those who abandon the true hope of resurrection in favour of modern spiritual fatuities.

**8:21,22 "And they shall pass through it, hardly bestead and hungry: and it shall come to pass, that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God, and look upward. And they shall look unto the earth; and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness."**

The fate of faithless Saul, the spirit-seeker, was now foretold for a nation far-gone after the same craze. The judgment brought by God's instrument, the conquering Assyrian, would leave the people roughly handled and desperately hungry through the famine of war. And in their anger with themselves for deserving such a fate they would curse their weak useless king Ahaz and the pagan god he had sought to exalt. More than this, they would curse the brutal Assyrian king and the foreign god he sought to vindicate against Jehovah.

The wretched people would look up to heaven in mute despair and look also to

their ravaged Land (5:30) and find no answer to their clamant needs. Instead, only harrowing perplexity (s.w. Lk. 21:25) and gloom (as in Joel 2:2) as multitudes of captives were driven away into captivity (cp. Dt. 30:1,4). And for those avoiding this fate, only flight and deep distress.

It is clear, from the repetition of the phrasing that 9:1 a belongs to chapter 8: "*But there shall be no gloom to her that was in anguish.*" It is a picture of Jerusalem (feminine in Hebrew), apprehensive of invasion and yet coming through unscathed.

But the rest of 9:1 belongs to what follows. There is the authority for Matthew's quotation (4:14-16) for this dogmatic conclusion.

This grim picture of impending catastrophe, duly fulfilled in Hezekiah's time, will come to life yet again when God's people go through the mill, in what will be the last of such experiences, just before Messiah's coming.

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## Chapter 9

**9:1,2RV "In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time hath he made it glorious, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."**

To Isaiah's contemporaries, the "former time" of contempt for the northern tribes would be the easy over-running of that territory in the first of the Assyrian inroads under Tiglath-pileser III. But now here is a promise, made certain by its emphatic past tense, of a wonderful new era — which duly came about in the incredible days of king Hezekiah when the people rejoiced, at least in part, in spiritual renewal (2 Chr. 30:11) and the re-unification of the twelve tribes. It could be that the "great light" which was seen was the lighting of the great candelabrum in the temple at the unique Passover feast brought about by Hezekiah's enthusiasm. Or it could be the Shekinah Glory which destroyed Sennacherib's army.

Those that "walk in darkness" and that "dwell in the land of the shadow of death" are the poor wretches who were dragged away into captivity by the Assyrians, so the parallelism in Ps. 107:10 explains: "being bound in affliction and iron:" and the next verse says why: "Because they rebelled against the words of God."

These very people were to experience the bright shining of the Glory of the Lord in the amazing and unexpected deliverance which came (in a Year of Jubilee!) when the tables of adversity were turned by the dramatic intervention of an angel of power (37:36).

But Matthew quotes these words (4:14-16) as a prophecy of the ministry of Jesus, an approach which is treated with a vast amount of scepticism by modern critics who are doubtful of even the primary reference and who have no use whatever for further Messianic fulfilment.

Yet in Isaiah Jehovah repeatedly refers to Himself as "the First and the Last" (41:4; 44:6; 48:12), that is, always active, always in control.

So it was to the north, where ignorance was greatest and the darkness most intense, that Jesus came. The sequence of phrases is right:

1. Zebulun and Naphtali.
2. Then, the way of the sea, that is, Capernaum and its environs.

3. Then, east of Galilee (the Decapolis) and the region east of Jordan.
4. The whole of it summed up in "Galilee of the Gentiles".

All this area was "made glorious" by the words and works of the Son of God. Consider: his first thirty years were spent there; his first miracles and most of his preaching were done there; most of his close friends were Galileans; it was in that area where Peter made his great confession; and it was there also where Jesus revealed himself most fully after his resurrection (Mt. 28:7,10,16,19).

The Hebrew word for "shined" normally refers to the Shekinah Glory of God. This very prophecy was alluded to also by Zacharias the priest in his psalm of jubilation: "...whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death" (Lk. 1:78,79). This emphasis on Jesus as the light from God is inescapable in the gospels (Jn. 1:4,5,9; 8:12; 9:5), "a light of the Gentiles," explicitly foretold again and again by Isaiah (42:6; 49:6).

Perhaps also it is possible to infer that in the time of the Messiah's appearing in glory there will be again a special blessing on that northern area of Israel. But first it will become "a land of the shadow of death", by suffering very specially from the ravages of vindictive enemies.

**9:3-5 "Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire."**

Here the past tenses emphasize the certainty of fulfilment of what is certainly a prophecy, for every detail here looks forward to a not very distant future in the reign of Hezekiah (the death of Ahaz is mentioned in 14:28), and also — of course — to a much more remote future concerning Messiah; verses 6,7, require this.

Here, then, is assurance that after the time of gloom and darkness when the fury of Assyrian invasion brought misery to all, the sun of God's favour would shine forth unexpectedly. The people of Israel is referred to here as *goi*, Gentile, either because the majority were so far gone in apostasy or as implying a large number destined for captivity in a Gentile land.

But the "multiplying of the nation and the increase of its joy" (note RV here — certainly correct) anticipates the return of these captives as a result of the great cataclysm overwhelming Sennacherib's army. This marvel of Israel's experience is a prominent feature of "Second" Isaiah. "Thou hast increased the nation, O Lord, thou hast increased the nation: thou art glorified: thou hast removed it far unto all the ends of the Land" (26:15; cp. 49:19; 54:2,3).

The national joy is to be like that which a bumper harvest provokes, and it is "before the Lord" at one of His holy Feasts. That deliverance came at Passover (30:29; 31:5; 26:20,21), and the captives came home to a phenomenal harvest inaugurating a year of Jubilee freedom (2 Kgs. 19:29,30; Is. 61:1,2). Psalm 126, one of Hezekiah's Songs of Degrees has these ideas very clearly expressed (cp. also Is. 25:6).

There is an impressive sequence of harvest thanksgiving songs scattered through the rest of Isaiah. This is the first of a surprising number.

The allusion to "dividing spoils" is also appropriate. Isaiah has a later picture of the plundering of the stricken Assyrian camp by the eager inhabitants of Jerusalem: "Your spoil shall be gathered like the gathering of the caterpillar (young locust): as

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the running to and fro of locusts shall he run upon them" (33:4). "Then is the prey of a great spoil divided; the lame shall take the prey" (33:23).

"The yoke of his burden...the staff of his (Israel's) shoulder...the rod of his oppressor" are all phrases making easily-identified allusion to the weight of an irresistible Assyrian invasion. It was comparable to the ancient bondage in Egypt: "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation...Be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod, shall lift up his staff against thee, *after the manner of Egypt*...in that day his burden shall be taken away from off his shoulder, and his yoke from off his neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing (the new king Hezekiah)" (10:5,24-27). "I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders" (14:25; cp. Nah. 1:13, contemporary).

"Every battle of the warrior" (v.5) is a dubious translation. Apparently the Hebrew has borrowed an Assyrian word to describe the jack-boots of Sennacherib's soldiers. These are plainly shown in more than one Assyrian bas-relief. In this respect also these international bullies of ancient days were the prototypes of Hitler's storm troopers.

All this horror and confusion of war, prophesies Isaiah, "will be for burning and fuel of fire." The Assyrian camp, the cause of all this curse, will itself be "fuel of fire", the fire of the Lord's seraph (37:36) "...the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering and tempest and hailstones. For through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be beaten down, which smote with a rod" (30:30,31). "His princes shall be afraid of the (Lord's) ensign, saith the Lord, whose fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem" (31:9).

Certain Hezekiah psalms present a similar picture: "He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire" (46:9). "There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle" (76:3).

Isaiah's comparison with "the day of Midian" is brief, but eloquent. Many of the details in the account of Gideon's rout of the Midianites (Jud. 6:12) find their counterpart in the wreck of the Assyrian camp:

"They (the invaders) encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth...and left no sustenance for Israel...they came as grasshoppers (locusts) for multitude...they entered into the land to destroy it. And Israel was greatly impoverished."

There was assurance given to the leader: "The Lord is with thee"...you are Immanuel — "go in this thy might" — you are the "Mighty God."

"If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign..." Both Gideon and Hezekiah asked for, and received, a remarkable sign to confirm their faith.

There was a re-instatement of true worship. The tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali were especially appealed to, and they responded. The waters of Harod, and Shiloah (8:6), became the test of faith.

The torches and the shout of Gideon's men — "The sword (*cherev*) of the Lord" — had their counterpart in "the voice of the Lord" and the lighting of His cherubim (*kh'ruv*), for there is fair evidence that the device of Gideon's three hundred was a deliberate imitation of the vivid glory of the cherubim-chariot of the Lord.

However, as already intimated, the real force of Isaiah's words lies in its assurance of the abolition of all the brutalities of modern war with the coming of the Prince of Peace. Yet in the first instance even he will be able to make no progress against the forces of evil in the world until superior divine authority and might have

been brought to bear.

The nation of Israel will be multiplied, and its joy increased only when the yoke and staff and rod of all oppressors have been broken, only when the clever contrivances and brutalities of modern war have all been consigned by the Prince of Peace to "burning and fuel of fire."

Precisely how these things will be achieved is not clearly specified, but if there is any close parallel with the primary fulfilment of this Scripture, it may be surmised that once again the angel of the Lord will go into action (37:36) "with a flame and a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones" (30:30).

In that time the prayer of God's stricken people: "Do unto them as unto the Midianites" (Ps. 83:9) will find its answer from heaven: "I will call for a sword against him through all my mountains, saith the Lord: every man's sword shall be against his brother" (Ez. 38:21).

**9:6,7 "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."**

Here, yet again, the primary reference is to Hezekiah, promised in 7:14, and now born. He is described as wise and exceptionally godly and as one who brings peace to a war-torn country.

"Is born" is a past tense in Hebrew, as though with reference to Hezekiah's birth. "Unto us" (cp. Immanuel) also suggests a fulfilment in Isaiah's day and for the special blessing of his faithful disciples. So also, very pointedly, does the phrase: "from henceforth..." "The government on his shoulder" (*Shechem*) may be intended to imply an extension of influence once again over the northern tribes, as was attempted and partially achieved by Hezekiah (2 Chr. 30:5-11). He also, through his own trust in God made the "Assyrian burden depart from off their shoulders" (14:25), "the yoke of the nation's burden, the staff beating his shoulder" (v.4).

There are also pointed verbal links with a Hezekiah scripture in chapter 22: "government, father, shoulder, David, throne" (22:21-23); but there, in place of "Mighty One" (*Gibbor*) there is "strengthen", making a play on the name Hezekiah.

Lastly on this point, "the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this" is repeated (37:32) in connection with the deliverance from Sennacherib.

But, without any possibility of doubt, the better reference is to Jesus as Messiah. This meaning of the prophecy is majestic.

There is rejoicing in his birth "for us." Compare also: "Lord, thou wilt ordain *peace for us*: for thou hast wrought all our works *for us*." (26:12) — and the next verse concerns "dominion" and "thy name."

The word describing this "child" that is born is the same as that used about Isaiah's own sons, thus emphasizing that "he also himself likewise took part of the same" flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14), and yet he is described as El-Gibbor, the God-Man, who is "given" for us (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 8:32).

"The government on his shoulder" uses the figure of the royal robe fastened at his shoulder, and this because that same shoulder once bore a cross (Jn. 19:17). Now he "upholds all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3).

The word for "government" here (v.6,7) occurs nowhere else. It seems designed to echo the name of Israel, given when Jacob wrestled for his family and, crippled,

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overcame by prayer.

"His name shall be called" is, of course, Bible idiom for: "This is what he will be..."

It is difficult to be sure whether "Wonderful, Counsellor," are two titles or one. The two-fold form of the next three titles suggests the same here. Elsewhere in Isaiah the two terms are practically combined: "The Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel" ((28:29). "...thou hast done wonderful things: thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth" (25:1). And both of these passages are about God Himself, as, apparently, "Mighty God" also is.

Yet taken as separate names "Wonderful, Counsellor" seem to be more meaningful. "Wonderful" is a word very commonly associated with the miraculous. "Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead?...shall thy wonders be known in the dark?" (Ps. 88:10,12). Perhaps it is because Wonderful is the name of an angel appearing to the parents of Samson (Jud. 13:18mg., 19) that here LXX reads: "Angel of great counsel."

"Counsellor" is the title used also by Micah in his Virgin Birth prophecy (4:9). The emphasis in the Scriptures seems to be on Christ's counsel with God (Ps. 16:7; Mk. 1:35; Jn. 6.15). The personal fellowship of the Father and the Son is constantly emphasized in John's gospel (5:19,20; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10). Then who better qualified than Jesus to be Counsellor of his people?

The title "Mighty God" — El Gibbor — has presented problems to some. First, it needs to be recognized that the term El, mighty one, does not necessarily describe the Almighty. In Ez. 31:11 it is applied to Nebuchadnezzar, "the mighty one of the Gentiles." Accordingly Moffat translates: "the Mighty Hero." There are clear links with the neighbouring Messianic prophecies: Immanu-El, the one who is to be filled with "the spirit of *counsel* and *might*" (11:2).

But such details do not necessarily mean that the Messiah *is* God. Such a conclusion ignores the common Bible idiom by which the one who represents God, be he man or angel, is referred to as God. There are many examples of this. (A considerable list is given in "He is risen indeed". pp.73,74).

So there is no need to seek to evade the plain reference of "the mighty God" in 10:21 to the God of Israel. But the Father has given to His Son "the Name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9). He is to be honoured as the father is honoured (Jn. 5:23). "Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended?...what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?" (Pr. 30:4). So it may be that "righteousness from the God of his salvation" (Ps. 24:5,8) may refer to Jesus, "the King of Glory" who will come into the holy city. Similarly, Psalm 45:3,6 addresses Messiah as: "O most mighty...Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever..." (cp. Heb. 1:8).

"Everlasting Father" is a serious headache for Trinitarians, for, taken literally, it proves too much. Does not the creed insist that the persons of the Trinity are not to be confounded? Then how can this be a fitting title of Christ?

Once again there is need to recognize the force of this Biblical idiom. Hezekiah is referred to as "a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (22:21). Joseph declared that "God hath made me a father unto Pharaoh" (Gen. 45:8). Naaman was addressed by his servant as "My father" (2 Kgs. 5:13). Micah's Levite was lured away by the Danites proposing that he be "unto us a father and a priest" (Jud. 18:19). Jabal was "the father of such as dwell in tents", and Jubal "the father of all such, as handle the harp and the organ" (Gen. 4:20,21). Nabonidus is described in a Babylonian inscription as "Father of the land, who has no equal."

Accordingly, LXX translates the phrase: "Father of the age to come". And in this it

is followed by Jerome and other important early fathers, all of them Trinitarians.

"Prince of Peace" is the most straightforward in meaning of these titles. The great prototype is Melchizedek, who is king of peace (Salem) because he is king of righteousness — until he is outshone in this character by Hezekiah, about whom Micah wrote: "And this man shall be our peace when the Assyrian shall come into our land" (5:5). Without the king the nation would have been lost, in the time of Sennacherib. So Isaiah sang this song of praise at his birth. But when the true Prince of Peace was born, it needed a choir of angels: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Lk. 2:14).

Yet elsewhere Isaiah ascribes this surpassing blessing to his covenant God: "Lord, *thou* wilt ordain peace for us" (26:12). The ambiguity is readily resolved, for He is the Cause and His glorious Son is the means.

If the "princedom and peace" of this Prince of Peace are to *increase* without end, two noteworthy conclusions follow. First, there is ruled out the idea of a rebellion at the end of his reign, for that would be anti-climax. And has not Isaiah already prophesied that "they shall learn war no more" (2:4)? Also, this authority is without limit — it takes in not only this world but others, not only man but also angels of every degree (Mt. 28:18; Eph. 1:22).

The echoes of the great promise made to David are very marked: "throne of David, establish, for ever" (cp. Ez. 37:25).

Fulfilment is certain and sure, guaranteed by the jealousy of the Lord of hosts which in times past has operated against His people (Dt. 4:24), but which will now vindicate them as well as His own name (37:32).

**9:8-10 "The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel. And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria, that say in the pride and stoutness of heart, The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycomores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars."**

There seem to be two ways in which this part of ch.9 (v.8-21) can be read.

The usual approach is to take it as a prophecy spoken by Isaiah personally against the northern kingdom — and in that case it supports the theory that the prophet fled north for refuge from the hostility of Ahaz. The Manasseh-Ephraim references in v.21 fit this idea. So also does the picture (in v.9-12) of Israel fighting against enemies to the north and south.

On the other hand, the prophecy may be addressed to refugees from Israel now planning with Ahaz to annex the weakened northern kingdom and so restore the ancient glories of Solomon's time. Later (see 2 Chr. 30:5-11) Hezekiah was to attempt a different and better method, and to come near to succeeding.

"All the people" (v.9) usually means the entire nation — Israel and Judah — and might provide support for the second of these suggestions. But not necessarily, for even if spoken only to Israel, it could still provide (as in 19:12 and Num. 14:34) a plain lesson ("they shall know") to all the twelve tribes.

The opening phrases almost speak of the Lord as a personal force going into action against His people. So also in not a few other places: "He will bring evil, and will not call back his words..." (31:2). My word...shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (55:11; cp. Ps. 107:20; 147:15). It is a word sometimes spoken of as irreversible (Gen. 27:33d; Num. 22:6c); yet this is not always the case.

There was evidently a tremendous spirit of self-confidence in Israel — "pride and stoutness of heart" — which in no way sprang from confidence in the God of their

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fathers. Rezin, Israel's former ally, was soon to be slain by his Assyrian enemy (2 Kgs. 16:9) and a puppet king Hoshea set in his place. But these men of Israel blithely shrugged off the discouragement. Looking back to the great days of Omri and Jeroboam II, they optimistically looked past present calamity ("the bricks are fallen") to a renewed prosperity which they would achieve by their own efforts — "we will build with hewn stones." The sycamores (commonplace fig trees, apt symbols of the nation) are cut down, but we will change them into cedars (such as Solomon gloried in)". They never stopped to ask themselves what good cedars might be before the Lord's devouring fire (Dt. 4:24).

Here LXX reads: "we will build us a tower." And since the next verse (v.11) foretells invasion from Syria, which had been a friend until recently, it becomes an interesting possibility that Jesus quarried two of his parables from this Old Testament Scripture — the man building a tower, and the king unable to make successful war against his stronger adversary (Lk. 14:28-32).

**9:11,12 "Therefore the LORD shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and join his enemies together; The Syrians before, and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with open mouth. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still."**

Isaiah's "Therefore" tells his reader that such a judgment is inevitable as the due retribution for the cocky self-confidence displayed by the men of Israel. And the Hebrew past tenses (not futures, as in the AV) emphasize just how inevitable the punishment is. Since "the adversaries of Rezin" are called also "the Syrians" one is led to infer a coup d'état in that country, leading to a switch from alliance with Israel to hostility against it.

Thus Israel was to find itself beset by Syrians coming in from the east (Am. 1:3; and not the north, as might seem geographically more likely), and by Philistines coming up the coastal plain and attacking from the west.

Nor was this to be the end of Israel's judgment. God's anger would not be so lightly turned away, but with His hand still stretched out against the northern tribes, He would continue to punish.

Following a remarkably small change in the Hebrew text, LXX has "the adversaries of the mountain of Zion" as another way of describing the Syrians who had earlier joined in the aggression against Judah, being used then as part of God's punitive measure against faithless Ahaz.

**9:13-16 "For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the LORD of hosts. Therefore the LORD will cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush, in one day. The ancient and honourable, he is the head, and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail. For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed."**

These men of northern Israel neither gave due honour to Jehovah nor were they willing to consider that the piling up of "misfortune" against them was His work. So His hand was stretched out still, to cut off "the head and the tail", that is, the leading men of wide experience in politics and the false prophets teaching religious lies (29:10; Jer. 14:14; Hab. 2:18). It is the figure of an animal that has lost all its natural powers to take care of itself. Its normal instincts seem to be useless.

Then the figure changes. Palm branch which normally waves itself proudly on

high, and bulrush which bows humbly and unnoticed by a stagnant pool — the proud and the humble are alike to be destroyed "in one day" (10:17). The Hebrew word means "swallowed up", just as Korah and his propaganda-blinded colleagues plunged into the bowels of the earth (s.w. Num. 16:30), so also the capacious maw of Assyrian aggrandisement would digest this people, politically and religiously corrupt.

**9:17 "Therefore the Lord shall have no joy in their young men, neither shall have mercy on their fatherless and widows; for every one is an hypocrite and an evildoer, and every mouth speaketh folly. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still."**

This part of God's nation was so estranged that He could neither join in their joy, as at the coming-of-age of their fine young men, nor share their miseries, not even of orphans and widows, those for whom His own Law expressed special concern (Dt. 10:18; Ps. 68:5). No mercy! No comfort! It is the renewed message of Hosea's Lo-Ruhamah (1:6). And this for the evident reason that a tradition of godlessness and vice had taken hold of all segments of society. "Every mouth speaketh folly" — it is a word often used specifically of sexual perversion. What could God hope to achieve with such a nation as this?

Isaiah taking this strong message with him into Galilee was bound to make himself as unpopular there as he already was in Jerusalem. But the word went forth nevertheless. And it may be surmised that it was not wholly without effect. The way was being prepared for a faithful remnant to respond in a few years' time to Hezekiah's warm appeal to join in a great renewed Passover feast.

**9:18,19 "For wickedness burneth as the fire: it shall devour the briers and thorns, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forest, and they shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke. Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts is the land darkened, and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire: no man shall spare his brother."**

What a vivid figure Isaiah here weaves into his picture of judgment! It is the wickedness of Israel which is to set their land and their civilization on fire (cp. Judah also: 1:31; 33:12). It is, of course, the fire of war (as in Num. 21:28).

There is the alternative possibility that the metonymy "wickedness" here stands for "the punishment for their wickedness", in the same way that "iniquity" also means, in some places, "punishment for iniquity", as in Gen. 4:13 (see RV mg.).

In the light of verse 21 — Ephraim, Manasseh — there is something very appropriate about this imagery for in those days the two main forests (which have long since disappeared) were in Ephraim (Josh. 17:15) and Manasseh (2 Sam. 18:6,8 — east of Jordan).

The flames of war would devour the worthless among the men of Israel, here called "briers and thorns" (such as exist also in the New Israel; Heb. 6:8). And as a forest fire shrouds an entire countryside in a pall of darkness, so would this judgment leave these northern tribes miserable under a cloud of divine anger.

**9:20,21 "And he shall snatch on the right hand, and be hungry: and he shall eat on the left hand, and they shall not be satisfied: they shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm: Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh: and they together shall be against Judah. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still."**

Here for right hand and left should probably be read south and north. Hostility from east and west (v.12), and no aid from the other points of the compass. Worse

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still, there was almost no cohesion among these northern tribes, as the constant feuding and frequent coups d'état mentioned in their history show only too well. Three out of the four kings preceding Pekah died by violence.

A very slight emendation would give the more coherent reading: "they eat every man the flesh of his neighbour", Ephraim and Manasseh illustrated this perfectly. Both of them blessed by Jacob (Gen. 48:16), and they were ready to curse each other from the period of the Judges (8:1; 12:1), and now are both cursed on God's behalf by Isaiah. Mutual antagonisms cancelled out all natural efficiency. It happened again in A.D. 70 when factions within Jerusalem made the impossible task of Titus a tolerably easy one. Neither does the New Israel learn the lesson, but has been prepared to waste a century of God-given time and energy on internal disruption.

Or, since the words for "arm" and "seed" are almost identical (see 53:1,2), is there here an allusion to the curse of Dt. 28:53, where it is foretold that the people would be reduced to eating their own children?

Now the nation's only unanimity was against Judah. Thus they anticipated Arab quarrelsomeness and Arab-unifying hatred-of-Jews in this twentieth century. Probably this rooted dislike of Judah had been intensified by signs that Ahaz was scheming to use the Assyrians to help him gain control of Israel. Apparently he had accepted an Assyrian garrison in Jerusalem, and had actually quartered it in the temple (2 Chr. 28:21. Heb, hence 29:16).

It was a period when all sense of moral decency and social responsibility had disintegrated. It was a chaotic era such as the twentieth century has already achieved in modern Israel, where there has come about an unhappy fragmentation in politics, economics and religion, and an exacerbation of social spirit such as would dismay utterly the idealism of the early Zionists. Both then and now the best comfort is in Isaiah's superbly eloquent promise of a Prince of Peace sitting on David's throne (v.6,7). But modern Israel wants none of it.

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## Chapter 10

**10:1,2 "Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless!"**

This paragraph begins like the Woes in 5:8-24. suggesting that it belongs with them as denunciations of Judah. But the concluding refrain (v.4b) continues the anti-Israel judgments in 9:8-21 (and 5:25). Perhaps this unexpected phenomenon is intended to imply that this expose of national injustice applies equally well to both northern and southern kingdoms. Already Isaiah has had plenty to say about social inequality (3:14,15; 5:7,23).

Now especially he denounces the cynical establishing of case-made laws perpetuating unjust decisions — "those who issue oppressive decrees" (NIV). In the days of Jesus corrupt scribes were happy to be in league with the rich, out of self-interest. In Israel this was a constant temptation besetting men of influence, and their yielding to it was a cancer in the life of the nation.

"Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow" declared Moses' law (Dt. 27:19). And all the people gave their Amen; but

the evil persisted nevertheless (Is. 1:23; 29:21c; Am. 5:12).

So those ominous words: "spoil, prey" were turned back on those who practised such evils (10:6; 8:1), *Their* fatherless and widows were to feel the hand of God-sent retribution.

What a contrast this picture is with the One whom Isaiah was to promise, One who would "not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth" (11:3,4).

**10:3,4 "And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? to whom will ye flee for help? and where will ye leave your glory? Without me they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still."**

These unjust law-makers are now called to account by the Judge of the nation. And the "visitation" will be by Ahaz's mighty ally the Assyrian, coming "from far" (v.5; 5:26). There will be desolation (*sho'ah*) instead of Y'snuah, the Messiah. Instead of Immanuel, they will be "without Me."

To whom then, in the day when their sin is visited upon them, will they look for help? "Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted?...Let *them* rise up and help you, and be your protection" (Dt. 32:37,38).

And in their flight from irresistible danger, where could they forsake their "glory", that is, their idols? A battered inscription by Tiglath-pileser boasting about his invasion of the land of Beth-Omri (Israel) includes this: "The gods of their land counted as plunder."

The phrases about "bowing down under the prisoners" and "falling under the slain" are difficult. In Hebrew "prisoners" sounds very much like "Assyrian" — a picture perhaps of Ahaz cringing before Tiglath at Damascus; and for "slain" it is easy to read "slayers". Others turn "under" into "among", but this is not a natural reading of the Hebrew word.

The refrain: "his hand is stretched out still" now takes on a more specific and sinister meaning, for the next verse speaks of the Assyrian as "the rod of mine anger" — as also in 14:26: "this (Assyrian invasion; v.25) is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nation."

It is significant that Jesus should appropriate the key-words here: "visitation, desolation" (Lk. 19:44; Mt. 23:38) in his warnings of coming judgment on his people because of their rejection of Immanuel. Then the "Assyrian" was the might of Rome. Who will it be when yet another visitation of judgment descends on these "children in whom is no faith"?

**10:5,6 "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets."**

Archaeologists have drawn attention to the fact that on the bas-reliefs, Assyrian kings are represented as holding a short truncheon, the sign of their authority. But now throughout this section of the prophecy (v.5-27) the great Sennacherib is foretold as being the instrument in *God's* hand. He is "the rod of God's anger" which is "not yet turned away, but is stretched out still" (v.4). "I will send him.../ give him a charge..." (29:3). Nevertheless, God's faithful remnant may remain a people

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without fear: "O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of this Assyrian..." (v.24) for his oppression shall only be "after the manner of Egypt". For "through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be beaten down, that smote with a rod" (30:31).

The remarkable similarity between this passage (v.5-11) and 2 Kgs. 19:20-37 (together with other indications) makes it likely that, through the renegade Rabshakeh, Sennacherib actually knew the tenor of this and other prophecies Isaiah had spoken in Jerusalem (see H.Gt. ch. 13,14). Why else should the Assyrian use the self-confident argument: "Am I now come up without the Lord against this land to destroy it? The Lord saith unto me, Go up against this land, and destroy it" (36:10)?

The idea of God being the wielder of this Assyrian axe (v. 15) is one that is familiar right through the prophets. It is the Almighty, and not dictators and demagogues, who guides international politics, especially in relation to His ancient people. This provides a philosophy of history superior to any alternative that the scholars can come up with. Didn't H.A.L. Fisher say: "The one thing to be learned from history is that nothing is learned from history"?

Here are some examples of the Biblical emphasis:

Nehemiah's prayer mentions "the kings which Thou hast set over us" (9:37).

"Lo, I raise up the Chaldeans..." (Hab. 1:6). And this assessment Habakkuk accepted: "O Lord, Thou hast ordained them for judgment" (1:12).

So also Jeremiah repeatedly: "I will prepare destruction against thee (Israel)" (22:7). "I will send and take...Nebuchadnezzar my servant against this land" (25:9; and cp. 5:15; 34:22; 51:20). Ez. 29:18-20 is specially eloquent on this theme.

The Psalmist refers to "the wicked which is Thy sword" (17:13).

"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord: as rivers of water he turneth it whithersoever He will" (Pr. 21:1).

And in his parable did not Jesus foretell: "The King sent forth his (Roman) armies, and burnt up their city (Jerusalem)"? (Mt. 22:7);

Now, in Isaiah's day, Judah was become "a hypocritical nation," that is, living a double religious life. And accordingly the prophet uses the Hebrew word which describes a *Gentile* people — *goi*. In a mere three letters God made strong reprobation.

In due time (it took some years) there would come a "treading down, as the mire in the streets."

**10:7-11 "Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. For he saith, Are not my princes altogether kings? Is not Calno as Carchemish? is not Hamath as Arpad? is not Samaria as Damascus? As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?"**

The Assyrian king did not at all see himself as a tool in the hand of Jehovah. He had his own empire-building plan, and he would work it out in *his* way. Indeed the policy of uprooting conquered peoples was first invented by Tiglath-pileser III, and was to be imitated with vastly greater efficiency in modern times by Hitler.

In his plan for a mighty empire this Assyrian also set the pattern for Napoleon by making his princes and generals into subsidiary kings in conquered territories: "Are

not my princes altogether kings?' Hosea refers to him as "the king of princes" (8:10). Events in Hezekiah's reign and again in the time of Daniel, were to demonstrate that Jehovah, and He only, is the "King of kings" (Dan. 2:37).

The catalogue of conquered cities and states boastfully listed here is perhaps to be read not as an awe-inspiring list of conquests already made but rather as a prophecy of Sennacherib's bragging when he came to attempt the toughest target of his military career — the capture of Jerusalem, for there is marvellous resemblance to the propaganda war waged by Rabshakeh outside the wall of the holy city (37:10-13; 36:19,20).

Carchemish was a tremendously important commercial city on the banks of the upper Euphrates. Hamath was a strong city of Lebanon conquered by Jeroboam II and at this time ruled by a certain Ya'u-bidi (servant of Jehovah), who was probably Jeroboam's nominee. Hamath and Arpad appear to have been almost twin cities, for they are three times mentioned together.

The allusion to Calno reads very differently in the LXX version: "He shall say, Did not I take the country above Babel, and Calneh where the tower was built?". This appears to be an allusion to the tower of Babel, close to Babylon, then an ancient ruin and later restored by Nebuchadnezzar.

"Is not Samaria as Damascus?" was true in Ahaz's reign only in the sense that both cities had then come under the domination of Assyria — the last king of Israel, Hoshea, was an Assyrian puppet. But when, later on, Sennacherib came against Jerusalem these words would have much more force, for then, after rebellion and a three-year siege Samaria had been captured and plundered.

"My hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols", that is, weak, unsupported by their gods, and unable to resist. It is the figure, repeated in greater detail in verse 14, of a man seeking out and plundering the nest of a helpless bird. In these other kingdoms there were graven images, exceeding in splendour the graven images which were certainly to be found (in Ahaz's time) in Jerusalem as well as Samaria, yet they availed nothing. And, by this copying of the Assyrian altar which he had found installed in Damascus, had not Ahaz already conceded that Ashur was a greater god than Jehovah? (2 Chr.28:3).

There is heavy sarcasm in the jibe: "Shall I not do (so) to Jerusalem and *her idols?*", that is, those introduced by Ahaz: 'He has copied the altar of *my* god, but is it likely that *my* god will help *him* against *me?*'

When the Assyrian campaigns came to their climax in the attempt to take Jerusalem, a very considerable element in the propaganda was centred around Sennacherib's determination to vindicate his own deity against the Name and might of Jehovah (36:18,19; 37:10; see H.Gt., p.61f).

Yet there is a strange irony in one of Hosea's contemporary references to "the calves of Bethaven (the golden calf installed at Dan and Bethel)...for the glory is departed from it (from Bethaven), It shall also be carried unto Assyria for a present to king Cantankerous" (10:6; this last is an obvious nickname for the Assyrian king). The implication here is that the substitute cherubim which Jeroboam I had set up became in Nineveh the prototypes of the massive Assyrian "cherubim", a great processional avenue of which were disinterred from the ruins of Nineveh by Layard. It looks as though Ahaz's pathetic attempt to adopt the religion of his overlord was balanced by a similar Assyrian syncretism.

**10:12 "Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks."**

God's "whole work" in His holy city was the seeking of holiness. But the people there thought of it as a dramatic deliverance which was to be theirs by right: "Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it" (5:19); whereas, in fact it was to be the rebuke of the stout heart of the men of Judah by means of the stout heart of the king of Assyria. The particular mention here of "mount Zion" stresses that God sought a real religious repentance in His people, such as Hezekiah was to seek (2 Chr. 31) and only achieve in part.

There is an admirable double meaning about the word for "*perfect* his whole work". It means not only the completion of a transaction but also the clearing of a profit in the process. In recent times God has found little of profit in His wayward nation.

There is a strange change of pronoun in the middle of this verse, for which there seems to be no obvious reason. LXX has "he, his" throughout. But if the received text reading is not correct, it is difficult to see how it came about.

"The fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria" (described in boastful aggressive terms in 14:13) was cruelty, lust of empire, and a vile blasphemy against Jehovah. "The glory of the lifting up of his eyes" may possibly refer to the god to whom the Assyrian lifted up his eyes (but 2:11 does have the meaning of "pride").

It is interesting to note that this divine action against the enemy was only to operate when God's work on mount Zion — the nation's change of heart — was first of all accomplished. It is another useful example of how fulfilment of God's purposes waits on the right disposition in the hearts of His people (Num. 14:29-31).

The principle is an important one; for will it not hold good also in the last days, that there will be divine judgment against the northern invader of that time only when God's work of changing obdurate hearts in Israel has been accomplished? (T.E. ch.2).

**10:13,14 "For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man: And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped."**

There are distinct echoes of what the bombastic Assyrians actually did say. "By the strength of my hand..." is a characteristic phrase in their inscriptions. "My hand hath found as a nest..." comes near to being a quotation from the annals of Sargon II. And, "I have put down the inhabitants *like a valiant man*" uses an ambiguous expression which might mean "Mighty God" or "bull", both being appropriate to the Assyrian bull-calf figures of deity. "I have removed the bounds of the peoples" describes the policy, first devised by Tiglath-pileser, of deporting the populations of conquered countries. Yet it was Jehovah who "set the bounds of the peoples" (Dt. 32:8). In both places the word describes specially the tribes of Israel. Then what right had these swashbuckling warriors to "gather all the Land" (cp. 13:5) "as one gathereth eggs that are left." There is a picture here of the mother bird deserting its nest (LXX: *nossia*) "not moving wing or chirping" against the plunderer. This figure of speech is the nearest that can be found in the Old Testa-

ment to the lovely contrast in the words of Jesus: "How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood (*nossos*) under her wings..." (Lk. 13:34).

**10:15 "Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood."**

Already Isaiah has abundantly emphasized that the Assyrian was "the scourge of God". In one figure after another this was made plain: "the bee", with its sting (7:18), the "razor that is hired" (7:20), "the waters of the River, strong and many" (8:7); and now the axe or saw or staff or club wielded by God against His own recalcitrant people. But the Assyrians' lust for power was limitless, whereas the character of God did set a limit to this retribution, So now, beforehand, Isaiah prophesies the invader's unbridled ambition and cruelty — "the axe boasting against him that heweth therewith...the rod shaking itself against *them* (the angels of heaven) who lift it up...the club brandishing Him who is not-wood." Is the tail to wag the dog?

In later days the prophet was to employ a similar though less dramatic figure about his own nation: "Shall the work (of the potter) say of Him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of Him that framed it, He had no understanding?" (29:16; and cp. 45:9).

But the self-conceit and atheism of men knows no limit.

**10:16-19 "Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire. And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briars in one day;" And shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body; and they shall be as when a standard-bearer fainteth. And the rest of the trees of his forest shall be few, that a child may write them."**

The context of this paragraph, both before and after, seems to require reference to a mighty expression of God's wrath against Assyrian boasting and savagery. But, remarkably, nearly every expression in these verses is used elsewhere by Isaiah in passages which threaten judgment against God's own faithless people. The pile-up of the verbal parallels is most impressive as well as unexpected.

Then can it be that these words were originally spoken against Judah, but then, because of their remarkable appropriateness to God's coming judgment on Assyrian pride, Isaiah inserted them here to emphasize their second truth? It is this meaning especially which will receive chief attention here.

Because the invader's crude Gentile egotism, the Lord of hosts (of angels) would, at the appropriate time, send among his fat ones (i.e. his generals) puffed up with pride of achievement, a leanness of both soul and body. They would be like a sick man pining away (RVm).

Then the figure changes to that of an irresistible raging forest fire. First, the thorns and briars would quickly kindle and burn away. But then the fine forest trees (v.18a,19a). The glory of his forest and of his fruitful field would be consumed together. The surviving trees (that is, the crack troops remaining to him) would be so few that a mere child would be able to count them — which child? Maher-shalal-hash-baz? In the camp of the Assyrians the Light of Israel, the Glory of the Holy One, who

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had earlier manifested Himself to Isaiah in seraphim of incomparable fire (6:3,2), would "burn a burning like the burning of a fire".

"Behold, the Name of the Lord cometh from far, burning with his anger...his tongue as a devouring fire...the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones...For Tophet is ordained of old...the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it" (30:27,30,33). LXX (v. 18) has an impressive variant reading: "And he that flees shall be as one who flees from burning flame."

And all this destruction "in one day", or, rather, in one night, when "the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians" (37:36).

**10:20-22a "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them: but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God. For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return:"**

This four-fold emphasis on "remnant" carries, in this context, the double meaning of (a) those coming safely through the horrors of Assyrian invasion (Hezekiah was to quote this very passage in this sense; 2 Chr. 30:6); and (b) the godly minority who had kept themselves aloof from the apostasy and materialistic faithlessness of the rest of the nation.

Shear-jashub, Isaiah's son, would be a young man when the fulness of his prophetic name came to pass. It has even been surmised that Shear-jashub himself was among the 200,000 captives taken away by Sennacherib and who soon afterwards returned home after the Assyrian disaster at Jerusalem.

This emphasis on the return of captives is an indirect way of declaring that the promised deliverance would happen in a Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:39-41). For the discerning it would be a faith-stimulating pointer to indicate *when* Assyrian aggression would come to an end, for every man of Israel knew when the next Jubilee would be (i.e. B.C. 701), even though any careful observance of that law was no longer practised.

"No more again stay themselves on him that smote them" is a sardonic phrase, for already it must have become obvious that Ahaz's "keep friends with Assyria" policy (2 Kgs. 16:7; 2 Chr. 28:20-23) was being interpreted by that military giant as an easy opportunity to pick Judah clean. The same wretched policy, adopted later on by Hezekiah's princes, had precisely the same result — Sennacherib took with both hands the "present" which was sent him, and then, treating it as though it were a slap in the face, he came on as aggressively as ever (2 Kgs. 18:15-17, and chapter 9 in H.Gt.

Over against these difficulties of political bargaining is here set dependence on the Holy One of Israel (6:3) "in truth", that is, with faith in God's promises (this is the constant association of the terms "mercy" and "truth"). The promise to Abraham is quoted explicitly — "as the sand of the sea" — and in such a way as to make clear that the occurrence of that phrase in the Solomon record (1 Kgs. 4:20) was not really a fulfilment of the promise.

Nor was it fully accomplished in Hezekiah's time, but a close parallel in Hosea 1:9-11 (who quotes whom?) makes Messianic reference inevitable, as also does the allusion here to "the Mighty God" (El Gibbor; 9:6), and the repeated mention of "the remnant" which is echoed yet again in an undeniably Messianic context in 11:11,16 (and cp. 6:13).

The Hebrew text does not say "a remnant of them shall return" but "a remnant *in him*" that is, putting their confidence and gratitude in El Gibbor — a primary reference, no doubt, to Hezekiah but much more explicitly to Christ.

The change of pronoun to "*thy* people Israel as the sand of the sea" suggests that this is Isaiah's prayer on behalf of the nation. Paul evidently read the passage thus, for he introduces his quotation of it in this way: "Esaias *also* (like Hosea) *crieth* (to God) concerning Israel..." (Rom. 9:27); and here the use of the quotation is Messianic, looking to the day of Israel's ultimate re-gathering.

**10:22b,23 "The consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness. For the Lord GOD of hosts shall make a consumption, even determined, in the midst of all the land."**

The first question to settle here is whether the "consumption" foretold is a judgment against Judah as God's people or against the Assyrians for their cruel hostility to Abraham's race.

- a. The words "decreed, determined" imply that here is a repetition of a prophecy already made known — in Joel 3:14: "decision". But that passage fails to resolve decisively the point at issue.
- b. However, Paul's use of this Isaiah passage in Rom. 9:27,28 with reference to the casting off of Israel in A.D.70 settles the question, especially since, after quoting LXX verbatim, Paul suddenly alters the last phrase from: "in the entire habitable" to "in all the Land."
- c. Then, too, there is the remarkable fact that the Hebrew word for "consumption" occurs only in Dt. 28:65, a judgment on Israel, and in the name of Ruth's husband Chilion, who evidently died of consumption.
- d. Again, the word "overflow" alludes back to the figure in 8:8 of the Assyrian Euphrates flooding God's Land.
- e. The different word for "consumption...determined" (in v.23) is picked up in Dan. 9:27 when foretelling the casting off of Israel after the coming of "Messiah the Prince."

It is a judgment which overflows "in righteousness" because the justice of God demands such an expression of his indignation (cp. 5:16,13).

Yet the context here, in 10:24,25, puts powerful emphasis on the outpouring of wrath on the Assyrian. So presumably the prophecy is so phrased as to be capable of being read both ways — against Judah for their indifference to the God of their fathers, and against the Assyrians for their national pride and contempt for the true God.

It is not possible to trace this two-fold application in A.D.70, perhaps because Titus had a wholesome respect for the God of the Jews. However there can be little doubt that, in the "consumption decreed" (cp. Jl. 3:14) for the last days, both aspects of the prophecy will find such a fulfilment "in the Land" as will leave the entire world awestruck.

**10:24,25 "Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD of hosts, O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt. For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction."**

The "Therefore" introducing this passage seems to look back to verse 15 (cp. v.16's "Therefore"). In both places there is the double story of God's wrath against Judah and then against the Assyrian for the excessive brutality shown against an almost defenceless people.

Again there is the reassuring name: Adonai Jehovah of hosts (that is, hosts of angels, in control of a complex situation).

A people whose heart earlier had been "moved as the trees of the wood are moved with the

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wind" was faced, in Hezekiah's day, with a much more acute threat, yet, as with Moses and his people on the shore of the Red Sea, Isaiah has one simple exhortation: "Be not afraid" — "neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid...let him (the Lord of hosts) be your fear, and let him be your dread" (8:12,13). "Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me" (37:6; cp. 43:1,5; 44:2).

The rod with which the Assyrian would smite was also God's instrument (v.26). And as Moses was bidden lift up the rod of God over the Red Sea to open a way of salvation for his fellows paralysed with fear (52:4), so once again there would be a signal deliverance, and this specially for "my people that dwell in Zion", that is, for the faithful remnant loyal to the service of God in the temple.

This gracious and dramatic rescue was promised in "yet a very little while." It is a phrase which requires to have been spoken very shortly before the great Assyrian invasion to which it obviously refers. So, although the death of Ahaz is not referred to until 14:28, it must surely be concluded that this prophecy (most of chapter 10) belongs to somewhere about the tenth year of Hezekiah's reign.

**10:26,27 "And the LORD of hosts shall stir up a scourge for him according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb: and as his rod was upon the sea, so shall he lift it up after the manner of Egypt. And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing."**

Here are two strong historical allusions calculated to move the prophet's disciples, including the godly king, to yet stronger faith in the divine rescue already promised. The parallel with Gideon's victory, already alluded to (9:4), is quite striking:

- a. An oppression raised up by God.
- b. Irresistible invasion — like locusts (Joel's vivid and elaborate figure of speech; ch.2).
- c. The cry of faith to God.
- d. Reminder of the ancient memorable deliverance from Egypt.
- e. A manifestation of divine glory — the angel of the Lord.
- f. The overflow of imported idolatry.
- g. God's living water — Harod, Siloam.
- h. In the destruction of the enemy, trumpet and fire (27:13; Jl. 2:2).
- i. The hostile leader escapes, only to be slain later — Oreb (Jd. 7:25), Sennacherib (37:38).

The Judges references are 6:1,5,7,8,22,25; 7:1,20,25. Ps. 83:11 -13, a Hezekiah psalm, has the same Oreb allusion (note the mention of Ashur in v.8).

The Moses reference is powerful. This is the first of many instances in Isaiah where the saving of Jerusalem by the destruction of Sennacherib's army is set alongside the saving of Israel at the Red Sea by the destruction of Pharaoh's army. The lifting up of Moses' staff over the waters (43:2) is specially appropriate, for had not the Assyrian might been compared to the overflowing of the great Euphrates into God's own Land?

Burden and yoke make up a grim figure of oppression endured by God's people — foretold in the curses of Deuteronomy (28:48) and eloquently repeated by both

Isaiah and Nahum, in both instances about the hated Assyrian. It became also an even more vivid acted parable in the experience of Jeremiah (28:10), and was picked up with startling effect by Peter at the council of Jerusalem: "Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear?" (Acts 15:10), as though comparing the exacting standards of the Law of Moses with the hard regime of Assyria or Babylon!

Isaiah's conclusion here is not without its difficulty: "The (Assyrian) yoke shall be destroyed *because of the anointing* (literally: *from the face of oil*)." Modernist attempts to cope with this problem, chiefly by cooking the text, have all been described by Kay as "absurdly grotesque conceits." Although not shoutingly obvious, the most likely interpretation is to take the words as an allusion to the royal anointing oil, for there can be no doubt that but for the faith and importunity of good king Hezekiah, Jerusalem would have been a lost city.

But there is every reason in the world to read this prophetic assurance with reference to Messiah's deliverance of the holy city in the last days. Hezekiah is readily recognizable as one of the finest of all the Old Testament types of Christ (see H.Gt., ch.22). The Moses parallel, frequently referred to in Isaiah, encourages this approach. The Talmud makes this an explicit reference to Messiah, "The government (and not the yoke) shall be upon his shoulder" (9:6,4) is already a familiar Messianic phrase. Psalm 83, with which there is here a close parallel, also belongs unmistakably to the last days. And does not the Sixth Vial use Isaiah's language about the overflowing Euphrates being dried up!

If only there were clearer insight, would it not be possible to read *all* early Isaiah chapters with reference to the Messiah and his times?

**10:28-32 "He is come to Aiath, he is passed to Migron; at Michmash he hath laid up his carriages: They are gone over the passage: they have taken up their lodging at Geba; Ramah is afraid; Gibeah of Saul is fled. Lift up thy voice, O daughter of Gallim: cause it to be heard unto Laish, O poor Anathoth. Madmenah is removed: the inhabitants of Gebim gather themselves to flee. As yet shall he remain at Nob that day: he shall shake his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem."**

Whether contemporary chronicle or prophecy of how it would take place, this passage describes the approach of the Assyrian army to Jerusalem. Boutflower is so convinced that Sennacherib's force did not arrive by this route that he postulates, without any Biblical or archaeological evidence, an earlier attempt at attack which petered out ineffectively.

But if Sennacherib were besieging Libnah (37:8) when he sent an army against Jerusalem, the only other defenced city left intact, the obvious approach would be via the valley of Beth-horon, emerging on to the high ridge between Ai (Aiath) and Michmash.

But there is a further problem. The list of names given does not follow the line of the main road to Jerusalem, but takes a much more difficult route a few miles to the east. It is hardly credible that any experienced army commander would accept a self-inflicted handicap of this sort, so it seems more likely that the places mentioned were those ravaged by the Assyrian raiding parties as the advance south proceeded. Hence the language of terror regarding one place after another.

A further feature of this is that almost all the names mentioned are associated, in 1 Samuel, with king Saul. Here "Gibeah of Saul" makes the link explicit. Thus an

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added purpose behind this dismal record comes to light — the king men would choose, "to go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sam. 8:20), was no success in this respect, nor were those descended from him; but, by contrast, "there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse" (11:1) endowed with all the godly powers which would mean the saving of his people. The juxtaposition of this prophecy of helpless wretchedness with the assurance and glory of the reign of the son of David (in ch. 11) is now seen to be specially effective.

For Migron, LXX reads (with the slightest possible change in the Hebrew) Megiddon, but this can hardly be correct, for Megiddon is too far north of these other places. An Assyrian inscription mentions Amgarron near Jerusalem.

Nob is most probably mount Scopus whence Assyrian threat against "the mountain of the house of the daughter of Zion" (cp. 2:2,3) would be obvious. For centuries that hill was called "the camp of the Assyrians." There was special venom against the temple of Jehovah because of the abiding memory of Jonah's irresistible campaign in Nineveh and because, more recently, Hezekiah had bidden the Assyrian garrison in the temple area (2 Chr. 28:21) pack up and and be off. This was remembered against Hezekiah with bitterness. Hence the special Assyrian ambition: "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation" (14:13). And hence also the jibes made against Jehovah when the siege of Jerusalem was in progress (37:10,23,28).

**10:33,34 "Behold the Lord, the LORD of hosts, shall lop the bough with terror: and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled. And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one."**

Many take these words as describing the divine counterblast to the Assyrian invasion just described, but several details suggest rather that they read as a picture of the devastation they will inflict "with terror" in the course of their campaign. Here the Assyrian is being used as God's axe to lop the boughs of pride in His people. The figure of an oak cut down was used already in 6:13, where judgment on Judah is plain and clear. Assyrian inscriptions mention again and again how the forests of conquered peoples were plundered. In Judah the felling of trees would be part of the preparation for the final onslaught on Jerusalem.

"The high ones of stature" and "the haughty" who are to be humbled are the self-confident leaders of the nation (as in 2:11).

The forest of Lebanon was the national armoury (2:13; 33:9; 1 Kgs. 10:17), a wonderful building with cedar pillars. The invader promised himself success against it, both literally and figuratively.

Long years later John the Baptist picked up this figure of speech: "The axe laid at the root of the trees" (Mt. 3:10) to warn his heedless generation of impending judgment — by the Messiah who here is referred to in the next verse (11:1), where there is a promise that the stock of David, cut back and apparently lifeless will nevertheless be found to be vigorous with new life.

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## Chapter 11

### 11-1 "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:"

The more outstanding Messianic prophecies in this part of Isaiah make a fascinating sequence:

7:14	The Promises of the birth of the Messiah
9:6,7	His Birth
11:1-10	His Kingdom

The same passages can be read, though hardly with the same precision, concerning the prototype Hezekiah, with this new chapter appropriate to the occasion when the young prince became a co-regent (at the time of his *bar-mitzvah*?) along with his worthless father — as he and his father had, in turn, been co-regents with Uzziah.

"A rod out of the stem of Jesse" not only echoes the figure of 6:13 but also makes a pointed contrast with the devastation of "Lebanon" with which chapter 10 concludes. It is interesting to observe that the rabbis fastened on this sudden change as a ground for the optimistic inference in A.D.70 that very shortly after the destruction of the temple Messiah's reign would commence. They were nearer the truth than they knew!

The remarkable mention here of Jesse, about whom virtually nothing else is known, seems to imply that when Messiah comes the royal line will no longer be regal but will have sunk back to the ordinariness of common life. This was true when Jesus was born and in a different sense it will be true when he comes again.

Two words are used for the Branch, but with little distinction of meaning. Here (and in 60:21) *netzer*, whence Nazareth, and Matthew's allusion (2:23) back to prophecies of a Messiah coming from Nazareth; elsewhere — in 4:2; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12 — the word is *tzemach*. It is interesting to observe that the word for "grow (fruitfully) out of his roots" suggests a link with Ephratah, thus appropriately setting Nazareth and Bethlehem side by side. Micah evidently read his Isaiah scroll in this way, for he has Messiah "coming forth" (s.w. as here) out of Ephratah.

It is noteworthy that a cedar (10:34) does not sprout again when cut down, but a vine (5:1-7) does.

### 11:2 "And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;"

The seven-fold endowment of this divine administrator (not the same seven as Rev. 1:4) is now set forth — superb qualities which are mentioned together in three verses of Proverbs (8:12-14). This is appropriate to describe the great Son of David, for those early chapters of Proverbs comprise David's education of his son Solomon. This Messianic king is both a Solomon (when at his best) and a David.

Just as "the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle," so now "in him (the Messiah) dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 1:9 — an allusion to the tabernacle).

The word "rest" is specially eloquent. After a limited fashion this was true in the experience of the seventy endowed with the Spirit to help Moses (Num. 11:25, where note RV: "They did so no more"). True also, again with limitations, of first-century disciples (1 Pet. 4:14). But now in fulness and without ceasing: "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him the same is he" (Jn. 1:33).

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If there is to be a seven-fold (i.e. perfect) endowment of the Spirit, it is surely strange that the first phrase has no descriptive term attached to it, but is simply "the Spirit of the Lord." Perhaps LXX preserved the complete form of this verse, including at the end: "the spirit of knowledge and *godliness*, and of the fear of the Lord". If this is correct, then first "the Spirit of the Lord" in its fulness, and then the seven-fold aspect of the loveliness of the Spirit's characteristics. Comparison with the seven-branched candlestick is invited, especially in the light of verse 5.

This "Spirit of wisdom and understanding" far surpasses Solomon at his best; that was only prudence and shrewdness in statecraft (2 Chr. 1:10-12).

It makes an interesting question why counsel and might should be bracketed together here. Is it that the true might resides not in physical resources but in good counsel? The word "counsel" clearly links with the Hebrew word for "tree" — not the impressive cedar of Lebanon, to be hewn down (10:34), but the Branch (v.1) which is both root and offspring of David (Rev. 22:16).

The "knowledge" mentioned here is certainly the knowledge of the Lord, for that is the only knowledge worth mentioning. "By his knowledge shall my righteous Servant justify many" (53:11).

Finally, "the fear of the Lord", a phrase superbly appropriate to the days of his flesh, describes Messiah in the glory of his millennial reign; now he is an immortal King. Then what a problem this phrase presents to the trinitarians who seize with avidity on "Mighty God" (9:6) but are never known to face honestly the logic of this passage. Here is no "co-equal" Son in a triune Godhead.

**11:3-5 "And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins."**

"My lord is wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God, to know all things that are in the earth" (2 Sam. 14:20) — so it was said about David; but this Son of David is greatly to surpass his prestigious forefather. "Quick understanding" is actually the interpretation of a Hebrew idiom. This word for "scent" describes one who is at once appreciative of devotion to God — "an odour of a sweet smell" (Phil. 4:18) — and one to whose nose hypocrites are a smoke in his nostrils (65:5).

It is not clear whether this "fear of the Lord" is the One who judges (v.2c; 2 Sam 23:3), or a virtue he specially appreciates in those who come before him for judgment (v.4). But, by contrast with the corrupt judges of Isaiah's own day (10:2) and indeed, to a large extent, all human judges (Jn. 7:24), here is One who is gifted with uncanny powers of reading men's minds, their motives and their deceptions. "He knows all men, and needs not that any should testify of man: for he knows what is in man" (Jn. 2:24,25). One of the outstanding demonstrations given to Israel that Jesus was their Messiah, was the superabundance of examples of his power to read men's minds (Jer. 23:5).

The poor, unimpressive to the eye, and the meek, not self-assertive or clamorous to the ear, know that from this divine King they will receive righteous judgment and equity (Ps. 72:3,4). He appreciates the pious self-denial of a widow (Mk 12:43) and of a penitent disciple (Jn. 12:3).

But there is in him also a royal indignation against bad men. The word goes out of his lips with power; it is like "a sharp two-edged sword" (Rev. 1:16; 2:16; 19:15). "Smite the earth" is a strange phrase, but it needs only the smallest emendation to one letter to read: "smite the oppressor," and thus there is an admirable parallel with "slay the wicked", which last word is singular and therefore specially appropriate to be quoted by Paul with reference to "that Wicked One" who was already causing grievous spiritual headaches in the apostle's own day: "The Lord shall consume him with the spirit (breath) of his mouth, and shall destroy him with the brightness of his coming" (2 Th. 2:8).

"Righteousness the girdle of his loins" implies that his seed derive their righteousness from him. But the mention also of a second girdle bids the reader see him not only as righteous King but also as High Priest, for Scripture speaks of no other person as equipped with *two* girdles (Lev. 8:7). Zechariah also describes "the man whose name is The Branch" as being also "a priest upon his throne" (Zech. 6:12,13).

**11:6-8 "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den."**

In Moses' vivid prophecy of his people's future history there was this horrific detail, clearly symbolic in its intent: "And I will send the teeth of beasts upon them, and the poison of serpents of the dust" (Dt. 32:24). But now, in Messiah's reign, all will be changed. The violence characteristic of fierce predatory animal life will disappear from Israel's experience, and indeed from all human history.

It has often been speculated that Virgil's "Messianic" eclogue, a poem virtually unique in ancient literature, is only to be explained as due to acquaintance with this passage, and maybe others, in Isaiah.

It can hardly be doubted that the main intent of the words is symbolic. The context itself seems to say so: "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord..." (v.9). And in so many other places in Isaiah, and elsewhere, the flavour of the language is the same (5:17; 35:9; 43:20; and cp. Acts 10:12; Hos. 2:18; Lk. 10:18,19). The lion, wolf and asp are all used in Scripture as symbols of the wicked. And can there be any doubt that the great "beastly" vision of Daniel (ch.7) is intended as commentary on what Isaiah has written here? The sequence of lion, bear, leopard and dragon (python) are all here, and so also is the Son of man who is to tame all these ancient enemies of his people.

It is surely significant that the wolf is to dwell with the lamb (not the lamb with the wolf), and the leopard with the kid. Nor is the pairing of these animals inappropriate, for it has been observed that a wolf attacks sheep-folds, but a leopard will stalk a goat (kid) in inaccessible places where no wolf would venture, and a lion will carry off an ox which neither of the other predators could attempt to move.

Yet another aspect of the symbolism here is that calf, young lion, little child may be intended to suggest three of the standards of Israel (v. 10), that of Dan being omitted (as in Rev. 7) for obvious reasons. And the lion eating straw like the bullock may suggest the re-union of Judah with Ephraim (which much-to-be-desired move came about, in part, in the reign of Hezekiah).

A yet more profound symbol is that of the child (Immanuel?) playing safely (there is a lovely play on words here in the Hebrew) on the lair of the cobra (the Hebrew word is almost "python") or of the cockatrice (viper), because these dens are empty — the serpent has been destroyed, as Gen. 3:15 foretells.

Yet, lovely symbolism notwithstanding, there is also a distinct suggestion of the literal, for in the unsullied primeval state of creation "to every beast of the earth"...was given every green herb for food (Gen. 1:30). Now Isaiah has a message of Paradise Restored.

**11:9 "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."**

What a sublime climax this verse makes to this superb paragraph! The first half of it is quoted, together with two other fragments from verses 6,7, in Isaiah's attractive picture of the "new heavens and earth;" and the second half is cited, with slight elaboration, by Habakkuk (2:14).

Grammatically "they" who now no longer hurt nor destroy are the ravenous beasts already referred to. But here there must be a human reference — to Gentile nations who have preyed on Zion, the holy mountain (s.w. 27:13). Jeremiah expands the idea: "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart" (3:17).

Isaiah's phrase is: "filled with the knowledge of the Lord." Psalm 72, *the* psalm of Messiah's kingdom, has: "filled with the glory of the Lord" (72:19). Habakkuk, with his eye on both, reads "filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord" (2:14).

Specially is this sublimely true of God's elect, both now and hereafter: "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord" (54:13). "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts...they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them" (Jer. 31:33,34).

The picture is made the more impressive by yet another figure of speech. As the sea is covered with waves, so there will be a great surge of eagerness to learn the ways of God. And as the Great Sea washed the shores not only of Israel but also of many a distant Gentile land, so Messiah's kingdom will see an impartial diffusion of divine knowledge and glory to all peoples.

**11:10 "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious."**

The repetition in v.11 of "in that day" shows that this verse 10 is not the conclusion of the preceding paragraph but the beginning of the next.

It is particularly easy to trace right through this paragraph the primary application to Hezekiah and his times, but to stop there would be a colossal blunder, for there is easy and impressive reference also to Christ in his Second Coming, and this is to some extent anticipated in his first advent.

Mention of "a root of Jesse" after "a rod out of the stem of Jesse" (v.1) establishes that the apocalyptic allusion to "the root and the offspring of David" (22.16) looks back to this chapter. The picture is presented of a shoot springing up out of what seems to be a dead olive root (Rom. 11:18) and out of a dry ground (53:2), to make a tall sturdy trunk like a pole (s.w. Num. 21:9; cp. Jn. 12:32). It stands as an ensign for the tribes of God's New Israel to flee to for aid (so the eloquent Hebrew root implies). And how right LXX version is in translating "stand" by a word which in the New Testament has such close associations with resurrection! Of course, for what aid to sinners would a crucified Christ be if he remained dead?

But "to *Him* (not: to it) shall the Gentiles seek" — and here Isaiah has a word which nearly always, in its scores of occurrences, means "seeking the Lord" (as in 55:6). LXX has *elpizo*, these Gentiles set their hope on the hope of Israel. This is how Paul read the passage for, after quoting it (Rom. 15:12), he ran on with this comment: "Now the God of (this) hope fill you (Gentiles) with all joy and peace in believing."

This actually transpired in Hezekiah's time, for that king's amazing recovery from a living death and the shattering overthrow of an irresistible Assyrian army sent a shock wave of gladness and awe through all surrounding countries, so that "many (foreigners) brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah; so that he (He?) was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth" (2 Chr. 32:23; cp. Is. 60:5; 49:12).

"His resting place shall be the Glory." Always God's resting place is a temple (as in 66:1 and Ps. 132:8,14). But now there is foretold a unique temple permanently filled with God's own Glory, not a sanctuary left desolate or only occasionally honoured with a divine visitation.

**11:11,12 "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth."**

"Second time" implies a first — that is, when Moses led Israel out of Egypt. The allusions, especially in "Second" Isaiah, to the Messianic redemption echoing that earlier deliverance from Egyptian bondage, are copious; e.g. 49:9-11; 63:11-12; 43:1-5,16-19; and Ps. 4:1,2. To underline the point, the Hebrew text of each of these verses makes a play on the name Joseph, the chosen Son without whose personal virtue and ready forgiveness his family could hardly have hoped to survive.

So this Book of Immanuel finds room also for Shear-jashub: "a remnant shall return." Israel is to be punished but not abandoned. The word "recover" is really "purchase", as used in Israel's song of redemption at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:6; Ps. 74:2).

Even the utterly astonishing deliverance in Hezekiah's day, when the remnant of a massive Assyrian army fled stricken back to Nineveh, was not the "second time." Even such a titanic divine intervention was to be seen as only a foreshadowing of the great climax of God's care for His people in the Last Days. Then if that unique event in ancient history was only a flimsy anticipation of the real thing, how complete and permanent will that colossal future salvation prove to be?

Yet it is this Assyrian prototype which provides some of the geographical details mentioned here. Assyria comes first, of course, not only because it was the irresistible enemy but also because of the endless stream of captives marched off as slave labour to Babylon (a recent Assyrian capture). In his famous prism inscription, Sennacherib boasts of rounding up 200,000 prisoners, nearly four times as many captives as Nebuchadnezzar dragged away (cp. Zech. 10:10).

Pathros is southern Egypt, and Cush is Ethiopia. The lean-on-Egypt policy advocated by Hezekiah's princes at the time of his dire sickness must have been accompanied by a flight thither on the part of many terrified Jewish civilians. There is archaeological evidence of at least one Jewish colony in Egypt in this very period.

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Elam, Shinar (Babylon; 48:20; 43:14,5,6), and Hamath are also mentioned as areas where the prisoners were dragged away by the Assyrians, to do their building for them.

"The islands of the sea", more correctly: "The coastlands", represent the flight by ship of some of the more fortunate fugitives.

This wretched situation anticipates an oppression and scattering of Jews in a day which lies yet in the future. The state of Israel, fashioned entirely in godless self-reliance, must yet again go through the mill of adversity, until the people seek the God of their fathers and so find a Messianic deliverance almost too amazing to be true.

So it may be expected that when the Jews ("the world's fourth super-power") come under the tyranny of their Arab enemies, many of them will become slaves in the territories round about (Dt. 28:68), until in their penitence they are given a Messiah to lift them permanently out of their misery (Is. 27:12,13; Zeph. 3:10). Then there will be an ensign not only for the seed of Abraham but also for Gentiles now startlingly convinced that God is on the side of Israel. They too (though not all) will come to Jerusalem to humble themselves in worship before the God of Israel (14:2; 49:22; 66:20).

But more important than any political Gentiles will be the "outcasts" and the "dispersed" of the chosen race (60:4; Am. 9:15). They will come not only from neighbouring countries but from "the four corners (wings) of the earth" — is there here a hint of cherubic protection (Ez. 1:6)? The idea is repeated in Rev. 7:1 where four angels stand at the four corners of the earth (or, the Land), restraining hostile forces from harming the sealed of God — and the rest of the chapter describes a deliverance comparable to Israel's escape from Egypt.

It is noteworthy that whereas "outcasts" is masculine, "dispersed" is feminine. The significance of this in Hezekiah's day would be readily perceived, for it is known (Sennacherib's prism again) that the Assyrians took away women of Hezekiah's court. Then what is the special meaning of this for the last days?

**11:13 "The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim."**

This must mean that those in Ephraim, the northern kingdom, who envy Judah (chiefly because of its temple) will depart into captivity. And those in Judah hostile to Ephraim (because of schism) will be cut off by Assyrian invaders. A common enemy would make it more feasible for them to sink their long-standing differences.

Hezekiah (2 Chr. 30:1-12) made a valiant and godly attempt to realise this prophecy in fact, but what he achieved was at best only a partial fulfilment. Hosea (1:1.1) similarly prophesied of a reunion of a broken fellowship, and his words likewise were only fulfilled in part. The true fulfilment awaits the coming of the Messiah, as Ezekiel 37, written over a century later, makes plain — the two sticks of Israel and Judah will become one only when God "makes them one nation in the Land upon the mountains of Israel; and one King shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all" (v. 16,22; cp. Jer. 3:18).

**11:14 "But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west; they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them"**

This picture of God's people dominating their neighbours in the Messianic kingdom had its counterpart in the sudden rise to power and prosperity of Hezekiah's Judah after the destruction of Sennacherib's army.

The "shoulders" of the Philistines were the northern and southern wings of their long strip of territory. It is possible to infer from the prism of Sennacherib that about the time of the change-over from Sargon to Sennacherib on the Assyrian throne, Hezekiah had invaded Philistia (2 Kgs. 18:8 — a precautionary measure against further Assyrian inroads), and had taken captive Padi, Sargon's puppet ruler, and had substituted a prince of his own. Sennacherib's campaign then reversed all this. Hezekiah's man was taken off to Assyria, and all his court with him; also there was a successful demand that Padi, a hostage in Jerusalem, be released to resume his reign in Ekron.

After the colossal Assyrian disaster outside Jerusalem, the tables were turned again. Once more Hezekiah's authority over the Philistine coastland was reasserted. But also there were punitive expeditions against the eastern peoples, especially Edom (34:6,7; 63:1-6; Obad. 18-21), but Moab too came in for its share of retribution (25:10; Zeph. 2:7-9). Earlier these peoples had all come in readily enough, as they always did at every opportunity, to act as jackals for the invader — Josephus refers to Sennacherib as "king of the Arabians". Midianites and Ishmaelites — "them of the east" — also came in for retributive action (the word "together" is appropriate, for these camel-mounted peoples always acted in concert, e.g.: Jud. 6:3).

It is an impressive picture of Judah's right hand and left being stretched out round the south and north ends of the Dead Sea to teach Edom and Moab a lesson. And the word "obey" implies that many even of the more remote Ammonites were rounded up as slaves.

It was to be a sudden re-assertion of the equally lightning expansion of much of David's empire (2 Sam. 8).

But, as already stated, all this was merely prototype, for the context demands a yet more thrilling fulfilment when at last Jerusalem receives its Messiah.

The Hezekiah pattern will work itself out in detail. First, there will be a shattering overthrow of the state of Israel, the whole Land being overrun by Arab enemies (this only possible, of course, with the necessary assistance of the "northerner"); then, repentance, of which at present there are only meagre signs, will bring a heavenly rescue operation so that with astonishing suddenness the kingdom of Israel will be re-established with Messiah reigning in Jerusalem; then will ensue needful punitive expeditions against those who have been such vicious enemies — "this honour have all his saints (the holy nation)"; Ps. 149:9.

The word "fly" implies the act of birds of prey. Yet LXX evidently read the word in an even more symbolic fashion: "fly in foreign ships", that is, from an overseas scattering. If this reading is correct, it can refer only to a Messianic return of the Diaspora (as in 60:9); and in that case, "spoil them of the east" is surely to be taken in an evangelic sense (as in 53:12; Gen. 49:27) — the conversion of Israel's most bitter foes.

**11:15 "And the LORD shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dryshod."**

This verse, along with v.10,11,16, has a close parallel in 27:12,13 which has a clear promise of a re-gathering of Israelite exiles from Egypt and Assyria: "and they shall come that were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem."

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For the phrase "shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea", LXX (evidently reading one letter different in the Hebrew text) has: "dry up...with his mighty wind." Thus, a deliverance like that in the time of Moses is promised: "And Moses *stretched out his hand* over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back *by a strong east wind*, all that night, and made the sea *dry land, and the waters were divided*" (Ex. 14:21). Not that exactly the same thing will happen again as happened in Moses' day; but a marvel comparable to that is promised: "As in the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I shew unto him marvellous things" (Mic. 7:15); cp "the second time" (v. 11 here). "In that day shall Egypt be like unto women: and it shall be afraid and fear because of the shaking of the hand of the Lord of hosts, which he shaketh over it" (19:16).

In Hezekiah's day, first the massive Egyptian army was routed by the Assyrians (Sennacherib prism), and then the Assyrian host was decimated by the host of the Lord (37:36). The language of this verse is symbolically prophetic of that double destruction. And thus the way was made easy for the return of fugitives from Egypt and prisoners from Assyria and Babylon (v. 16).

The future reference of these words is to a Last-Day deliverance of Jews from the lands of their Arab enemies after the state of Israel has been overrun in the last and worst of all tribulations (cp. Zech. 10:11).

"The *tongue* of the Egyptian sea" is a double-meaning reference in irony to the Egyptians as great boasters who accomplish little.

"The River" is, with hardly an exception, the Euphrates (cp. 8:7,8). RV reads: "smite it into seven streams", i.e. cause its waters to dwindle away, thus enabling the returning captives to "go over dryshod", literally, "in shoes", that is, no longer barefoot, because now treated with respect and kindness by their captors.

This, and not the un-Biblical story of Cyrus damming the Euphrates, is the true original of the apocalyptic prophecy of the water of the great river Euphrates being dried up (Rev. 16:12). And Isaiah 11:16 goes on to define in advance who are "the kings of the east" whose way home is thus prepared.

**11:16 "And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt"**

Now, instead of Israelite captives and strangers building roads for their conquerors, a highway of deliverance is provided for them, as in the day of Moses (Ex. 14:29). This is a constantly recurring theme in Isaiah, appropriate to the return of that multitude of captives carried away by Sennacherib (19:23; 35:8; 40:3; 49:11; 62:10; 63:12,13). But what a mess the modernists make of this moving theme by their determination to apply these prophecies to the much less exhilarating restoration from Babylon in the time of Cyrus.

Isaiah shows his own exhilaration by a six-fold play on similar Hebrew words, a feature which it is quite impossible to bring out in translation.

The repeated comparison with the Exodus is picked up in the Apocalypse where the Song of Moses and of the Lamb is associated with the last seven plagues (15:3,8) which lead on to the drying-up of Euphrates (16:12). Perhaps the counterpart to the Song of Moses (Ex.15) is to be found in Isaiah 14:4-27.

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## Chapter 12

**12:1-3 "And in that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation."**

This short chapter — a psalm, really — appropriately concludes the first section of Isaiah (1-12). Very appropriately, because the repeated allusions in chapter 11 to a captivity to be set free (e.g. 11:11,12,15) are followed by a song with much of its phrasing modelled on the Song of Moses in Exodus 15.

	Is.12	Ex.15
The Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation	2	2
Water out of the wells of salvation	3	27
Sing unto the Lord, for he hath done excellent things (triumphed gloriously)	5	1, 21
The Name of God: Yah	2	2

The introductory phrase, "In that day" refers back to the promise in chapter 11 of a Messiah, "a root of Jesse", and to the deliverance promised there. The same prophetic phrase recurs in the "little apocalypse" — in 25:9; 26:1; 27:2. It was to find its fulfilment in the startling theophany in Hezekiah's reign which rid the Land of all Assyrians. It is to yet find an even more impressive fulfilment in Messiah's rescue of his afflicted Israel in the Last Day. This kind of double reference of Isaiah's prophecies becomes almost commonplace after a while.

It may be speculated that in fact Isaiah wrote after the event, but this is readily seen to be an inadequate explanation, for if indeed the prophet had written with full knowledge of the events, it would have been virtually impossible for him to have avoided much more specific detail than he actually supplies. The temptation would have been too great for any man. Contrast in this respect Exodus 15 which certainly came *after* the event and is very specific in its reference to the details of the crossing of the Red Sea and the disaster which befell the Egyptian army.

Yet, against all public opinion and all likelihood of how events seemed to be shaping, Isaiah foretold misery and judgment on his own people because of their spiritual corruption, and yet he rounded off his expectation of desolation and captivity with an assurance that a deliverance comparable to the great events of Moses' time would assuredly take place, and this through the merits of one man, the godly descendant of David ruling in Jerusalem.

"In that day *thou* shalt say" addresses the young king-elect, who was already sharing royal responsibility with his father (contrast v.4: "ye shall say").

"O Lord (the Covenant Name comes four times in six verses), I will praise thee *because* thou wast angry with me." This, of course, makes no sense apart from the realisation that the affliction which came on Hezekiah was not personally deserved but was visited on him as representative of the nation. Nor does this first declaration make sense apart from what follows: "Thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me."

There is a sharp contrast here with the threat constantly repeated: "For all this his anger is *not* turned away, but his hand is stretched out still (in punishment)." But there is no disharmony. First, God added in Hezekiah's reign further judgments in addition to the miseries of the time of Ahaz, but then later the sun of His graciousness shone out suddenly with comforting brightness and warmth.

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And so also, it will be in the days to come. The many bitter experiences of the Jews, incurred by their faithlessness, are yet to come to a woeful climax; and then with the coming of their Messiah the dramatic change in their fortunes will leave all the world incredulous and aghast. "God is able to graft them in again." He will do it before the eyes of all the nations. Isaiah's message of Messianic comfort is never far away (40:1; 49:13; 57:18; 61:2).

The psalm continues:

"Behold (the marvel of it!), God is my salvation (Jesus!), / I will trust, and not be afraid." This was the very exhortation Hezekiah addressed to his craven contemporaries as the Assyrian invasion came on. His profound godliness comes out in that one word "afraid", for it always describes fear of *the Lord*; in other words here was recognition that the terrifying events hanging over the nation were the work of the God of Israel.

But so too, much more obviously, was the deliverance; and this is emphasized by the unusual divine name Yah: "the Lord (Yah) Jehovah is my strength and my song." This name Yah comes in the Song of Moses (Ex. 15:2) and in another Exodus psalm (68:4) and in what is undoubtedly a Hezekiah psalm (118:5,14,15,18). It is even possible that Isaiah 12 is a Hezekiah psalm (note the pronouns of v. 1,2) which Isaiah included in his collection of prophecies. The second half of verse 2 is identical with Psalm 118:14. Which of the two is the original?

In Hezekiah's day there was only one "well of salvation" — the Gihon spring which was led underground by Hezekiah's conduit (2 Chr.32:3,4) to Siloam (Is. 8:6) inside the city's defences. The intensive plural — "wells" — is used here (v.3) for emphasis.

Here is the beginning (it could hardly have been introduced earlier) of the lovely figure of speech, in psalms and prophets, of the Lord as a life-saving spring of water: "My people...have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and have hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13; cp. Ps. 42:1,2).

"With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells (literally: fountains) of salvation" suggests that it was in thanksgiving for the Assyrian deliverance that the procedure was instituted at the Feast of Tabernacles of drawing water from Siloam and taking it in solemn procession to the temple, there to be poured out in praise and thanksgiving at the base of the altar. It was, of course, this to which Jesus referred in his great appeal on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn. 7:37,38). He appropriated the meaning of the entire procedure to himself, and thus underlined (what needs no underlining) that Isaiah 12 is about himself and his salvation.

One day the ceremony will be re-instituted, with a vastly intensified meaning, when for all time the Land is rid of "Assyrians."

Here it is appropriate to stress the *joy* with which this water of salvation in Christ is drawn — not with hard labour and exertion, as a deep well, like that of Jacob's, necessarily entails. Here, indirectly, is a foreshadowing of the justification of those in Christ, by their faith and the joy that goes with it, not by works and dedicated effort.

**12:4-6 "And in that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing unto the LORD: for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee."**

Now the pronouns are plural. The people are bidden take up the praise of God uttered by their king. "Praise the Lord, call upon his name" quotes from one of the processional psalms when David brought the ark to Zion (1 Chr. 16:8). Now, in Hezekiah's day, let not the people forget that the Holy One is still in the midst of Zion. He who from His holiness had threatened judgment on His city and nation (6-3,11,13) now showed Himself a compassionate protector (and why the change?). So His great acts are to be declared among the peoples (this word *amim* almost always refers to the tribes of Israel). They are to remember (Hebrews) how His Name is exalted in the deliverance so marvellously given when all looked black and hopeless. "He alone is exalted (s.w. 2:11,17; 33:5). The Hebrew word strongly suggests a high tower of refuge, and this idea is more explicitly woven into psalms of the Assyrian deliverance (46:7; 48:3).

The "excellent things" celebrated in a song to the Lord (26:1) suggest something majestic, something for His own people to be proud of (37:36). But the word is also used of an uprush of waters (Ex. 15:1,21; Ps. 89:9; Ez. 47:5), this by deliberate intention, for the next phrase also suggests the unexpected reading: "waters of knowledge, this is in all the Land" (v.5) — an allusion to the sudden flow of water through the Siloam conduit when completed?

Psalm 46, (another Sennacherib psalm), is very close in idea: "God is our refuge and strength...though the waters thereof roar and be troubled...there is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High...The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge...I am God...I will be exalted in the earth..."

The historical narrative (2 Chr. 32:23) makes clear that one outcome of the Assyrian defeat was an unparalleled acknowledging of the God of Israel by surrounding nations. He becomes "known in all the earth."

Well might the people of Jerusalem "cry out and shout" in unrestrained gladness at such a mighty salvation. This was specially true of the womenfolk ("the inhabitress of Zion"; cp. 4:5; 40:9 Heb), for they specially knew what horrors they had been delivered from. Contemporary Hosea was glad to quote this song of salvation, and with the same meaning: "I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger (against Israel)...for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: I will not enter into the city (i.e. in judgment)" (11:9). And generations later, Zephaniah, a descendant of Hezekiah, quoted this earlier psalm (3:14,15); but alas, a like deliverance did not come in his days.

But yet again, and more mightily than ever, it will come in Messiah's day. Once more when Israel's plight is desperate and by all human judgement hopeless, the trust of a faithful remnant throwing themselves upon their God will bring a theophany such as will dwarf into insignificance the might acts of the Holy One, either in the days of Moses or Hezekiah.

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## Chapter 13

### 13:1 "The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see."

This word "burden" is always minatory in character, describing a message borne by the prophet to those who are to be dragged down to destruction.

This second large section of Isaiah's prophecies consists of *ten* Burdens uttered against the nations round Israel:

Babylon	13; 14:1-17
Philistia	14:28-32
Moab	15; 16
Damascus	17
Egypt	18; 19; 20
The desert of the sea	21:1-10
Dumah	21:11,12
Arabia	21:13-17
The valley of vision	22:1-14
Tyre	23

Regarding these the following characteristics are worth noting:

1. They all were to find their primary fulfilment with reference to the Assyrian expansion and empire-building which was going on at terrifying speed in Isaiah's day.
2. Even so, their real *raison d'être* is the relationship of these nations to Israel. It is this factor, and this only, which qualifies these Gentiles for an expression of concern in the Word of God. *All students of Bible prophecy need to keep constantly before their minds this vital criterion: this field of divine inspiration takes in the activities of Gentile nations only in so far as they relate to Israel or Israel's Messiah. This is true of all Bible prophecy. There are no exceptions.*
3. This feature can be traced clearly in almost all of these ten Burdens. Indeed, in some of them, the Israel reference almost completely takes over; e.g. the Burden of Damascus has two verses about Damascus and twelve about Israel.
4. It is to be expected that these Burdens will have a Last Day reference, in addition to their contemporary relevance. This is the normal characteristic of nearly all Messianic prophecy. In several places (e.g. 17:13; 13:5,6; 19:23-25; 22:22) clear links with other Last Day prophecies seem to demand this, although in not a few places the exercise is distinctly difficult.
5. This catalogue of *ten* appears to be significant, designed to remind the student of other ten in Daniel 2,7; Psalm 83; Ezekiel 38:1-6,13; Revelation 17:12-14.

But why should Isaiah foretell a judgment on Babylon, since in his day Babylon was effectively outside the circle which dominated the politics of Judah? And why should a prophecy of destruction be uttered *then* which was to have no sign of fulfilment for at least two hundred years? And even if it be conceded that such a far-ranging prophecy was possible, how remarkable that the desolation and curse denounced on Babylon in this chapter did not come upon it even *then* in the reign of Cyrus? The Persians simply took over the city, and all went on as before; Babylon was still a great and influential city in the time of Jerome, 4th century A.D., that is a full millenium after Isaiah.

At this point, then, it becomes necessary to establish fairly firmly the little known fact that in the Bible "Babylon" and "Assyria" are used interchangeably of the same political power, so that constantly it is necessary to be on the alert to know which of the two is being alluded to. The two kingdoms spoke virtually the same language. In the time of Isaiah, Assyria conquered Babylon, and then in the time of Zedekiah Babylon destroyed Assyria.

Here, then, are the details not to be ignored, about this Assyria-Babylon confusion:

1. Isaiah foretells the destruction of the might of the ambitious king of "Babylon" (14:4,12), and then immediately in what is part of the same prophecy: "I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him underfoot" (v.25). Later in this commentary it will be shown that the whole of chapter 14 has reference to Assyria, and so also 13:19-22.
2. Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, was taken captive to Babylon by the king of Assyria (2 Chr. 33:11). Also, the Assyrians brought captives from Babylon into Northern Israel (2 Kgs. 17:24).
3. There are strong indications (see later commentary) that the Babylon prophecy in Isaiah 47 is also about Nineveh. "These two things shall come upon thee *in one day*, the loss of children and widowhood". This did not happen to Babylon. Its greatness faded away very gradually.
4. Also, the language of verse 8: "thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me: I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children", is quoted nearly a century later by Zephaniah (2:15) with reference to the destruction of Nineveh (v.13). So either Zephaniah did not understand what Isaiah was writing about, or else he took in his stride the idea that Isaiah's "Babylon" was Nineveh, Sennacherib's capital.
5. Psalm 87, one of a block of "Korah" psalms, all of them about the experiences of Hezekiah's reign, makes mention of Rahab (Egypt) and Babylon, and also Philistia, Tyre, Ethiopia, all of them important in Hezekiah's time, but makes no mention of Assyria which dominated and battered all of them.
6. Ezra 6:22 refers to a contemporary "king of Assyria" more than a century after Nineveh had been reduced to a heap of rubble. He meant, of course, the king of Babylon who "strengthened their hands in the work of the house of God."
7. Zech. 10:10,11 foretells God's gathering of His people from Egypt and Assyria, and speaks of the pride of Assyria about to be brought down, when in fact Assyrian power had already disappeared. But Babylon was still there.
8. In the reign of Josiah, Pharaoh-nechoh went against "the king of Assyria" at Carchemish (2 Kgs. 23:29). But by that time it was no longer necessary to fear Assyria. It was the empire building of Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar, which Egypt feared then.
9. Micah, contemporary of Isaiah and Hezekiah, foretold that "thou shalt go even to Babylon" (4:10). Yet in the next chapter, Assyria is named as the threat: "This man (Hezekiah) shall be the peace when the Assyrian shall come into our land" (5:5)

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10. Stephen quoted to the Sanhedrin the prophecy of Amos that "I (the Lord) will cause you (the northern kingdom) to go into captivity beyond Damascus." But Stephen turned it into "beyond Babylon" (Acts 7:43). How the learned men listening to him would have enjoyed exposing his inaccuracy, if indeed it were that! But they knew well enough the equivalence of Assyria (where the northern captives were taken) and Babylon.
11. Nahum also makes his emphatic witness. His prophecy about the destruction of Nineveh (1:15) quotes Isaiah's prophecy which had its primary fulfillment regarding Sennacherib's invasion (52:7). Perfectly appropriated! But also Nahum alludes to the "whoredoms, witchcraft, nakedness, and merchants" of Isaiah's "Babylon" (3:4,5,16=47:3,9,15), when his subject is still the end of Nineveh.
12. With the exception of one detail, everything in Habakkuk's prophecy suggests that he was a contemporary of Isaiah. That detail is: "the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation" (1:6). It can now be seen that even here the reference is to the Assyrian. "I will work a work in your days which ye will not believe." If indeed Habakkuk spoke his prophecy in Nebuchadnezzar's day, these words were irrelevant. But how appropriate to the great deliverance in Hezekiah's reign! Thus again Babylon language is found to be appropriate to Assyria.
13. An important general consideration: in 13:19 and repeatedly in ch. 14, "Babylon" is represented as the supreme world-power, exercising a cruel tyranny over many nations and especially over Israel. But in Isaiah's day, Babylon was either a conquered state of the Assyrian empire or was making sporadic attempts at rebellion from the Assyrian yoke. Thus the "Babylon" spoken of here must have been Nineveh, the bully of the world of that day.
14. The Exodus theme developed so fully in ch. 12, with its allusions to the Song of Moses, requires a counterpart here in Isaiah. This, as already shown, God provided in the miraculous destruction of Sennacherib's army; and the counterpart to Moses' Song is the Song of triumph in 14:4-27 such as all Israel must have joyfully taken up.
15. It must not be overlooked that the kings of Assyria took special pride in their domination of Babylon: Sargon records as one of his royal titles: "Viceroy of the Gods of Babylon." Tiglath-pileser proudly called himself "King of Babylon."

Such an accumulation of evidence is surely not to be lightly set aside. When the conclusion it points to is adopted not a few difficulties of exposition evaporate. However a further complication is that many details in this "Babylon" burden, refuse to conform to a Babylon (or Nineveh) reference at all. The first 16 — or, more likely, the first 18 — verses seem to demand exposition with reference to Judah invaded by the Assyrians. In this respect compare 17:3-14 in the "Damascus" burden which are all about Israel and Judah.

The details needing to be considered here are these: v.2 "The high mountain", and also v.4: "a multitude in the mountains" are phrases incapable of reference to Babylon or Nineveh, for both cities were in dead flat plains. Expositors, recognizing the difficulty, read the words as a description of the warlike Medes (v. 17) mustering in their mountainous homeland. But reference to God's holy mountain is easy and obvious. Kay says this means "the levelled mountain" — a description well-suited to 'the mountain of the house' (10:32) with its temple area at the top. This is only one of the series of details which Kay emphasizes pointing to judgment on God's people, and yet he backs away from explicit identification with *God's* mountain, Jerusalem!

Also, "shake the hand" echoes Isaiah's earlier description of the Assyrian force making its first threat against Jerusalem: "he shall shake the hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion" (10:32).

- v.3 "My sanctified ones." It is an uneasy interpretation to read this with reference to rough uncultured Medes going against cultured but utterly pagan Babylon. Nor is it much better to see the Assyrians, going against Zion, as God's sanctified ones, even in spite of 8:7: "the Lord bringeth upon them...I will send him against an hypocritical nation...(10:6)." A much better parallel is with Joel 3:11: "thither cause thy mighty ones (thy Gabriels) to come down, O Lord" — and this is when nations come against Zion (v.16). "Them that rejoice in my highness" (also v.3) seems to demand reference to angels (cp. 37:36). This Joel passage has the *same* double reference as these early chapters of Isaiah.
- v.5 "The Lord, and the weapons of his indignation." But why should there be such violent divine indignation against Babylon, a city which hitherto had had almost no contact with Israel? But read this as describing Assyrians "the people of his wrath" being used against Israel, and there is easy parallel with copious similar phrases in Isaiah. "They *come* from a far country" — that is, they *come* to Zion. But *go* to Babylon (from Media?) would surely be more appropriate. The same phrase is used about Assyrian invasion of Judah (46:11; see commentary there). "To destroy the whole Land" is precisely and literally what the Assyrians set out to do in Judaea. Cp. v.9: "to lay the Land desolate." But the Medes and Persians made their conquest of Babylonia with hardly any destruction, for the simple reason that there was almost no opposition.
- v.6 Quotes or is quoted by Joel (1:15); and there the primary reference is undoubtedly to Assyrian invasion of the Land.
- v.8 The figure of "a woman that travaileth" comes also in Psalm 48:5,6 regarding the Assyrian threat against Jerusalem.
- "Their faces shall be as flames" is the very description used by Joel to describe the Assyrian invaders (2:6).
- v.9 "He shall destroy the sinners out of it". How utterly inappropriate to Babylon, for "where there is no law, there is no transgression;" but Judaea was full of sinners from end to end.
- v.10 "Stars...sun...moon" all in a state of darkness or eclipse, But note in how many places are the heavenly bodies a figure of *Israel* (e.g. Gen. 37:9,10; Jer. 31:35,36; Rev. 6:12,13 and context; B.S. 6.01).
- v.13 "I will shake the heavens and the earth." Again, in 50:3; 51:6; Jl. 3:16 the reference is to *Israel*.
- v.16 "Children dashed in pieces...wives ravished." This is the very judgment denounced on the people of Nineveh (Nah. 3:10), exactly in accordance with the bitter prayer of Ps. 137:9: "Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth *thy* little ones against the stones." (Thirtle has shown that the "Babylon" in this psalm is Assyria; "Old Testament Problems").
- v.17 "I will stir up the Medes against them" can be read in either of two ways:
- (a) Median mercenaries in the Assyrian army used against Israel.
  - (b) Oppositely, Median inroads into Assyria after the disaster of 37:36.

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As the exposition proceeds a number of other details will be found to conform readily to the two-fold interpretation (a) that "Babylon" is the power of Assyria-(b) that — as with 1 7:3-14 — the first 16 (or 18) verses here relate to Judah overrun and devastated by the ruthless armies of Sennacherib.

However, turning a blind eye to the indications listed above, the moderns are determined to see in ch. 13,14 a "burden" composed in the Babylonian captivity about the destruction of Babylon (which, in any case, didn't happen for more than another thousand years). The fact that the text says: "which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see," is quietly ignored. And so also is the long list of verbal connections, compiled by Kay, between ch. 13,14 and the four preceding chapters.

Even the word "burden" is turned into a synonym for a message. Yet the AV is proved right by such examples as the following: "The Lord laid this burden upon him" (2 Kgs. 9:25) — more than a message, a weighty responsibility.

"The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel...Jerusalem a burdensome stone unto all the people round about" (Zech. 1 2:1,3)

**13:2-5 "Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain, exalt the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles. I have commanded my sanctified ones, I have also called my mighty ones for mine anger, even them that rejoice in my highness. The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people; a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together: the LORD of hosts mustereth the host of the battle. They come from a far country, from the end of heaven, even the LORD, and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land."**

This commentary will concentrate throughout on the contemporary reference of the prophecy, and afterwards (at the end of the chapter) on the crisis situation in the Last Days to which it also refers.

For "high mountain" should be read "bare mountain" or, better still, "the mountain made bare" (Heb: Niphal). Kay says "levelled", and adds: "a description well-suited to 'the mountain of the House' (10:32), with its temple area at the top." And the phrase "gates of the nobles (princes)" links well with the historical hints of a special entry-gate for the rulers of Israel (1 Chr. 9:18; 2 Chr. 23:20; Jer. 39:3; Lam. 5:14).

Is it really possible to read "sanctified ones" and "my mighty ones" with reference to any but angels — "my Gabriels" — especially since, in Jl. 3:11, regarding the same prototype, the same phrase is used: "Thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O Lord"? And is not that precisely what God did? (37:36). By comparison, how feeble is the attempt to pin this divine mission on to ignorant uncivilised Godless Medes ("which rejoice in my highness"!!) a thousand miles away!

"The mustering of the host to the battle" is a close equivalent to the familiar words: "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger...I will send him against an hypocritical nation...The Lord bringeth upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria" (10:5,6; 8:7). And their purpose "to destroy the whole Land," was the divine commission to these brutal invaders of Judah.

**13:6-11 "Howl ye; for the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man's heart shall melt: And they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames. Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity: and I will**

**cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible."**

Here one detail after another (and why haven't the commentators noticed them?) steers the reader to consider *God's people* under judgment, the instrument of His anger being the Babylonian Assyrian, as already explained.

"Howl ye" is, in Hebrew, a very effective mocking play on "Hallelujah," the theme of futile temple prayers and praises.

"The day of the Lord" is always God's open judgment or deliverance, and with hardly an exception concerns Israel (2:12; Zeph. 1:14). It is described as "near", a word which plays on "cherub" — and the cherubim are always associated with God's activity for or against Israel.

"Destruction from the Almighty" is yet another of Isaiah's puns: *shad mish-Shaddai*. And Shaddai itself is a two-meaning name. In the Pentateuch it is used always for God as One who blesses His people with fruitfulness (the Genesis contexts are specially impressive — and note the grim contrast here in v. 8: "pangs...travail...sorrows"). In the poetic books, however, Shaddai is associated, as here, with *shadad*, destroy (B.S. Ch. 15.01).

This verse is quoted from, or quoted by, Joel (1:15), in a contemporary prophecy which is certainly about Israel. Then why should the words here be referred to Babylon or to the uncouth Medes?

A similar phenomenon regarding Psalm 48:2,5,6 suggests that both psalmist and Joel wrote with their eyes on Isaiah. Perhaps the psalmist was Isaiah. "The sides of the north" (of Jerusalem; v.2; 14:13), "marvelled...hasted away" (v.5; 13:8,14), "fear took hold of them, and pain, as a woman in travail" (13:8) — these phrases are all written, in Psalm 48, with reference to the Assyrian debacle at Jerusalem. Then the grim experience of the invaded people very suddenly became the experience of the invaders. They provide yet further support for the same kind of interpretation of Isaiah 13,14.

Various other examples of paronomasia in this context also give subtle support to the application now being suggested. The technical details are best omitted here.

The figure of sun, moon, and stars being darkened again steers consideration to Israel, for without exception all other usage of this metaphor is in an Israel context (e.g. Gen. 37:9,10; Jer. 31:35,36; Mt.24:29; Rev. 6:12,13). But here, and in none of the other instances, is there included mention of "the constellations." The Hebrew word describes specifically the constellation of Orion, the Hunter, for which the ancient eastern name was Nimrod, the founder of Babylon and Nineveh. The plural, otherwise meaningless, is to be read as an intensive plural, meaning: "the mighty Nimrod." Again, details such as these are appropriate to the Judah-Assyrian crisis about which so much of Isaiah's prophecy is written.

Other phrases (v.11) point to the same theme. The "terrible" (v.11) is one of Isaiah's standard descriptions of the Assyrians (e.g. 25:3,4,5; 29:5). It was a description utterly inappropriate to the city of Babylon in Isaiah's time, and for nearly a century after that. "The arrogancy of the proud" (v.11) is echoed regarding "Babylon" (14:13,14; 47:7,8). "I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease" has its parallel in another psalm of Assyrian destruction (46:9). And by contrast with the tribulation of "the Land" (v.5,9) there is this: "I will punish the *world* for their evil" (v.11) again with reference to the signal judgment on Sennacherib's army; it is an expression quite inaccurate regarding the city of Babylon, for that metropolis went unscathed for centuries; (even in the time of Cyrus, nearly 200 years later, it hardly suffered at all).

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But now it is time to look at this prophecy from a different angle. The relevance to the Last Days can hardly be doubted in view of the following catalogue of pointers in other Scriptures:

- a. Both Peter and Paul use the phrase "the day of the Lord" (v.6) with reference to the Second Coming (2 Pet. 3:10; 1 Th. 5:2).
- b. Verse 6 and Jl. 1:15 are the same and are about the same events: (i) the Assyrian invasion; (ii) the last great struggle in the Holy Land.
- c. Verse 7: "Every man's heart shall melt" is matched by "Men's hearts failing them for fear" (Lk. 21:26). Where else do the prophets use this kind of language?
- d. The figure of a woman in travail (v.8) is repeated in Paul's prophecy of the Second Coming (1 Th. 5:3) and in our Lord's Olivet prophecy: "These things are the beginning of travail" (Mk. 13:8 RV).
- e. The metaphor of sun, moon, and stars darkened (v. 10) is repeated in four other prophecies of the Last Days: Joel 2:31; 3:15; Is. 24:23; Mt. 24:29 (Lk. 21:25); Rev. 6:12,13.

Who can doubt that the further fulfilment of Isaiah 13 (and 14) will produce the very situation which made the reign of Hezekiah one of the most exciting in all history? Once again, as then, there will be wrath on the state of Israel for its godlessness and lack of faith; the Land will be overrun by a confederacy of enemies; vast numbers will be herded away as slave labour in the lands of their conquerors; then, through the repentance of the faithful remnant and the merits of one Man whom God has smitten with undeserved suffering for the sake of his people, there will come sudden incredible divine deliverance, and the City of God will be safe; a gracious year of jubilee will be celebrated, with the joyous return of all the captives; and then will ensue a reign of righteousness and peace and prosperity more adequate to fulfil all the long-cherished dreams of God's pious and faithful ones.

Not all of this picture comes in Isaiah 13,14; but much of it is there, and the other details are copiously filled in, in Isaiah's later prophecies.

**13:12-16 "I will make a man more precious than find gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man taketh up: they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land. Every one that is found shall be thrust through; and every one that is joined unto them shall fall by the sword. Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished."**

In this paragraph also there are sufficient pointers, however unexpected, referring to Jerusalem and her people:

- a. The shaking of heavens and earth has a distinct echo in ch. 50:3; 51:6, with reference to the overthrow of God's people (and cp. Ps. 102:25,26).
- b. And "shaken out of its *place*" uses the word *maqom*, which normally refers to a holy place or altar — in this instance the temple in Jerusalem, surely.
- c. "The chased roe" justifies its place here as a figure because here is a double-meaning word signifying also "the Glory"!
- d. The horrible passage about "children dashed in pieces" is reproduced in Psalm 137:8,9, which Thirtle ("Old Testament Problems") has shown to refer to Jewish captives carried off by the Assyrians to Babylon (see earlier comments on this chapter). Hosea 13:16 has just the same idea. "Happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us" finds its fulfilment in Nahum's prophecy about the destruction of Nineveh (3:10, the same words).
- e. "Houses spoiled (rifled), and women ravished" is quoted explicitly in Zech. 14:2 — with reference to *Jerusalem* in the Last Days. But if Isaiah 13 is about the destruction of the city of Babylon, why the quotations, and why such a bad misapplication of it?
- f. The shaking of *heavens* and earth is again a figure for the tribulation of *Jerusalem* in the Last Days, as quoted by Joel (3:16).

Items e, f here serve a double purpose by establishing also that, besides the grim fulfilment of this "burden of Babylon" in Isaiah's own time and in his own Land there will be also a yet more horrifying re-fulfilment in the Holy Land in the days ahead.

The shaking of heavens and earth becomes also an end-time prophecy in Haggai (2:6) interpreted specifically in that way in Hebrews 12:26 and in Revelation 6:12,14.

The picture of even a frail mortal man (*enosh*) and man (*adam*) of the earth being hard to find foretells slaughter and captivity on a vast scale. Isaiah has already foretold this (4:1). How many of today's three and a half million Israelis will survive? It is a grim prospect.

**13:17,18 "Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and as for gold, they shall not delight in it. Their bows also shall dash the young men to pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye shall not spare children."**

The conventional interpretation of this "burden", which assumes that it is a prophecy of the destruction of Babylon by Cyrus (a destruction which never took place!) has all the commentators identifying these Medes as one of the main components of Cyrus' confederacy. As one man these commentators illustrate "no delight in silver or gold" with reference to a speech which Herodotus, coming years later, puts in the mouth of Cyrus as an explanation of that leader's thanks to his Median troops for their unpaid service. A highly unlikely Greek literary flourish!

But here the Cyrus reference of this Scripture has been considered irrelevant. There are no less than three other possible references to these Medes, all with more to recommend them:

- a. The Median destruction of Nineveh, the "Babylon" that is condemned in v.19ff. But this was still a long way in the future.
- b. The Medes who had been recruited into the military hotch-potch which Sennacherib brought against Judah (and then v.18 matches Ps. 137:8,9; but v.17 remains difficult).
- c. The men of Israel who had been carried away in large numbers to "the cities of the Medes" (2 Kgs. 17:6) by Shalmanezar V. In such prophecies as 48:20,21; 49:9-23 there are indications of a massive return of these captives (Part 1:ch.33) after the shock of the mighty destruction of Sennacherib's army. And it would be strange if such a return were

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not accompanied by some revenge-taking against hard Assyrian masters. Hence the word "also" in harmony with Ps. 137:8,9. The Median reference in 21:2 can be read similarly.

"Their bows shall dash the young men in pieces" hardly makes sense; it encourages acceptance of LXX reading: "they shall break the bows of the young men in pieces."

"No pity on the fruit of the womb" hides a very subtle play on words, for the alternative Hebrew word for "womb", not used here, is identical with the word for "pity". Many of Isaiah's puns are shoutingly obvious. This one is very neatly disguised.

**13:19-22 "And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged."**

The biggest difficulty in this prophecy — a problem carefully side-stepped by most commentators — is Isaiah's insistence on *speedy* fulfilment. Some have pointed to Sennacherib's conquest of the city of Babylon. But this identification runs up against the fact that in those days Babylon had no vainglorious empire-builder as its monarch (14:9-17). Nor was Babylon of those days any sort of threat to the people of God (14:13). *That* Babylon continued as a tolerably prosperous city for nearly a millenium.

The only candidate for an early fulfilment is Nineveh, and certainly soon after these words were spoken there did come a mighty divine cataclysm abolishing the Assyrian threat to many neighbour kingdoms. Yet the problem remains that the desolation spoken of here did not come for another century. However, when destruction did come to Nineveh, it came almost overnight, and with horrifying completeness such as history never knew until August 1945.

And in confirmation of this Nineveh reference is Zephaniah's explicit use of this passage with reference to the desolation of that city of Nimrod in his time (2:14,15).

Also, it has been noted that the language of these verses seems to be echoed in an inscription of Assurbanipal, the last great Assyrian monarch, in describing his devastation of Elam. Then was he perhaps acquainted with the prophecies of Isaiah, as Cyrus certainly was?

Thus apart from the century lapse of the time before fulfilment, everything points to reference of this prophecy to Nineveh, the great present enemy.

Then is it possible that just as the destruction of Nineveh proclaimed by Jonah (3:4) was deferred for 150 years, so also Isaiah's urgent prophecy about the Assyrians, learning their lesson from Sennacherib's experience, caused them not only to send all their Jewish captives home but also to leave God's Land alone, even when they were busy plundering Egypt?

The weird creatures referred to as making their home in the ruins of this "Babylon" have been variously identified as owls, ostriches, wolves, wild goats, jackals (see modern versions).

Regarding both Nineveh and Babylon this eerie description of desolation was marvellously matched by the facts. Both cities — one sooner, the other later — vanished from sight, and from site, for their very whereabouts was unknown for long centuries. And to this day they are "not inhabited, nor dwelt in." ' Jeremiah, who was a great quoter of earlier Scriptures, saw the fulfilment of these words regarding Nineveh in his own time. And yet he went on to assert a further fulfilment regarding the Babylon he knew (50:27,39,40; 51:11,28, 29,33,37,62) — a very long-range prophecy, this!

Nor does that end the story, for again the words are picked up to describe the ultimate fate of the apocalyptic "Babylon" (Rev. 18:2), the identification of which still has plenty of question marks hanging over it.

## Chapter 14

**14:1,2 "For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob. And the people shall take them, and bring them to their place: and the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the LORD for servants and handmaids: and they shall take them captives, whose captives they were; and they shall rule over their oppressors."**

As that first word "For" indicates, these two verses supply the reason for the overthrow of "Babylon". The city of that name was not brought to savage dereliction either by Sennacherib or by Cyrus or at any later time. But by two blows of intense violence almost unmatched in history the Assyrians first lost an invincible army outside the walls of Jerusalem, and a hundred years later Nineveh itself became a ruin and an eternal devastation.

With the first of these hammer blows God had mercy on His beleaguered city and people, and brought His wretched captives home from Babylon where they had been exiled (Mic. 4:10) to glorify the second capital of an empire of brutality (Ps. 102:13,15,20 — a Hezekiah psalm).

"Mercy on Jacob" and the choosing of Israel are constantly recurring themes. And even when the entire purpose with this nation seemed to have gone wrong, this conviction animated those of later days away from their homeland: "The Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem (as the place of His dwelling)" (Zech. 1:17).

The promise to "set them (cause them to rest) in their own Land" implies a people taken into captivity in Isaiah's own day. The prism of Sennacherib supplies the boastful detail:

"I made to come out from them 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, innumerable horses, mules, donkeys, camels, large and small cattle, and counted them as the spoils of war. Hezekiah himself I shut up like a caged bird within Jerusalem, his royal city." This captivity was vastly greater than that which is always denominated as *the* Babylonian captivity. But whereas that dragged on for seventy years and more, this lasted less than seventy weeks.

The added promise that "strangers shall be joined with them" is constantly repeated in the rest of Isaiah (44:5; 49:22; 55:5; 60:4,5,9,10,14; 61:5; and of course 2:2,3). Such language makes no sense save in the light of the stroke of Heaven against the might of Assyria, thus

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vindicating God's righteous king in Jerusalem. From that day forward and throughout the rest of Hezekiah's reign, the God of Israel was honoured among the Gentile nations round about. "Many brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that He was magnified in the sight of all nations from henceforth" (2 Chr. 32:23). "Then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them" (Ps. 126:2 — another Hezekiah psalm).

"They (these Gentiles) shall cleave to the house of Jacob. And the people (*amim*, Israel) shall...bring them to their Place (*maqom* certainly refers to the temple)" Besides the passages already listed, ch.56:6-8 is outstanding:

"Also the sons of the strangers that join themselves unto the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer...The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered to him."

In this unexpected way an early fulfilment came to the words: "They shall take them captives whose captives they were." It is an awe-inspiring thought that among the arrogant Assyrians were some who came to acknowledge the God of Israel as the Lord of all.

But never yet has it been true that Israel has "ruled over their oppressors." So here is a phrase which calls for fulfilment in the time when the righteousness and glory of Messiah's reign far outshine the qualities of Hezekiah's (45:14; 61:3; 62:5; 66:20).

The emphasis on return to "their own Land...the Land of the Lord (Immanuel's Land; 8:8)" is appropriate to the Year of Jubilee when God brought about this great deliverance (2 Kgs. 19:29,30; Lev. 25:21-24). Only the rich blessings of such a year could enable the nation to make recovery at express speed from the horrors of foreign domination.

Isaiah foretold it all, and lived to see it. He will yet live to see the gracious blessings of a final restoration of his people and the beneficent rule of a King whose suffering and glory the life of king Hezekiah so remarkably portrayed long centuries before.

**14:3,4a "And it shall come to pass in the day that the LORD shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve, That thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon,"**

Note here the almost casual way in which Isaiah makes a prophecy of such depressing accuracy — that his people are going to endure sorrow, fear and hard bondage.

So also Habakkuk: "Behold, is it not of the Lord of hosts that the people (*amim* — Israel) shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?" (2:13). One of the Assyrian kings boasts in one of his inscriptions about the fear he inspired in his captives; there is a marvellous contrast with this in 31:8,9. But Israel are also going to be given "rest" from such a harrowing time (51:4). And then it will be their turn to taunt their oppressors with the mockery of their "parable" (cp. Hab. 2:6).

It is not certain who this king of Babylon was, who is spoken of here, but with very high probability he was actually one of the contemporary Assyrian monarchs. Boufflower argues persuasively for equation with Tiglath-pileser III who was certainly king of Babylon at the time

of this prophecy (v.28). The irony is that just then Assyria was friendly towards Judah, because of the treaty (of gross subservience) which Ahaz had made, even allowing the Assyrians to quarter a garrison in the temple area (2 Chr. 28:20,21).

Tiglath-pileser was inordinately proud of his title as king of Babylon, not only because he had conquered that country but also because his grandmother was the famous Babylonian princess Semiramis. Many of his inscriptions and bas-reliefs were removed by his successors because of his marked preference for Babylon.

Shalmanezar V was actually king of Babylon before he was crowned king in Nineveh.

However, a strong case can be made out for identifying the king of Babylon in this prophecy with Sennacherib (v.2,3,13,14,25; see the later comments on these verses). As the "burdens" of Isaiah proceed, they become more and more specific in character, and almost all of them centre on Sennacherib's challenge to the God of Israel and how for this his power was brought down to the dust.

It would be surprising indeed, if this powerful prophecy is not to find a further fulfilment in the last days, when God's Messiah saves his people from another brutal northern enemy. The promise to David about Messiah's kingdom speaks of "a time...when I have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies...neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more" (2 Sam. 7:10,11). How like Isaiah's assurance: "the Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow and from thy fear and from thy hard bondage." As David's reign foreshadowed Messiah's, so also this prophecy looks forward to a like fulfilment.

**14:4b-6 "How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! The LORD hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth."**

A special characteristic of the Assyrian empire was the barbaric frightfulness with which it scared subdued nations into paying massive tribute. Halls and palaces in Nineveh bore such names as: "Holding abundance" and "Preserving the tribute of mountains and seas." Israel and Judah both suffered from this greedy oppression (2 Kgs. 15:19; 18:14). The peoples (*amim*, the people of God) were smitten "with a continual stroke" (v.6). Nahum has the figure of speech of a lion tearing its prey (2:12).

But there is the possibility here of a different reading due to the common confusion in OT. texts between Hebrew R and D. This would turn "golden city" into "insolent city", a description relevant enough to the railing against the God of Israel indulged in by Sennacherib and his minion Rabshakeh (36:14,15,18,20; 37:10,29,35). The Assyrian campaign in Judaea was as much a war against Jehovah as against Hezekiah.

"The LORD hath broken the staff (10:5) of the wicked" is specially true with reference to the destruction of the Assyrians by the angel of God (37:36).

Here, before Ahaz died (v.28) is an undoubted prophecy of the oppressor being brought low; it was made even before the worst of the invasion had begun. In Hezekiah's day when Assyrian warriors spread fear and desolation through God's Land, the backbone of the faithful remnant would be stiffened by the knowledge that Isaiah had foretold a mighty turning of the tables.

The Apocalypse describes another "Babylon", a golden city (17:4,5; 18:16), an oppressor of God's holy people (17:6), also to be brought low. Reference of this prophecy to Rome runs

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into many problems which over long years expositors have carefully side-stepped. *Biblical* indications point in a different direction and there seem to be signs that a rabid ultra-orthodoxy in Judaism may yet turn openly and viciously (as in the first century) against their fellows in Israel who believe Jesus to be the Messiah.

**14:7,8 "The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing. Yea, the fir trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us."**

Without any doubt, this should read: "The whole Land is at rest," for the next phrase: "break forth into singing" is frequent in Isaiah, and always with reference to the restoration of Israel: 44:23; 49:13; 52:9; 54:1; 55:12; Ps. 98:3,4 (an Isaiah psalm). The last fifteen years of Hezekiah match this description perfectly, and they in turn foreshadow the tranquility and prosperity of Messiah's reign.

The Assyrians plundered the fir and cedar trees of Lebanon through sheer joy of increasing devastation and being able to boast about it (37:24); and a century later Nebuchadnezzar took pride in having his "photograph" taken as he personally felled a cedar of Lebanon.

But the "feller" Isaiah specially refers to is to be himself "laid down." This is the very word used by the prophet about the devastation of the Assyrian camp: "The Lord...bringeth forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power; they shall *lie down* together, they shall not rise: they are extinct, they are quenched as tow" (43:17).

Again, it is a mighty judgment against the enemies of Jerusalem in the Last Days.

**14:9-11 "Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou also become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols; the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee."**

Here Isaiah develops a powerful figure of speech. He pictures this mighty tyrant going down to the abode of the dead. Whereas God's Land, and indeed the whole earth, is heaving a sigh of relief that the threat of oppression is now removed, all the mighty men and the monarchs who have preceded this brutal empire-builder into the place of the dead are now portrayed as deeply disturbed at the prospect of having to greet again the haughty dictator who had sent them thither. Ezekiel (32:21-27) has a similar elaborate figure about dead warriors, buried with all the tokens of their military prowess, greeting Egypt's Pharaoh when he joins the ranks of the slain.

Hell itself is personified as the leader of the dead whom he now stirs up to give a suitable welcome to the Assyrian king. These dead are pictured as sitting upon their thrones, as represented by the effigies in their mausoleums. They marvel that one whom they have known as invincible in power and more cruel than the grave should now himself be brought low to lie on a bed of worms and to be covered by the worms which hitherto have provided the glorious scarlet dye enhancing the splendour of his royal robes (cp. *vermilion*, from Latin *vermis*, a worm).

The fitness of all this vivid language to the death of Sennacherib is easy to trace. The mistake is often made of assuming that this proud tyrant died, assassinated by two of his sons in Nineveh, very soon after his warriors died outside Jerusalem (37:36,38). In fact there is clear archaeological evidence that it was fifteen years later when Sennacherib met a much-merited fate. Isaiah's account of this says it was "as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god." No such Assyrian god is known, but the suggestion has been made that this is a compressed form of the names Ashur, the national god of Assyria, and Aku, another name for Sin, the moon god, after whom Senna-cherib was named.

Asshur-bani-pal, grandson of this "hero", mentions in the Rassam cylinder "the figures of the protective deities (winged bulls and lions excavated by Layard, Assyrian "cherubim") between which they (the rebels) had smashed Sennacherib, my own grandfather."

Esarhaddon, in his Nineveh prism, tells how his brothers "plotted evil, even drawing the sword within Nineveh against divine authority. They butted at each other like young kids in order to exercise the kingship" — that is, after murdering their father they quarrelled, and so the usurpation plan came to nothing.

Isaiah's phrase: "the noise of thy viols" suggests religious music and ceremonial. How right this is, for it was evidently in the course of a religious procession into the temple that Sennacherib was slain.

**14:12-15 "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds: I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit."**

Lucifer has nothing to do with the Devil of Christian mythology. The name means Morning Star, and refers to the planet Venus, the brightest object in the sky just before dawn. In various ways the figure is appropriate to the king of Assyria, for as the morning Venus is low down in the eastern sky (where Assyria is) and can be seen climbing higher and higher, so this mighty monarch made his ambitious imperial plans to ascend higher and higher, as Ishtar (Venus).

This goddess was also the war-deity: "The Lady of attack", "The strengthener of battle", "The Lady of battle and war". As such she commanded the reverence of every Assyrian king.

Like the contemporaries of Nimrod, these ruthless men of power were set on ascending up to heaven (Gen. 11:4). And especially, since the humiliation of an earlier generation in Nineveh demanded by Jonah, they meant to exalt their throne above the stars of *God*, that is, above the people of Israel (Joel 3:15; Dan. 8:10), and against the angels of Jehovah (Job 38:7; Rev. 1:20).

In Ahaz's reign Tiglath-pileser III did sit also upon the mount of the congregation, for "Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of the Lord...and gave it unto the king of Assyria." In other words, part of the temple area was assigned to an Assyrian garrison. Ostensibly this was a friendly Assyrian gesture, to reinforce the authority of a weak and despised king, but in actual fact it was meant to keep the state of Judaea well-behaved and tractable.

One of the first things Hezekiah did, as a gesture of faith but not of statesmanship, was to send these Assyrians packing; and from that moment a terrifying invasion by Sargon or Sennacherib was an absolute certainty.

When at last it took place, these jackbooted thugs encamped on Mount Scopus "on the sides of the north" of Jerusalem, so that for long generations afterwards that area was known as "the camp of the Assyrians". A psalm of that period declares that "promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south" (75:6). Useless to look for help from the north where the Assyrian was ominous and frightening. But after God's angel had brought deliverance, another Hezekiah psalm celebrated it with both relief and devotion: "Beautiful for situation the joy of the whole Land is mount Zion, *on the sides of the north*, the city of the great King" (48:2). Ishtar may be known as "The Queen of the Mountain of the World", but she could celebrate no victory against mount Zion.

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The great king of Assyria may plan to "ascend above the heights of the clouds" and to be "like the Most High." But instead "the Lord Most High is terrible: he is a Great King over all the earth" (Ps. 47:2).

So the Assyrian, who "weakened the nations" by draining the strength of every people his armies overran, was "cut down to the ground" — literally, in his assassination. And so also Ishtar, the great goddess — she too was "cut down to the ground" like the Baal image Gideon disposed of.

It may be that the derisive "How art thou fallen from heaven!" came to a near-literal fulfilment, for Velikovsky has theorised very impressively that about that time there was a dramatic perturbation in the course of the planet Venus.

In any case it is remarkable enough that the most impressive Babylonian epic discovered by the archaeologists is about the descent of Ishtar into the underworld.

And not only Ishtar, but the proud monarch who honoured her, he too "was brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit." (Job 20:5-8). His invincible warriors died in a night. The figure is highly appropriate, for when Venus is not a morning star, it is an evening star, seen vividly in the west immediately after sunset, and descending inexorably to the night horizon and the darkness below it.

Centuries later, Jesus made a powerful lesson from this vivid prophecy. His disciples came back from preaching full of glee, for "even the devils are subject unto us through thy name." So they were bidden recall how God chastened the pride of Assyria — "Satan as lightning (a day-star?) fallen from heaven." And not only disciples but also self-assured Capernaum, "which art exalted to heaven, shall be thrust down to hell" (Lk. 10:18,15). In every generation the lesson has to come home: "No flesh shall glory in God's presence." There is only one Lucifer, one "bright and morning star" — Jesus, the true Lord of mount Zion (Rev. 22:16).

**14:16,17 "They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?"**

Here is pictured the widespread surprise that the *man* (no superhuman devil here! J.W.'s please note!) who had been such a terror and a scourge should come to such a sorry end. He shook kingdoms like an earthquake (Heb.). By a deliberate scorched-earth policy his ravaging armies reduced large areas to wilderness, and strong cities to piles of rubble; e.g. Lachish, and (17:2), appointed (Heb.) mass deportation of captives to other conquered lands, and with no intention that they should ever return (but the God of Israel had such an intention regarding His own people; v.1).

All who had come under his scourge would sigh with relief at his dramatic reversal of fortune and would learn a lesson (Heb.) from it.

**14:18-20b "All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house. But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcase trodden under feet.**

**Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people:"**

There has never been a time when royal burial has not been a thing of great magnificence — pomp and circumstance at its finest. Here, in a judgment pronounced years ahead of its time on this mighty Assyrian monarch, there is a scornful contrast between the honour and glory, prepared beforehand by every petty king in the Assyrian empire for himself in the day of his interment, and the shame and despite to be heaped on Sennacherib in the day of his downfall.

This passage gives the gruesome detail of how he was to perish. It is known (from 37:38 and the Babylonian Chronicle and the Nineveh prism of Esarhaddon and the Rassam cylinder of Asshur-bani-pal) that two of Sennacherib's sons raised a rebellion in Nineveh and slew their father as he was in procession before the entrance of his temple. Nevertheless the coup failed, largely because of a bitter quarrel between the plotters. So they fled and left authority in the hands of Esarhaddon their brother. This was in 686 B.C., some fifteen years after the disaster outside the wall of Jerusalem. Apparently God added fifteen years to the life of Sennacherib, as He did in that same year to Hezekiah — presumably in acknowledgement of Assyria leaving God's people alone after that frightful campaign of 701 B.C.

Here Isaiah foretells that Sennacherib would be "thrust through with a sword" and his "carcase trodden under feet" in the melee of revolution, and his body in its blood-stained raiment "cast forth, away from his (already prepared) sepulchre as an abominable branch" — Isaiah deliberately using a familiar term for the Messiah, "the Branch out of the roots of Jesse" (11:1).

He who had not been joined in friendship with the kings of countries round about was not to be joined with them in his death. They, for all their subservience to the empire, had each of them a mausoleum to perpetuate their memory amongst their own people. But not so Sennacherib. In the riot and fury and carnage of the revolution his was just one more bloody battered and trampled carcase among those which littered the streets of the capital.

All this was to befall him eventually "because thou hast destroyed my Land (Jehovah's Land), and slain my people." Here LXX corrects the pronouns of the received text.

(NOTE: There is one school of archaeologists which interprets the inscriptions as meaning that Sennacherib made two invasions of Judah — in 701 B.C. and in 686, the latter being the time when disaster befell his army. The usually received chronology of Hezekiah's reign, about which indeed there is a great amount of uncertainty, does not easily harmonize with this view. But if the theory is correct, then Sennacherib died soon after his army died).

**14:20c-23 "The seed of evildoers shall never be renowned. Prepare slaughter for his children for the iniquity of their fathers; that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities. For I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew, saith the LORD. I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the LORD of hosts."**

The entire dynasty of ruthless Assyrian conquerors is written off with divine disgust. "Their inward thought is that their house shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places unto all generations" (Ps. 49:11 — a contemporary psalm). But in fact this "seed of a mighty evildoer (intensive plural here) shall not be named for ever." Fathers have sought to bequeath an empire, but they have bequeathed retribution as well. "They shall not rise (this is echoed in 26:14)...nor shall they fill the face of the world with cities." This last word reads strangely, and can by the slightest emendation read instead: "fill the world with ruins (v. 17: destroyed the cities thereof);" or, with evil men, or, with adversities. Any of these readings is more appropriate to a description of Assyrian beastliness. By contrast, God's restored Israel is to "fill the face of the world with fruit" (27:6).

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It almost seems possible to match the prophet's catalogue of this "seed of evildoers" with the Assyrian kings down to the destruction of Nineveh:

The name	Sennacherib
and remnant	Esarhaddon
and son	Asshur-bani-pal
and son's son	Shin-shar-ishkun.

And then Nineveh became "pools of water", by the destruction of its mighty system of irrigation — as Nahum also prophesied: "With an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof" (1:8). This was accomplished by Nabopolassar, the empire-building father of Nebuchadnezzar. Nay, it was done by *the Lord of hosts*. His angel destroyed Sennacherib's army, and other angels rounded off the task, reducing Nineveh to rubble. The city was swept with God's "besom of destruction", a powerful phrase: *betetiyah b'matateh heshmed*.

**14:24-27 "The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: That I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders. This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?"**

Now, explicitly, "Babylon" is plainly said to be Assyria. Earlier (8:4-8; 10:5,6) the purpose of Heaven in using this great king as a tool has been emphasized. Now, with a strong oath sworn by the Lord of hosts, His purpose against Assyria is expressed in a climax of repetition: "I have thought (i.e. made a plan)...I have purposed...it shall stand...this is the purpose...the Lord hath purposed...his hand is stretched out."

There is also another repetition: "as...as...Assyria" is, in Hebrew, "asher...asher...Asshur," thus making the climax more effective.

Nothing could be more explicit. This military colossus is to come to nought, broken by act of God on the mountains of Israel, thus giving freedom to captives under the yoke and a great lightening of burdens to other conquered nations. (These "burdens" are depicted in vivid detail in no less than eleven chapters: 13-23).

The language of servitude — "yoke...burden" — formerly used in threat (10:27; 9:4), is now shaped into a gracious promise of release. Immanuel's Land (8:8) is now said to be God's Land. And it is here, and not at the border of Egypt (as so many of the moderns perversely insist), where this human tyranny will be broken. But when the destruction came, how did God "tread him under foot"? What *kind* of divine act is foretold by this phrase?

For the discerning of Isaiah's day, the prophecy was even chronologically explicit. Freedom from yoke and burden is the language of Jubilee, the year of release. For every contemporary of the prophet knew, in this last year of Ahaz (v.28), that the next Jubilee would be in 15 years' time. Then, and not before, would the Assyrian shadow be taken away. Weary years of waiting for the faithful remnant; but then, for certain, would be deliverance.

As God's hand was "stretched out still" (9:12,17,21; 10:4) in wrath against His own people, so there will also be this other stretching out (v.27), "and who shall turn it back?" This is the true word of false prophet Balaam: "Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it" (Num. 23:20).

#### The Last Day reference of Isaiah 13,14

The great climax of God's purpose with Israel comes with the final "overturn" of the nation by their enemies (Ez. 21:27). At that time repentance will bring their Messiah (foreshadowed by godly Hezekiah) and salvation from a dreaded "Assyrian."

In a further survey of these two chapters one must be content to review the salient details where there are special indications of a Last-Day fulfilment, as already laid out with reference to the contemporary fulfilment:

- a. 13:1-18 Judgment of Israel.
- b. 13:19-22 The overthrow of "Babylon."
- c. 14:1-3 Israel's restoration.
- d. 14:4-27 The fate of the Assyrian (Babylon) and all his might.

This summary can now be set out in greater detail:

- a. 13:4. An irresistible invasion by a gathering of nations.  
 13:6. It is "the day of the Lord".  
 13:6. The destruction of Israel from Shaddai; cp. Jl. 1:15, about the same.  
 13:8. Israel helpless.  
 13:9. The Land destroyed. *Sinners* punished.  
 13:10. Sun, moon, and stars obscured — a figure of Israel's calamity; Jl. 2:31; 3:15; Mt. 24:29; Rev. 12,13.  
 13:13. "Heaven and earth" — the old order ended.  
 13:16. This is Zech. 14:2.  
 13:17. Remote enemies join in the attack.
- b. 13:19. Like the destruction of Sodom; Lk. 17:28,29.  
 13:20-22. Compare Isaiah 34, and note especially v.8.  
 13:22. "The time is near", after the destruction of Israel.
- c. 14:1. God's mercy on Israel.  
 14:2. Captivity and tribulation ended.  
 14:3. The year of Jubilee.
- d. 14:4-6. The power of the "Assyrian" broken.  
 14:7. Israel left in peace.  
 14:9-19. All the world wonders.  
 14:13. Failure to be exalted above "the stars of God" (Israel).  
 14:13. The temple mount coveted.  
 14:17. This destroyer has made the world a wilderness.  
 14:20. No ceremonial burial (but instead Ez. 39:11).  
 14:24. The oath of God regarding all this, as in such Messianic prophecies as Gen. 22:16-18; Ps. 132:11.  
 14:24. "So it shall rise up" (Heb.) — i.e. a second time, in the Last Days.

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- 14:25. The northern invader broken in God's Land.  
14:25. "Yoke, burden, shoulder, counsel (purpose)" — cp. 9:4-6: Messiah's kingdom.  
14:26,27. The culmination of God's Purpose (the repetition pointing to a second fulfillment).

### 14:28 "In the year that king Ahaz died was this burden."

It is difficult to resolve with certainty the problem: Does the phrase: 'this burden' refer to the foregoing (ch.13; 14:1-27: 'Babylon') or to what follows (14:29-32: 'Philistia')? Read according to the first of these possibilities (i.e. as a sub-scriptum) there is much more effectiveness. The words are now seen as a declaration: This doom on 'Babylon' will be fulfilled in the reign of the new king. And the Jubilee hints in 14:2,3 would point to the 14th of Hezekiah as the appointed time of the Assyrian overthrow.

This doom on 'Babylon', together with Mic. 5:5, would encourage Hezekiah's prompt shrugging off of the Assyrian yoke (2 Kgs. 18:7).

Jeremiah's remarkable intervention in contemporary politics (27:2-4) encourages the idea that Isaiah's long series of burdens (ch. 13-23) was spoken to, or handed in writing to, the ambassadors of the various nations who came to Hezekiah's coronation (note v.32).

**14:29-32 "Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent. And the firstborn of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety: and I will kill thy root with famine, and he shall slay thy remnant. Howl, O gate; cry, O city; thou, whole Palestina, art dissolved: for there shall come from the north a smoke, and none shall be alone in his appointed times. What shall one then answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it."**

In this period Judah's relations with the Philistines had swung from one extreme to another. In Uzziah's reign that land had been completely absorbed into Judah's new empire (2 Chr.26:6,7). Then in Ahaz's reign of weakness the tables were turned very drastically, and Philistia's independence even took over an appreciable piece of Jewish territory (28:18), so that Ahaz — poor fool! — was driven to appeal for Assyrian help, and thenceforward found himself an Assyrian vassal (29:21).

It is difficult to identify with confidence the powers referred to here as the rod-become-serpent (as in Ex. 7:10), and the cockatrice, and the fiery flying serpent. Do these refer to a re-assertion of Jewish authority over Philistia? Or to a sequence of Assyrian waves of invasion down the coastal plain? In view of the undoubted Assyrian ambitions to overrun Egypt (see ch.20), the latter reading is more likely. In that case, if the broken rod (v.29) is Sennacherib repulsed from Jerusalem (an event yet 14 years in the future), then Isaiah is warning the Philistines to prepare for two more generations of devastation — by Esarhaddon and Asshur-bani-pal. Yet another possibility is reference to Tiglath-pileser, Sargon II (20:1), and Sennacherib.

There are a surprising number of verbal coincidences (in Hebrew) between these few verses and ch. 11:1-8 about the root of Jesse who defends the poor and gets rid of the cockatrice. It is appropriate to the contrast between the Assyrian aggressor and righteous king Hezekiah.

Thus whereas God's faithful — "the firstborn of the poor" (Num. 3:13) and the "needy" — will come through safely (thanks to their righteous king), the "root" and "remnant" of the

Philistines will suffer grievously. Because of the "smoke from the north" (the dust raised by the invading army?), Philistia will "melt away" (RV) and the great city of Ashdod (20:1) will suffer hardship. The army coming against it will be irresistible: "no straggler in his ranks" (RVm; cp. Jl. 2:7,8 — the same invasion overrunning Judaea).

And it will happen "in his appointed times". This mysterious phrase is more specific than appears on the surface, for this Hebrew word always refers to feasts of the Lord. It was at Passover that Sennacherib's army was destroyed at Jerusalem (3029; 31:5), at a time when his other army was besieging Lachish and Libnah 37:8) and wrecking the Philistine plain (Am. 1:6-8).

The only prophetic comfort offered to these war-torn Philistines was an exhortation to recognize that God's holy city was, in this era, inviolate (29:7; 31:5; 33:20; Ps 87). Let these Philistines recognize that as "the poor of God's people" put their trust in Him (Zeph. 3:12), so they should also do the same. Apart from this, no hope! Not for any of their five cities.

According to all the intimations encountered so far in this part of Isaiah, there should also be a Last Day fulfilment of this burden of Philistia in connection with the dramatic boil-up of events preceding Messiah's coming. But one has to confess that it is not easy to get a clear interpretative picture.

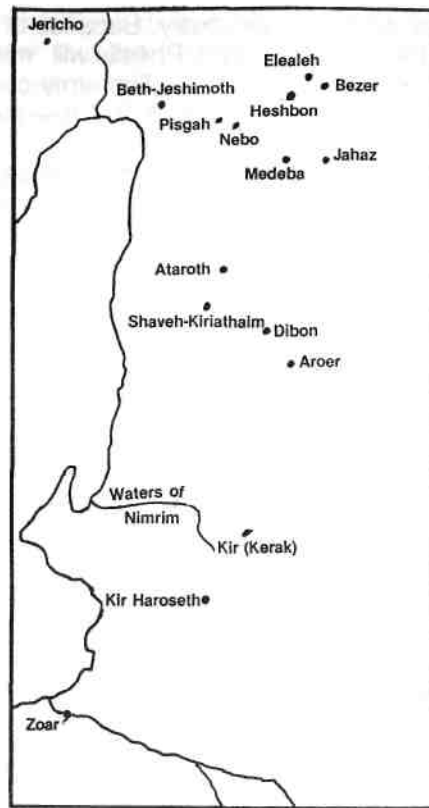
Certain details are fairly dependable. There will be invasion from the north, and it will be at Passover time. But which identification is possible of the serpent brood Isaiah specifies? The modern counterpart to the ancient Philistine territory is what is now called the Gaza strip, with a burgeoning Arab population, all of them, at the time of writing, on the boil with anti-Jewish hatred.

## Chapter 15

**15:1-5 "The burden of Moab. Because in the night Ar of Moab is laid waste, and brought to silence; because in the night Kir of Moab is laid waste, and brought to silence; He is gone up to Bajith, and to Dibon, the high places, to weep: Moab shall howl over Nebo, and over Medeba: on all their heads shall be baldness, and every beard cut off. In their streets they shall gird themselves with sackcloth: on the tops of their houses, and in their streets, every one shall howl, weeping abundantly. And Heshbon shall cry, Elealeh: their voice shall be heard even unto Jahaz: therefore the armed soldiers of Moab shall cry out; his life shall be grievous unto him. My heart shall cry for Moab; his fugitives shall flee unto Zoar, an heifer of three years old: for by the mounting up of Luhith with weeping they go up (R.V.); for in the way of Horonaim they shall raise up a cry of destruction."**

The burden of Moab occupies two chapters. A quick review of the nation's history is perhaps desirable.

Moab and Ammon were peoples sprung from the sons of Lot's incestuous daughters (Gen. 19:37). They joined in the early efforts to crush David's growing power, and were themselves crushed and added to his fast-growing empire (2 Sam. 8:2; Ps. 60:8). Solomon kept Moab friendly, but in spite of his great wisdom he paid a horrible price by adding a Moabite princess to his harem and by



tolerating a Chemosh temple on the Mount of Olives looking towards Moab (1 Kgs. 11:7).

After the northern secession Israel gave Moab hard treatment, especially in the reign of Omri. But the weakness of Ahab gave Mesha, an extremely able Moabite king and sheep-master, the opportunity to assert independence. According to the Moabite Stone (broken up by superstitious Arabs, so that more than a third of it was lost), Mesha was a competent progressive ruler. But independence was lost again when Jeroboam II overran the country. Tribute was probably paid in the form of thousands of sheep and lambs.

When the growing power of Assyria weakened Israel's dominance, Moab gained its independence again, and about this time, or maybe earlier, it assimilated practically the whole of the territory of Reuben. Most of the cities assigned to Reuben in Joshua 13:21 crop up later (in Is. 15,16; Jer. 48, and the Mesha Stone) as Moabite possessions.

Then the Assyrians — Tiglath-pileser III, Shalmanezar V (probably), and Sennacherib (certainly) — took toll of Moab's prosperity. The last two verses of ch. 16 are to be read as foretelling disaster in the time of Sennacherib. That passage asserts the fulfilment of the body of these two chapters at that time.

But 16:13 (RV): "This is the word which the Lord spake concerning Moab in time past" intimates that ch. 15, 16 are not original prophecies by Isaiah himself. Apparently all he has done is to reproduce the words from some older "burden", simply adding the grim assurance that within three years all this will be accomplished (16:14).

It is rather remarkable that just as David's conquests began with, first, the Philistines, and then the Moabites, so also Isaiah's burden against Philistia is followed by this against Moab — and so also Jeremiah 47,48. The very dramatic opening should probably read (as in Cambridge Bible): "Yea, in a night is Ar laid waste — Moab undone! Yea, in a night is Kir laid waste — Moab undone!"

The accompanying map shows the probable location of most of the places mentioned. The element of uncertainty makes little difference to the general meaning of the prophecy.

Kir is probably the modern Kerak, a fortress of outstanding strength.

Bajith is probably 'the House', i.e. the temple of Chemosh; and 'high places' is most likely an intensive plural describing Dibon as *the* holy place. (Josh. 13:17: high places of Baal). Mesha tells how he re-built the high place of Chemosh.

Nebo is the mountain where Moses died, but the city was some miles east of it.

But it is noteworthy that in verse 5 names and phrases all seem to focus on reminiscences of the story of Lot: "her *fugitives* flee to *Zoar*" (at the southern end of the Dead Sea); there is a cry of *destruction*"; "an heifer of three years old" is literally: "the third heifer" — a symbolic allusion to the fate of Lot's wife (v.8 mentions Eglaim and 'the two heifers', his daughters); Horonaim, near Zoar, means "two caves" (Gen. 19:30); and just possibly Luhith may have a hidden allusion to that last disgraceful episode told about Lot.

**15:6-9 "For the waters of Nimrim shall be desolate: for the hay is withered away, the grass faileth, there is no green thing. Therefore the abundance they have gotten, and that which they have laid up, shall they carry away to the brook of the willows. For the cry is gone round about the borders of Moab; the howling thereof unto Eglaim, and the howling thereof unto Beer-elim. For the waters of Dimon shall be full of blood: for I will bring more upon Dimon, lions upon him that escapeth of Moab, and upon the remnant of the land."**

There is little certainty about the identification of the places mentioned here.

The waters of Nimrim (see map) are said to be fed by seven springs, and therefore a specially lush area important for Moab's main "industry" — sheep-rearing. The withering of the grass is another symbolic reference to the desolation of Moab's "abundance" (v.7).

Beer-elim (the well of the rulers) may be the very place on Moab's eastern or northern border where the princes of Israel made a formal ceremony of digging a well (Num. 21:16-18), thus signifying the beginning of their possession of their inheritance.

No place called Dimon is traceable. But it has been speculated that this is a deliberate perversion of Dibon, so as to suggest the Hebrew word for "blood".

The abundance carried away to "the brook of the willows" is probably a parallel to the willows of the waters of Babylon (Ps. 137:2) where Sennacherib transplanted many of his captives. And similarly the "lions" (v.9) are a figure of the Assyrians, for winged lions figure prominently in their bas-reliefs.

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## Chapter 16

**16:1-6 "Send ye the lamb to the ruler of the land from Sela to the wilderness, unto the mount of the daughter of Zion. For it shall be, that, as a wandering bird cast out of the nest, so the daughters of Moab shall be at the fords of Amon. Take counsel, execute judgment; make thy shadow as the night in the midst of the noonday; hide the outcasts; bewray not him that wandereth. Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab; be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler: for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land. And in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness."**

This paragraph has about it a distinct change of tone (except perhaps for v.2). Its details strongly suggest that it is Isaiah's own insertion in the older prophecy (v. 13 RV) which he has quoted in ch. 15 and in the rest of this chapter.

But since v.2 is so like ch. 15, it has been suggested that this really belongs at the end of ch.15. Certainly "the daughters of Moab" pictured in flight might well be a carry over of the allusions to Lot and his family (15:5).

Verse 1 reads as an exhortation to Moab to resume the payment of tribute to God's people. "The lamb" is a collective noun for the thousands of animals paid in tribute. But now the allegiance is to be expressed not to the Northern Kingdom, as formerly (2 Kgs. 3:4), but to the temple of Jehovah. The mention of Sela (in Edom) and the wilderness suggests that because of invasion from the north the tribute is to be sent via the southern circuit of the Dead Sea. "The ruler of the Land" who received this subjection is, of course, Hezekiah who after the destruction of Sennacherib's army (v.4) stood in a position of great prestige among the surrounding nations.

Remarkably, the Hebrew of verse 4 can be read in two directly opposite ways — either, as AV: "Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab" (a picture of Jewish fugitives finding refuge east of Jordan); or, as most modern versions: "Let the outcasts of Moab dwell with thee" (i.e. with the daughter of Zion; v.1). This latter reading (with strong support of LXX and other versions) has more inherent sense and undoubtedly fits the context far better, for ch. 15,16 are all about Moab being overrun by the enemy, all (that is) except v.5 which speaks of a son of David secure on his throne from invaders who are "consumed out of the Land." So Moab is urged to lean on Hezekiah of Jerusalem, just as Lot had to depend for rescue on Abraham, who then brought the spoils of war to the sanctuary of the Lord on Mount Moriah.

As the godly king in Zion was to be "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (32:2), so also for wretched Moab, if only these stricken people would have the good sense to recognize where true safety lay — "a shadow in the midst of noonday, hiding the outcasts" (v.3). Compare also 14:32: "The Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it." "The oppressors" are clearly the irresistible Assyrians. At this point, LXX follows a slightly different text, to give this reading: "The prince is perished that trampled the Land" — a specific prophecy of what was to happen to Sennacherib as well as to his army (37:36-38).

Verse 5 is quite superb, first as an assurance of the saving power of godly Hezekiah — note the words "mercy...truth...judgment...righteousness" — with the strong implication that, sharing the faith of this wonderful man, these distressed Moabites can share also the safety and recovery which comes through him.

The reference to "the tabernacle of David" is to be taken in a double sense, as meaning not only the sanctuary in Zion but also the Man of God in Zion. In Amos 9:11 the "raising up of the tabernacle of David that is fallen" is most probably a figurative allusion to the restoration of stricken Hezekiah.

But it would be foolish to stop here, focussing entirely on the undoubted relevance of this prophecy to Isaiah's own day. The rabbis fastened on the allusion to "a throne established in mercy and in truth" (i.e. fulfilling the promises to the fathers) on "the mount of the daughter of Zion" and so they interpreted "Send ye the lamb" as meaning: "They shall bring tribute to Israel's Messiah who shall have sway over those that are in the wilderness" (Targum).

Just as chapter 14 foretells how the great Northern Enemy of the last days will be brought to nought, so also chapters 15,16 prophesy a desolation of the state of Jordan unless there is a willingness to acknowledge the authority of the Lord's Messiah reigning on the throne established (2 Sam. 7:13) on Mount Zion.

**16:6-12 "We have heard of the pride of Moab: he is very proud; even of his haughtiness, and his pride, and his wrath: but his lies shall not be so. Therefore shall Moab howl for Moab, every one shall howl: for the foundations of Kir-hareseth shall ye mourn; surely they are stricken. For the fields of Heshbon languish, and the vine of Sibmah: the lords of the heathen have broken down the principal plants thereof, they are come even unto Jazer, they wandered through the wilderness: her branches are stretched out, they are gone over the sea. Therefore I will bewail with the weeping of Jazer the vine of Sibmah: I will water thee with my tears, O Heshbon, and Elealeh: for the shouting for thy summer fruits and for thy harvest is fallen. And gladness is taken away, and joy out of the plentiful field; and in the vineyards there shall be no singing, neither shall there be shouting: the treaders shall tread out no wine in their presses; I have made their vintage shouting to cease. Wherefore my bowels shall sound like an harp for Moab, and mine inward parts for Kir-haresh. And it shall come to pass, when it is seen that Moab is weary on the high place, that he shall come to his sanctuary to pray; but he shall not prevail."**

The appeal (see on v.4) to rely on the God of Israel and on His king in Zion is apparently rejected. So this next paragraph pictures the unrelieved agony of the people of Moab as judgment overtakes them for their overweening pride (as in 25:11 also), their unfriendliness towards Israel, and especially for the base character of their religion. How well "the haughtiness of Moab" comes out in the boasting of Mesha, on the Moabite Stone! But "his lies are not so" — there is to be a sharp contrast between false expectation and the true facts of experience.

"Moab will howl for Moab" — the survivors mourning for those who have been lost.

"The lords of the heathen" are the priests of the high places (cp. Num. 21:28). These flee now to Jazer on the edge of the wilderness or "go over the sea" (this must be the Dead Sea, if the reading is correct; but LXX more appropriately has "wilderness").

Nevertheless — because of the ancient link with Abraham? — there is deep sympathy for Moab in its predicament: "I will weep with the weeping of Jazer." The "bowels" i.e. compassion, of God, goes out to these fugitives (cp. 63:15). Or is it said in irony, when there is actually contempt for the futility of Moab's "weary"

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pleading on high places, prayers which cannot possibly prevail? What a contrast with the effectiveness of the intercessions of Hezekiah both for himself in his sickness and for his people facing the inroads of the Assyrians.

A remarkable feature of these two chapters is the close relationship that there is with Jeremiah 48, also about Moab. There seem to be two main possibilities: either Jeremiah is quoting from his copy of Isaiah, or else from the original prophecy (by some un-named prophet) which Isaiah has also used very copiously. It is undeniably true that Jeremiah refers quite extensively to Isaiah's prophecies, so this makes the first suggestion perfectly feasible. But on the other hand, there is so little direct quotation and so much variation of phrase in the parallel passages as to suggest the other possibility, or even that Jeremiah was quoting from memory, or making variations to suit the circumstances of his own time.

With ch.15:2-7 compare Jer. 48:37,34,35,36; and with 16:6-11 compare 48:29-33,36.

**16:13,14 "This is the word that the LORD hath spoken concerning Moab since that time. But now the LORD hath spoken, saying, Within three years, as the years of an hireling, and the glory of Moab shall be contemned, with all that great multitude; and the remnant shall be very small and feeble."**

"Spoken in time past" (RV) suggests that most of ch. 15,16 forms a prophecy spoken in earlier days by some prophet of the Lord (Jonah?). But now Isaiah declares very emphatically that, since apparently Moab refuses to lean on Judah's king, and Judah's God, the worst features of this judgment will be fulfilled, and little indeed will be left to Moab. More than this, Isaiah is specific that fulfilment will come within three years, "as the years of an hireling." But the years of a hireling are neither longer nor shorter than any other kind of year. However, two periods of three years of hired service fitted into the six between one sabbath year and the next. Now the sign given to Hezekiah (2 Kgs. 19:29) identifies the year of the siege by Sennacherib (701 B.C.) as a sabbath year. So the implication behind Isaiah's explicit phrasing is that these words were spoken in 704 B.C, and that before the sabbath year came, havoc and ruin would be taken by these Assyrians through the length and breadth of Moab — and not just Moab: "This is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations" (14:26).

When a boastful Assyrian voice was lifted up against the God of Israel, the reply from heaven was: "Hast thou not heard long ago, how I have done it; and of ancient times, that I have formed it? now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste defenced cities into ruinous heaps" (37:26). That phrase: "ancient times" may imply that ch. 15,16 were first spoken long before the days of Sennacherib, and that these prophecies were known by the Assyrian king.

Since Isaiah has similar phrasing in 21:16 — "as the years of an hireling" — it follows that that prophecy was spoken two years after this one.

There is an interesting play on words in the expression: "the glory of Moab contemned (abased, brought low)," for this Hebrew word also means "roasted," as though alluding to the worst horrors of Moabite religion when they passed their children through the fire to Chemosh (2 Kgs. 3:27).

Since, undeniably, the prophecies about Sennacherib belong also to the last days and the inroads of another northern invader, it needs to be considered whether in that time of crisis there will not once again be an all-important sabbath year for the deliverance of Jerusalem, with its preceding year bringing devastation on Moab (Jordan).

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## Chapter 17

**17:1-3 "The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap. The cities of Aroer are forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make them afraid. The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria: they shall be as the glory of the children of Israel, saith the LORD of hosts."**

The shape of this Burden of Damascus is really rather remarkable. In these three verses the fate of the city is closely coupled with that of Ephraim, the northern kingdom, and then the rest of the burden concentrates (probably) on Judah and its sensational deliverance from Sennacherib.

Earlier Isaiah had bidden Ahaz not fear "the two tails of these smoking firebrands," Syria and Israel (7:4,8). Now the day of God's action against them draws nearer. Just which Assyrian attack on Damascus is meant here is not clear. Certainly Tiglath-pileser III conquered it (2 Kgs. 16:9; Am. 1:3) in 732 B.C. It appears to have continued under Assyrian domination in the reigns of Shalmanezar V and Sargon II. It is a likely guess that when Sennacherib faced revolt from various subject states, Syria was one of them, and that this prophecy foretells the outcome of that king's punitive expedition "No eastern city has been so often overthrown and rebuilt as Damascus" (Vitranga).

Isaiah, always fond of playing with words, has a couple of typical examples here in the Hebrew text. They are such as cannot possibly be re-produced in English. The city becomes a heap. The *cities* of *Aroer* are for *flocks* which are not *afraid*. Since none of the three Aroers of the OT. (one in Moab, one in Ammon, and one in the Negeb) seems relevant to this passage, there is a temptation to follow LXX in leaving it out altogether, — "her cities for ever are forsaken." However there is some evidence of a place with a similar name near Damascus, but nothing is known about it. The name Aroer means "bare, stripped," and this meaning is surely alluded to in the picture (v.6) of both vine and olive bereft of fruit.

"The glory of Israel" is spoken of as already gone, or at least already prophetically doomed. "The fortress" may be Samaria which withstood a long siege by Shalmanezar and Sargon before being at last brought to ruin.

**17:4-6 "And in that day it shall come to pass, that the glory of Jacob shall be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall wax lean. And it shall be as when the harvestman gathereth the corn, and reapeth the ears with his arm; and it shall be as he that gathereth ears in the valley of Rephaim. Yet gleanings shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the LORD God of Israel."**

"In that day" becomes, as elsewhere (e.g. 2:20; 3:7,18; 4:1,2), the lead in to a new paragraph of judgment (v.4,7,9,11). The reference to Ephraim and Israel (v.3) is picked up for repeated emphasis, Isaiah again indulging in some rather impressive juggling with words:

"Rephaim" is intended to recall "Ephraim," and the meaning of Ephraim is behind the phrase "a fruitful tree" (cp. Gen. 49:22; Hos. 13:15). "Ears" is *shibbolim*, suggesting *shibboleth*, the test applied to the men of Ephraim (Jd. 12:6) And the word "gathers" is almost the name Joseph. The word for "berries" occurs nowhere else, and to a Jewish ear would suggest "fugitives."

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Three separate figures of speech follow each other here — a wasting disease (cp. 10:16), the harvesting of corn, and the gathering of olives. It is the harvestman Death who gathers so beautiful a crop. And why in the valley of Rephaim? — because that name means "the dead."

The mention of gleaning grapes, and a few olive berries on remote branches is in itself a prophecy of the meagre fruits of Hezekiah's appeal to the northern tribes to renew their celebration of Passover at Jerusalem (2 Chr. 30:10,11).

There should also be a fulfilment of this part of the prophecy concerning the last days, but it is difficult to be sure precisely how. Is there an indication of heavy slaughter amongst the Israelites in the north of the Land, and consequently only a few repentant people joining those whose godliness will achieve so much towards bringing the promised Messiah?

**17:7,8 "At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel. And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall respect that which his fingers have made, either the groves, or the images."**

It is a prophecy that in the coming days oppressive events will shatter belief in all forms of false worship. Instead, men will be led back to faith in Jehovah. These developments, both negative and positive, came about in Hezekiah's reign. The ferocity of Assyrian invasion shattered (for the time being, at any rate) belief in the plethora of false gods, fostered by a spineless, faithless Ahaz. And the full-blooded reformation led by devout Hezekiah and Isaiah's school of faithful prophets re-established the authority of Jehovah over His people.

"The Holy One of Israel" is once again a divine title steering the prophet's disciples back to his earlier vision of the Lord, high and lifted up, and the message imparted then of coming judgment and the survival of a faithful remnant (6:3,9-13).

The futile altars which had distracted attention from true worship — and especially the Assyrian altar obsequiously imported by Ahaz (2 Kgs. 16:10-12) — these were to encounter a shattering wave of righteous zeal and indignation (2 Kgs. 18:4; 2 Chr. 31:1). As "the work of men's hands" they were polluted from the first moment of their fashioning — so Moses' Law declared (Ex. 20:25).

The "groves" (a poor translation, this!) were actually phallic symbols associated with the sex-religion which in nearly every generation mesmerised the people of Israel (and still does). The Hebrew name *asherah* means literally 'the way to happiness' — and so says the 20th century with equal gusto.

The "images" were actually obelisks erected in connection with sun-worship. There is good evidence in Phoenician inscriptions for this conclusion. A cognate Hebrew word means "the heat of the sun." The "sun-dial" of Ahaz (2 Kgs. 20:11) must have been one of these, and presumably it was allowed to survive the idol-smashing rampage in Hezekiah's reign because of its association with the sign given to Hezekiah at the time of his sickness (and because of its practical usefulness?). That sign very appropriately demonstrated the superiority of the Glory of the Lord over any worship of a heavenly body, no matter how impressive. However that obelisk stood no chance in the next wave of idol-smashing in Josiah's reign (2 Kgs. 23:11,12).

**17:9 "In that day shall his strong cities be as a forsaken bough, and an upper-most branch, which they left because of the children of Israel. and there shall be desolation."**

As it stands this verse is not easy to make sense of. N.I.V. and sundry commentators treat these words as not belonging here (from some other part of Isaiah's prophecy?).

"The strong cities" are the "fenced cities" of Hezekiah (2 Kgs. 18:13; 19:25) which the Assyrians readily captured and destroyed, reducing them to desolation, as Isaiah's earlier prophecy had foretold (6:11).

The LXX reading, adopted by R<sup>V</sup>m, throws a ray of light on the meaning here: "his strong cities shall be as the forsaken places of the Amorites and the Hivites which were forsaken from before the children of Israel." Now all is clear. Those Canaanite tribes, worshippers of the false gods denounced here in verse 8, were for that main reason cast out of the Land, leaving their cities and villages to be taken over by Israel, led by Joshua. Now, for the same evil found in God's people, they are to suffer a like experience, the Assyrians being used as the scourge of God.

**17:10,11 "Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength, therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shalt set it with strange slips: In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish: but the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow."**

These verses are anything but easy to understand. There seems to be sustained allusion to the pagan sexual fertility cult which dominated so many of the religions adjacent to Israel. There is some evidence that the word "pleasant" — *na'amon* — was an alternative title of Adonis (Adonai!), who was also called Tammuz. This cult was evidently associated with rites which took place in specially cultivated gardens (1:29,30; 65:3; 66:17; 57:5), but little specific information is available. Perhaps it is as well that it is so!

The "strange slips" are vine shoots. And here the LXX reading, very different from AV, reads: "in the day wherein thou shalt obtain an inheritance, and as a man's father shalt thou obtain an inheritance for thy sons." Is there possibly here an allusion to the rape of Naboth's vineyard which Ahab wanted to dedicate to the evil Adonis religion just mentioned?

But the end of v.11 AV says that these beautiful gardens of false religion will be swept away "in a day of grief and desperate sorrow" — again, it is the Assyrian threat. The Hebrew word for "heap" always means "a heap of waters" — the Assyrian tide (as in 8:7,8); and this idea leads on readily enough to verses 12,13.

**17:12-14 "Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind. And behold at eveningtide trouble; and before the morning he is not. This is the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us."**

The attack of the Assyrian invaders, causing complete terror (v.14), is scornfully rebuked. Their violence is to meet with a greater violence, so that in a few hours between evening and morning all threat of danger is gone.

The enemy is described as "many people" because of the copious recruitment of mercenaries which the Assyrians made use of from other conquered countries:

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"the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel" (29:7); "assemble yourselves, all ye peoples, and ye shall be broken in pieces" (8:9). Elam and Kir and the Medes are specifically mentioned (21:2; 22:6) and the vigorous judgments against Edom and Moab make it pretty certain that they too joined with enthusiasm in the onslaught on Judah (25:10; 34:6; 63:1).

The "rushing of mighty waters" is a vigorous figure taken from experience of a flash-flood in a wadi after a violent storm in the hills. The same word "rushing" describes "the noise of strangers" coming against the mountain of the Lord of hosts (25:5,6)

The rebuke of God — by His thunder? (Ps. 104:7) — comes first from His prophet and then by the violence of the judgment poured out. The power harnessed by God for the discipline of His people has decreed for it an even worse fate: "When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and upon Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks" (10:12). "When thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shall be spoiled" (33:1).

"They — these mighty Assyrians! — shall flee far off." The wheat of the harvest was beaten out with a flail on a hill-top threshing floor (2 Chr. 3:1). Then, when the mixture of wheat and chaff was thrown up into the wind, the lightweight chaff was blown in violent eddies away from the heavier grain (Ps. 1:4; 35:5; Mt. 3:12).

This figure recurs more than once. "The multitude of thy strangers shall be like small dust...as chaff that passeth away...Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder" (29:5,6).

Psalms 83, most emphatically a Hezekiah psalm, and not (as often asserted) dating from Jehoshaphat, is a remarkably close parallel prophecy. It presents a picture of God's people hard-pressed and with little hope of survival. They are beset by a great confederacy of enemies, all of them Arab peoples round about, including Damascus, Syria, with Asshur prominent among them. This prayer for help echoes Isaiah: "O my God, make them like a whirling thing, as stubble before the wind, (*ruach*, the Spirit)...pursue them with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm" (Ps. 83:13,15) — "that men may know that thou, whose name alone is Jehovah, art the Most High over all the earth." "The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm" (Nah. 1:3) — the words were spoken against Sennacherib's Nineveh.

Isaiah's prophecy here could hardly be more specific. There is "trouble (terror) at eveningtide." Yet "before the morning he (the enemy) is not." This is precisely how judgment fell on the Assyrian host: "when men arose early in the morning, behold they were all dead — corpses!" (37:36).

There is a grim irony about that expression: "This is the *portion* of them that spoil us", for that word *holek* means 'this is their share of the plunder.' They have ravaged towns and cities, homes and farms; now they have this share of plunder as well — the stroke of the angel of the Lord.

Again it has to be emphasized that the real value of this prophecy is in its meaning for *today*.

Syrian Damascus, along with Edom and Moab, Egypt and Tyre and all the other Arab marauders, will combine with the great northern enemy to devastate and ravage Israel for its persistent faithless materialistic godlessness and worship of sex. And yet through the penitence of a faithful remnant there will come sudden Messianic deliverance. The destroying angel of the Lord still has much fell work to accomplish — and he has not forgotten how to achieve it *overnight!*

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## Chapter 18

**18:1,2 "Woe to the land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia: That sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters, saying, Go ye swift messengers, to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled!"**

Babylon-Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Syria — and now through three chapters, the burden of Egypt. And still the most essential element in these prophecies against Gentile nations is their relation to the people of God. Apart from this, no Gentile nation is of any serious importance in the purposes of Heaven. It is friendship with or hostility to Israel which makes all the difference. Was not this almost the first assurance given to Abraham (Gen. 12:3)?

As background to this burden, there is a picture of an embassy of friendship and alliance coming to Jerusalem from Tirhakah, the Ethiopian king of Egypt. Yet everything about succeeding prophecies suggests Egyptian untrustworthiness and deceit, and even hostility. Isaiah gives no encouragement at all to the repeated eager efforts of the faithless statesmen in Jerusalem to make a firm defensive alliance against the tide of Assyrian expansion. Joel is specially caustic in his deprecation of this pseudo-ally: "Egypt shall be a desolation...for the violence against the children of Judah, because they (the Egyptians) have shed innocent blood (of Jewish refugees) in their land" (3:19),

"The land shadowing with wings" is readily identified by the mention of its "vessels of bulrushes", more strictly, papyrus, the flags which still grow on the margin of the Nile. Of course their vessels were not made of papyrus, but they used sails of that material. And their treaties were paper promises.

"The rivers of Ethiopia" are the several branches of the Nile delta. The name Ethiopia is used with reference to the ruling Egyptian dynasty, for Tirhakah (37:9) and his predecessors were a Cushite family from the extreme south, hence "*beyond* the rivers of Ethiopia."

Dr. Thomas fastened on the eastern Cush, to the north-east of Mesopotamia, and so identified the rivers as the Tigris and Euphrates (Eur.2.556). But in Isaiah Cush is always southern Egypt.

The word for "*shadowing*" with wings is a strange one which might refer to the buzzing of the flying insects or the whirring of wings or even the reverberation of cymbals. In fact, it is almost the same as the local name for the tse-tse fly, and is perhaps chosen to suggest the hornet which Moses used as a symbol for the might of the Pharaohs (so Garstang in his "Joshua-Judges"). There is evidence, too, that the ancient symbol for Ethiopia was the sun's disc with a prominent pair of wings.

The Hebrew interjection "Woe!" is mostly turned by modern translators into the colourless "Ho!", summoning attention. Yet it can hardly be gainsaid that in most Old Testament occurrences "Woe" appears to be the essential idea. Chapters 19,20 suggest that this is probably the right flavour, preparing Egypt for ill news. Certainly it became an important element of Isaiah's witness to discourage his people from an Egyptian alliance.

But evidently at the time when this burden was communicated, Tirhakah was showing marked signs of friendliness, sending his ambassadors to Jerusalem by boat down the Nile (sometimes, because of its impressive size, called "the sea"; 19:5; Nah. 3:8), and possibly coasting along to Joppa, for this would be a much easier travel than by the coast road, "the way of the Philistines."

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There is no need for the word "saying" (note the italics), although there are other examples of the same ellipsis. The passage makes good sense without it, when read as the prophet's cynical comment on the political mission of these ambassadors. Rather neatly LXX translates: "*swift* messengers" with a Greek word *kouphoi* meaning 'light, insubstantial, trivial.' And "ambassadors" become "paper letters" (LXX), as though suggesting paper promises, or even a paper tiger. Thus, gently, the prophet's later slurs against Egyptian undependability are anticipated (30:5,7; 31:3).

The nation to whom this deputation comes is, of course, God's own people facing fearful threat from Assyria.

"Scattered and peeled" probably, though not certainly, means "dragged away and plucked off (their Land), or (possibly) flayed" (50:6). It is a picture of people destined to face desperate hardship when the invader takes multitudes of them off into captivity in a far-off land. And accordingly the word for "nation" is *goi*, the normal Old Testament word for a Gentile race.

How appropriate when addressing Egypt to describe Israel as "a people *terrible* (s.w. Ex. 34:10) from their beginning." The tradition about Moses and the plagues probably still survived in the land of Ham. And in that Hebrew phrase there could even be an echo of "manna."

How appropriate, too, to refer to Israel as "the land the rivers have spoiled," for this last word recalls the last verse of ch. 17: "them that spoil us;" and the figure of Assyrian invasion as a mighty river bursting its banks is already familiar in Isaiah (8:7,8; 7:18).

**18:3 "All ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on the earth, see ye, when he lifteth up an ensign on the mountains; and when he bloweth a trumpet, hear ye."**

Egyptian ambassadors are intent on securing a secret agreement, but the prophet calls all the world to take notice of the mighty developments soon to centre on God's city in the mountains. This crisis will be like the lifting up of an ensign (5:26) and the blowing of a great trumpet (Jl. 2:15) bidding them all assemble at the Almighty's bidding. But not for war against the Assyrian Nazis. This summons calls them to peace and especially to a devout acknowledgement of the supremacy of the God of Israel (2 Chr. 32:23). It is also, as Ps. 81:3 (see context), a jubilee trumpet declaring freedom for God's people who have been dragged away into captivity.

**18:4,5 "For so the LORD said unto me, I will take my rest, and I will consider in my dwelling place like a clear heat upon herbs, and like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest. For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches."**

It is not for nothing that Lowth describes this ch.18 as "one of the most obscure prophecies in the whole of Isaiah." Another commentator goes further and calls it "the most difficult chapter in the Old Testament." So here and there conclusions have to be somewhat tentative.

The prophet makes sure that what he writes is received as undeniably a revelation from God: "The LORD said to me, I will take my rest." The words must mean either cessation of evident activity or holding back from activity until the time is more propitious; in this case, the latter, so the context indicates.

But there is assurance that God will go to work "in the heat of harvest." AV: "consider in my dwelling place" is somewhat vague; but with the smallest possible difference in the Hebrew reading (maqom for naqon), LXX has "security (or, safety) in my city" (that last word being a paraphrase). It is another of Isaiah's specific prognostications of the great Hezekiah-Sennacherib crisis.

"As clear heat upon herbs" and "like a cloud of dew" is an apparent contradiction which has the commentators somewhat mystified, judging by their tangle of words. "As the Light of mid-day heat" (LXX) is more accurate. There is now seen to be an allusion to the Glory of the Lord, the pillar of cloud and fire, which protected Israel coming out of Egypt (Ex. 14:20). The reference to "heat" is appropriate too, since it was with "devouring fire" that the angel of the Lord was to destroy the Assyrians (30:30).

Paul seems to interpret this passage in this way, using it in his vivid description of his own conversion: "About noon suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me" (Acts 22:6). He was like the Assyrian persecutor struck "dead" in the presence of the Glory of the Lord.

But this promised deliverance in Zion was to come only after God had bided His time, "taking His rest." Then, "for Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth" (62:1).

But before this — "afore the harvest" (17:11) — there must be a cutting-off of "the sprigs with the pruning hooks," that is, the plundering of Judah before ever Hezekiah's reformation had come to its fulness. Here the Hebrew word for "sprigs" seems to make deliberate allusion to "*shadowing* with wings" (v.1), thus supplying also a hint of the cutting-off of the proffered military aid from Egypt through the massive defeat inflicted by the Assyrians on Pharaoh at El-tekeh (Taylor Prism).

"He will take away, and cut down the branches" is a fairly clear anticipation of the considerable captivity which was inflicted on no less than 200,000 men of Israel, including members of the royal family (details which the same prism inscription confirms).

Not a few commentators choose to interpret this verse 5 differently: The reference to the bud and the flower and the grape and the sprigs is taken as a picture of the ripening purpose of the Assyrian king, set on empire-building in Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Judah and even Egypt — with v.6 setting out the dramatic contrast of the complete destruction of his army outside Jerusalem. But there are two arguments against this: (a) the dramatic change in the figure of speech, which has to be assumed between v.5 and 6; (b) 17:6,9,11 uses the figure of the vine for God's judgment on Israel (see notes on ch. 17).

The last day fulfilment of these verses is deferred to the end of this chapter.

**18:6 "They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth: and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them."**

By common consent, "they" are the Assyrian plunderers suddenly brought low in Judaea. The grim figure of vultures and wild beasts gorging themselves on mounds of carcasses is ghoulish enough. But the details are impressive. The siege of Jerusalem took place at Passover (31:5; 26:20; 33:20; 29:1). Here is an indication that through the summer and into the winter the wild creatures would still be foraging for their food among the piles of the dead. 185,000 — no less! (37:36).

**18:7 "In that time shall the present be brought unto the LORD of hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the LORD of hosts, the mount Zion."**

"That time" will be a time of misery and destruction, first for God's people, and then for their invaders. And now is described the final outcome — Israel constrained by the marvel of their unique deliverance to return with heart and soul to their God, and indeed being brought back to their Holy Land and Sanctuary by nations round about now recognizing it as incumbent on Jew and Gentile alike to give glory to the Lord of *hosts*. And this divine title is specially appropriate here because the deliverance comes about through *angelic* action: "The angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians" (37:36).

Once the Assyrian threat was done with, Hezekiah's partial reformation became a national regeneration (for a time, at any rate). Now in their king's extended reign of 15 years they came much more readily "to the place (*maqom*, holy place) of the name of the Lord." The thousands of captives taken off to Babylon (Senn. prism) and yet more thousands who had fled in terror to other lands — all of these were now given full encouragement and generous help for their return to the Land of their fathers (49:8ff; 60:6,7; 66:20). There was no nation within reach that was not eager to have friendship with the Jews and favour from their God.

These nations not only brought Hezekiah's people home, but they also brought lavish gifts to the temple in Jerusalem: "Many brought gifts unto the Lord, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from henceforth" (2 Chr. 32:23). Judging from other references Egypt, so useless as an ally, was now foremost in its assiduous cultivation of a Jewish alliance; and Merodach-baladan, away in Babylon, was not far behind.

From being plundered and poverty-stricken, God's Land climbed to an astonishing apex of prosperity. No longer "dragged away and plucked from" their homes, they became a people at ease and honoured far and wide.

And now it is highly important to observe how superbly prophetic of *the Last Days* this part of Egypt's burden is.

There is a picture of Egypt pretending friendship with Israel, but useless to help at the time when the northern threat paralyses everybody. But deliverance comes not from Egypt but from God's Messianic ensign raised in Zion. First, however, there seems to be reluctance on God's part to do anything for His people. The small signs of spiritual revival are apparently cut off short by the terror sweeping through the Land. But suddenly the power of the Lord of hosts is manifest, and the scene is transformed, first into one of carnage as the invading army is laid low, so that wild beasts and carrion birds are glutted with their prey (Ez. 38:20; 39:17; Rev. 19:17,21); then the sun of God's favour shines forth. Scattered Israelis come happily home, and nations who had hitherto been indifferent to their fate now esteem them the most desirable of friends. Best of all, the God of Israel is honoured with the best service which the nations can offer — those nations, that is, who have some capacity for recognizing God's Truth, and who acknowledge in the new King of Israel the one whose godliness alone can save the world.

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## Chapter 19

**19:1-4 "The burden of Egypt. Behold, the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it. And I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians: and they shall fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbour; city against city, and kingdom against kingdom. And the spirit of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof; and I will destroy the counsel thereof: and they shall seek to the idols, and to the charmers, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards. And the Egyptians will I give over into the hand of a cruel lord; and a fierce king shall rule over them, saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts."**

The Burden of Egypt begins properly here, for chapter 18 was more in the nature of an advance warning, without including any direct threat of heaven's wrath. But now, in the two parts of this Burden there is explicit prophecy of sweeping judgment, but also assurance of ultimate blessing.

Verses 1 -15 are in poetic form, and the rest is prose. The modern versions bring this out excellently.

It seems probable, in the light of the Herodotus version of this part of Egypt's history, that even after the defeat of Tirhakah's army at El-tekeh, the ultimate rout of Sennacherib's army (foretold in 18:6) would be attributed by the Egyptians to the advance of another army from Egypt and to the influence of the gods of Egypt successfully sought by the Pharaoh (not Tirhakah) who was apparently a priest also.

Appropriately, then, the impending judgment on Egypt is introduced by a vivid picture of the God of Israel going into action, the prophet's language constantly echoing the Exodus narrative of the plagues in Egypt and the freedom won by Moses for Israelite captives there:

Isaiah 19	Exodus	Isaiah 19	Exodus
1	13:21,22; 12:12,30	14	7:13
3	7:11,22; 8:7; 7:12	16	7:5,19
4	1:8	17	7:12,20
5	7:19ff	20	3:9,10; 2:23-25
11	7:11; Ps. 78:11,43	22	9:15; 12:23
12	8:19		

There is a sharp contrast between the tranquil cloud of blessing associated with God's presence with His people (18:4), and the swift cloud of judgment, rather like the eye of a hurricane, by which God manifested Himself when delivering Israel from Egypt (Ex. 14:24). Jehovah is often spoken of as travelling on a cloud or on the wings of the storm (Dt. 33:26, against Egypt; Ps. 68:33, in the wilderness; Nah. 1:3, against Assyria; Ps. 18:10; 104:3). In Ex. 14, the Cloud of the Shekinah Glory was travelling from Egypt into the wilderness because His people were going thither. Now because refugees of His people were fleeing into Egypt (v. 18), their God also "cometh into Egypt" with them. And "the idols of Egypt" which had felt the divine stroke in the time of Moses (Ex. 12:12; Num. 33:4) and which again were being relied upon by deluded Egyptian superstition, are "moved at his presence" (cp. 1 Sam. 5:4).

One of the resulting judgments is civil war and social and industrial chaos throughout the land. Herodotus describes just such a period in Egypt soon after 700 B.C. "I will swallow up the counsel thereof" uses the very word for Aaron's rod becoming a serpent and swallowing up the rods of the Egyptians (Ex. 7:12).

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The idols — the "not-gods" — are exposed as futile, and the people of that land come under the control of "a cruel lord, a fierce king." Here "lord" is plural and "cruel" is singular, thus suggesting what is known as an intensive plural — a singular expressed by means of a plural, here meaning: "an excessively cruel lord."

And his identity? The commentaries produce a bewildering variety of suggestions — guesses, all of them: Sargon, Psammetichus (who re-unified Egypt 15 years after the time of Hezekiah), Nebuchadnezzar, the Persian dynasty, the Romans, the Saracens. Of these, the first is the most likely, or even better still, Sennacherib. But it has to be confessed that the fragmentary archaeology of that period has not as yet produced any clear sign of that Assyrian tyrant getting as far as Egypt. But it would be surprising if, after his easy and overwhelming victory over the Egyptians at El-tekeh, Sennacherib did not set his sights on the plundering of that land, as a good compensation for his ignoble overthrow outside Jerusalem. "I gave Egypt for thy (Zion's) ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee" (43:3). These words seem to imply that the Assyrians were vouchsafed a rewarding, if only brief, success in Egypt as a kind of "compensation" for being robbed of victory in Judaea by the angel of the Lord.

"Saith the Lord, the Lord of *hosts*" guarantees the fulfilment of the prophecy. It is yet another allusion back to the days of Moses when the angel hosts did God's bidding in Egypt (Ex. 12:23; Ps. 78:43-49).

**19:5-10 "And the waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall be wasted and dried up. And they shall turn the rivers far away; and the brooks of defence shall be emptied and dried up: the reeds and flags shall wither. The paper reeds by the brooks, by the mouth of the brooks, and every thing sown by the brooks, shall wither, be driven away, and be no more, The fishers also shall mourn, and all they that cast angle into the brooks shall lament, and they that spread nets upon the waters shall languish. Moreover they that work in fine flax, and they that weave networks, shall be confounded. And they shall be broken in the purposes thereof, all that make sluices and ponds for fish."**

In both literal and symbolic language this paragraph describes all aspects of Egyptian life reduced to chaos. By "the sea" is meant the Nile (as in 18:2; Nah. 3:8), and by "the brooks" there is reference to the vast Nile delta (5 times the word is translated "Nile" in R.V.). Verse 5 is evidently alluded to by Ezekiel in a similar prophecy (30:12), and it appears to be quoted almost verbatim in Job 14:11 (the Book of Job was most probably written in the time of Isaiah, even though its action belongs to an earlier period).

"Rivers of defence" are really "irrigation canals of misery", the last word being the unusual singular form of the word for Egypt (s.w. 37:25) — it is another example of Isaiah's clever juggling with words.

Verse 9 describes the flax and cotton industry, and v.8,10 the intensive and rewarding fishing then possible in Nile waters.

The "pillars broken in pieces" (v. 10 R.V.) are a figurative reference to "the wise counsellors of Pharaoh" (v.11) his cabinet controlling national policies (cp. OT. use of "cornerstone"). But considering the massive pillars which made (and make) Egyptian temples so impressive, there is probably a marked element of the literal here also (cp. Gal. 2:9).

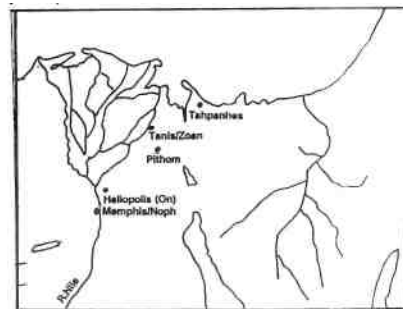
The question arises whether social, political, and industrial chaos on this scale

overtook Egypt in Isaiah's time. Specific information is fragmentary. But assuming that 37:25 (Heb.), 43:3 are sufficient Biblical indication of an Assyrian invasion then, it can only have been short and sharp in its effects, leaving each of the twelve "cantons" of the land to assert its own independence. There is every reason to look for a yet further fulfilment of this "burden."

**19:11-15 "Surely the princes of Zoan are fools, the counsel of the wise counsellors of Pharaoh is become brutish: how say ye unto Pharaoh, I am the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings? Where are they? where are thy wise men? and let them tell thee now, and let them know what the LORD of hosts hath purposed upon Egypt. The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived; they have also seduced Egypt, even they that are the stay of the tribes thereof. The LORD hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof: and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit. Neither shall there be any work for Egypt, which the head or tail, branch or rush, may do."**

Here is sustained and contemptuous exposure of the experienced statecraft of Egypt. The political skill of that land's priests and Pharaohs had wide reputation outside its own borders (Ex. 1:10; 1 Kgs. 4:30; Acts 7:22). Yet it would all prove useless to stave off the downfall and chaos purposed by the Lord of the hosts of angels, who in Moses' day had wrought such havoc in that land of unmatched prosperity (Ps. 78:49).

Why should these statesmen preen themselves on their skill in steering affairs, when they failed utterly (as in Moses' day) to respond to the elementary challenge of a genuine prophet: "Let them tell now...let them know (i.e. beforehand) what Jehovah hath purposed upon Egypt." It was a challenge going back to Moses himself (Dt. 18:22), and it was to be scornfully repeated by Isaiah time and time again against the gods of Assyria (41:22,26; 43:9; 45:21; 48:14). These Egyptian leaders of Zoan and Noph (Tanis and Memphis) boasted of descent from ancient lines of priests and kings, yet very soon political events were to expose their ineptitude. "The stay of the tribes" seems to imply, in LXX reading, the very opposite — the breakdown into small independencies, brought on by humiliating Assyrian defeats. Isaiah lived to see it.



The profundity of wisdom which led to such a collapse was to be seen by and by as nothing less than inspiration from the Lord. He would instil into these political savants the folly of a drunken man (aye, and later, the same exposure to contempt would come to Israel's faithless priests also; 28:7). All Egypt at a standstill! Head and tail, branch and rush — all segments of society (v.5-10).

**19:16,17 "In that day shall Egypt be like unto women: and it shall be afraid and fear because of the shaking of the hand of the LORD of hosts, which he shaketh over it. And the land of Judah shall be a terror unto Egypt, every one that maketh mention thereof shall be afraid in himself, because of the counsel of the LORD of hosts, which he hath determined against it."**

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Here begins the prose section of this chapter. It divides readily into five paragraphs each beginning in true prophetic style, with "In that day," each paragraph having strong emphasis on "the LORD of hosts."

The "day" spoken of is not a "date" on the calendar, but it is specific nevertheless, as a day purposed and planned (v. 17) by Jehovah when a mighty divine activity will be readily discernible in Egypt by the faithful.

The Egyptians will become soft as women, filled with fear at the shaking of the hand of Jehovah, as happened very evidently in the time of Moses (Ex. 7:5; 10:12), and as Isaiah had already foretold: "With his mighty wind he will shake his hand over the River (Euphrates)" bringing also judgment on "the tongue of the Egyptian sea." (11:15). In this place (19:16) the Hebrew word seems to be chosen to make indirect allusion to Noph (Memphis), the mighty centre of the Egyptian kingdoms.

As in Moses' day Egypt's people were driven to fear of the God of Israel, so on this later occasion "the land of Judah will be a terror" to them. The only possible explanation of this is the awe-inspiring disaster which the angel of the Lord brought on the invincible army of Sennacherib. This was "the counsel of the Lord of hosts which he had counselled." Already, in earlier prophecies Isaiah had spoken explicitly about this impending unique crisis.

**19:18 "In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the LORD of hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction."**

There is hardly any detail in this verse which is not problematical.

The language of Canaan is, of course, Hebrew. But is it Hebrew spoken by Jewish refugees or Jewish captives? The attempts at Egyptian alliance in Hezekiah's day (e.g. 30:1,2) make the former explanation more probable (and 11:11 supports this).

But why the mention of Canaan, for the name was already (in Isaiah's time) near to being an anachronism? Most probably, to recall the migration of Jacob and his family into Egypt, or perhaps to hint at how Abraham took refuge there and was protected from harm — God's faithful (but frightened) people were turning to Him in despair (v.19) and continuing to swear loyalty to Him even though far from His sanctuary. In due time (11:11; 18:7) they were to be brought home again.

This prophecy speaks of five cities where these Jews are concentrated. The emphasis on five might suggest loyalty to the Law, or — differently — might imply by its use of the Egyptian sacred or lucky number (Gen. 43:34; 45:22 47:2) the ready acceptance of the Jews into Egypt. It has been suggested that the five cities are the three named in Jeremiah 44:1, together with Heliopolis (the city of the sun) and Leontopolis where, centuries later, a Jewish temple was erected for the Egyptian Diaspora.

"The city of destruction" is almost certainly Heliopolis (Gen. 41:45; Jer. 43:13), for the Hebrew word (=On) is almost identical with "sun" — it is one of Isaiah's characteristic puns. Ezekiel similarly juggles with the name On (30:17), turning it into the Hebrew for vanity. The form of the phrase means: 'the city that is to be destroyed' (cp. usage in 24:10; Zech. 11:4) — destroyed because of its idolatry, for these are the associations of the Hebrew word (Ex. 23:24; Jud. 6:25). It is understandable that LXX should somehow turn this name into "city of righteousness," for that Greek version of the Old Testament was made in Egypt for the benefit of its Jewish community, who would not like to think of themselves as

coming under judgment there. It is known that, at the time when the LXX version was made, Onias, the son of the high priest, quoted the next verse about "an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt" as Biblical ground why an auxiliary Jewish temple should be built there (the Jews have always shown themselves good at this kind of misuse of Scripture to serve their own ends; see on 44:28). It was probably with mistaken self-laudatory reference to this prophecy — "he will send them a saviour, a great one" (v.20) — that one of the Ptolemy's ruling in Egypt called himself Soter, the Saviour.

The destruction foretold here was probably brought about by an Assyrian invasion in the time of Sennacherib. "I gave Egypt for thy ransom" (43:3) is very pointed; but it has to be admitted that thus far no archaeological evidence has come to light of such an inroad.

**19:19-22 "in that day shall there be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt; and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the LORD because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them. And the LORD shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the LORD in that day and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the LORD, and perform it. And the LORD shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even unto the LORD, and he shall be entreated of them, and shall heal them."**

The details of this prophetic vision, especially when linked with v.23-25, are readily seen to be most relevant to the Last Days, as the more Messianic segments of this prophecy already considered have been likewise seen to be. Even so, it is not amiss to look for a certain relevance also to Isaiah's own time.

An altar to Jehovah in Egypt serves to emphasize a strong Jewish presence there, as the mention of "the language of Canaan" has already done. The commentators are very fond of reading Isaiah here as foretelling the Jewish temple built by Onias at Leontopolis c. 170 B.C., but such a reference is hopelessly out of character for Isaiah. A good expositor will look at events in *his* day, and in Messiah's. With hardly an exception this is the character of Old Testament prophecy.

There is now considerable evidence of strong Jewish settlements in Egypt c. 530 B.C. Such passages as 49:11,12,22,23 show clearly enough that the Assyrian invasion of Judah produced an indiscriminate scattering of Jewish refugees long before 530 B.C. Egypt was an obvious place of refuge, as it had been right from the time of Abraham.

Deuteronomy (e.g. 16:6,15) repeatedly commanded that sacrifice was to be offered only "at the place which the Lord thy God shall choose." But now here as in Hezekiah's reformation Passover (2 Chr. 30:13,17,18,23), there is indication of relaxation of the rigidity of the Law for such of the people as had its essential principles at heart.

This altar is to be seen as comparable to that erected at Jordan by the eastern tribes, not in a schismatic spirit but to proclaim their essential oneness with their brethren in the Holy Land proper. Their altar was meant as a witness to this wholesome frame of mind (Josh. 22:27,28). And would it not also assert that Jehovah was "the God of the gods of Egypt" (Delitsch)?

Similarly a pillar at the N.E. border of Egypt was to proclaim a covenant unity (Gen. 28:18-22) with the Jews back home. More than this, as Jacob's pillar at Galeed-Mizpah proclaimed his set purpose never to make any future interference with the inheritance of the sons of Laban

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(Gen. 31:45-53), so now there was to be assurance of no further Egyptian interference with Israel's affairs, neither were Jews again to seek a craven refuge in the land of Egypt.

During Hezekiah's day this sensible separation was observed. Migdol (=watchtower; Ex. 14:2) proclaimed the same truth as Mizpah-of-Jacob. But in later generations, especially in the reigns of Josiah (2 Kgs. 23:29,30) and Zedekiah (Jer. 42-44), both parties disregarded this God-appointed covenant.

In all countries refugees are persecuted by a large proportion of the host nation. The early Israelites in Egypt had found that a bitter truth; and so also in Isaiah's time. But the cry of faith of those who now fled thither, would be heard, and the saviour raised up on their behalf was the great man of faith, Hezekiah. Very soon, for his sake the arm of the Lord was revealed against the oppressions of the invader of Judah, and thus the way was made open for an uneasy diaspora to return in the year of Jubilee which followed that deliverance.

In this way "the Lord was made known (i.e. openly; Ps. 48:3; 76:1 — both are Hezekiah psalms) not only to His own people but also to Gentiles round about, and especially to Egypt, so that there was an immediate readiness to honour the greatness of Jehovah (2 Chr. 32:23).

Alas, this Egyptian piety did not last. Their wily priests saw to that. In their later tradition (according to Herodotus) it was through the virtue of an Egyptian king-priest that the Assyrian invaders were brought to nought! (H.Gt, p.75).

The smiting of Egypt (v.22), which is vividly foretold in v.1 - 10, took place in the massive defeat of Pharaoh's army at El-tekeh, and may have been the consequence of ill-treatment of Hebrew refugees. However, the overthrow of the Assyrians at Jerusalem changed Egyptian attitudes drastically to one of reverence for Israel's God: "They shall return unto the Lord, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them."

**19:23-25 "In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance."**

In 18:6 and 19:1 -11 there is foretold a humbling of both Assyria and Egypt, two mighty powers whose economic and military resources completely dwarfed those of Judah. Now there is blessing for them both, but only through union with God's people in the service of God. Of such an amazing transformation in Isaiah's time there are only limited indications. Certainly after the overwhelming of the Assyrian army at Jerusalem there was a sudden surge of readiness to make friends with the God who wrought such wonders and with His righteous king reigning in Jerusalem (2 Chr. 32:23; Ps. 87, with Assyria significantly omitted; Is. 60:6-12; 49:22-23), but it is obvious enough to any experienced student of prophecy that the real fulfilment of these words belongs to the reign of the Messiah, whom Hezekiah so wonderfully foreshadowed.

In the prototype the highway was important for the multitudes of captives in Babylon and unwanted refugees in Egypt who were soon to come flocking back home. Formerly despised and cursed, they would be treated with helpful respect as a people wearing the badge of the mighty Lord of hosts.

As will be shown later, all the features of the situation and the phraseology of the

prophet fit the year of Jubilee which followed immediately after Jerusalem's deliverance (2 Kgs. 19:29,30), but of course the true relevance is with reference to Messiah's Jubilee.

"Egypt shall serve (the Lord) with the Assyrians" is certainly the meaning of this incomplete phrase. Verse 21 has the same word: "*and shall do sacrifice*" (cp. the use of the same word in Ex. 3:12; 9:13; 10:26; 12:31).

It is time to consider this prophecy — Isaiah 19 — once again, and with special care, with reference to its further fulfilment in the Last Days.

The first fifteen verses are readily understood of a mighty disaster yet to overtake the land of Egypt. Perhaps the emphatic language about the drying up of the waters is to be read figuratively of a complete financial and social collapse of the country. But one is led to consider the possibility that earthquake in Africa's rift valley, or maybe massive nuclear action, might send the waters of Ethiopia flowing south instead of north, thus, overnight, making Egypt almost uninhabitable. Or, is it the recent very dramatic, climatic change (nine years of drought at the sources of the Nile)

There are also long detailed prophecies about the downfall of Egypt in Jeremiah 46 and Ezekiel 30,32. As with Isaiah 18,19, reference of these to contemporary overthrow of Egyptian prosperity is relatively straightforward. But if, after the normal pattern of Bible prophecy, there is also a further reference to the Last Days, any interpretation before the event becomes exceedingly problematical.

Joel 3:19 is very explicit, in what is very evidently a Last Day context: "Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land." The later part of Isaiah 19 (e.g. v.21-25) describes a blessing on Egypt which is to come about only after the exercise of the severe divine discipline described in the prophecies just referred to.

It is remarkable that here for "terror" (v.17) LXX has the same word as in Luke 21:11 — "fearful sights," in the Last Days. It is a word which occurs nowhere else.

The rest of this chapter presents a remarkably vivid picture of dramatic events in the Middle East at the time of Israel's final travail.

It is difficult to envisage Israelis fleeing to Egypt for sanctuary in the face of irresistible invasion, for it may be taken as certain that in any time of Arab hostility to Israel, Egypt, in spite of a formal (and quite futile) treaty of friendship with Israel, will be an enemy at the first political opportunity. Joel 3:19 describes the true Egyptian attitude in the Last Days.

Then how will "the language of Canaan" come to be spoken in five cities in Egypt? Probably through the rounding-up of many Jews as prisoners and slave labour. In such circumstances of utter hopelessness these Jews will be driven to repentance — hence "an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt," that is, prayers for a deliverance which, it is now seen, can come from no other source.

When there is this "cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors" (cp. Ex. 3:9; 14:13), the divine response will be immediate, as it so often was in the times of the Judges: "he will send them a Saviour, a great one," none other than their Messiah. In Hebrew the word for Saviour, *Moshiah*, makes an easy play on the name Moses, *Mosheh*.

In the time of Moses, that ancient Pharaoh stridently asked. "Who is Jehovah, that I should obey his voice, to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, neither will I let Israel go" (Ex. 5:2). But by and by he changed his tune. So also in this crisis yet in the future.

There will again be appropriate retribution against Egypt ("he that curseth thee, I

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will curse"), yet only for a time. When the King of the Jews is acknowledged, then — having smitten — God will heal: "he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them." Now, instead of a repeated hardening of heart by a Pharaoh who would not keep faith the Egyptian will "vow a vow unto Jehovah, *and will perform it.*"

The fourth and fifth repetitions of "in that day" (11:10,11; 12:1; Zech. 12,13,14) underline the Messianic character of this remarkable prophecy. And the highway, which is such a feature in Isaiah (11:16; 35:8; 40:3; Mic. 7:12RV; Is. 62:10), emphasizes not only a new spirit of fellowship among nations always ready to indulge in hatred — "Assyrians into Egypt, and Egyptians into Assyria" — but also the transformed spirit which makes them all eager to *serve* Jehovah. There is probably another of Isaiah's puns here, for, both written and read, "serve" (*abdu*) is marvellously close to *'abru*, "become Hebrews, cross over;" v.23 has this very idea.

The emphasis on "a third" prepares the way for a similar repetition on a big scale in the Trumpets in Revelation (8:7-12; 9:15,18; 12:4), thus providing another hint for Last Day interpretation of the Trumpets on lines similar to Isaiah 19.

Also, the Jubilee phraseology of v.24,25 really comes into its own.

"Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it (the Land) shall bring forth fruit for three years" (Lev. 25:21; A. Chambers has an excellent study on this) — this is "the blessing in the midst of the Land, whom the Lord of hosts shall bless."

"Egypt my people" echoes another Jubilee idea — scattered and enslaved people being set free and helped to return to their homes (Lev. 25:10).

"Assyria the work of *my* hands" underlines that in Jubilee year there was no cultivation; whatever grew then prospered only by the special blessing of God, it was the work of *His* hands (25:11).

And "Israel mine inheritance" is an easy allusion to "the redemption of the land" for every family (25:24ff).

All of these blessings will overflow to all nations when Messiah reigns in Jerusalem. It is a superb heart-warming picture, packed into a handful of verses, and all the more powerful for the contrast with the beginning of the chapter.

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## Chapter 20

**20:1 "In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod, (when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him,) and fought against Ashdod, and took it;"**

This chapter is dated quite precisely, and with the help of Sargon's inscriptions can be pinpointed as 711 B.C. (unless the accepted Assyrian chronology is seriously wrong).

On the face of it this is a prophecy with a specific short-term fulfilment, sandwiched between two blocks of five burdens, all of which refer to the nations round Judah. But whereas, as has been shown, there is a probable Last-Day reference of these other prophecies, there is no clear indication of the same being true regarding chapter 20.

So it would seem that this public short-term prophecy, readily put to the test within three years, served to guarantee the accuracy of the other burdens, both in their primary and later fulfilments.

Sargon was not the son of Shalmanezzer V, who died during the three year siege of Samaria. He was probably the commander in chief of the Assyrian army in the field. His name may be read as meaning "Prince of Defence", the equivalent either of the modern "War Minister" or "Army Chief", the word defence being used with the same double-speak hypocrisy of the modern politician.

There is available here a neat indirect demonstration of the exactness of the historical record in Kings:

"Shalmanezzer king of Assyria came up against Samaria, and besieged it. And at the end of three years *they* (not *he*) took it" (2 Kgs. 18:9,10). The death of Shalmanezzer at Samaria required a change of pronoun. But yet it would not do to say Sargon took it, for this would imply that he forthwith succeeded to the kingship. However this was not the case, for since he was not Shalmanezzer's son he found himself having to fight for the throne, a struggle which lasted two or three years. And for this reason also there was no crediting him with the success at Samaria.

Because of having so many other distractions, it was actually ten years after the fall of Samaria (711 B.C.) before the Assyrian drive towards Egypt could be resumed, and even then Sargon had to be content to entrust the campaign to his Tartan — the name is evidently a military title, for it crops up again eleven years later (2 Kgs. 18:17) in Sennacherib's campaign against Jerusalem.

Ashdod had been captured once by the Assyrians, but advantage had been taken from Sargon's preoccupation elsewhere to re-assert independence and to organize an alliance in that area against Assyria (so says Sargon's own inscription). It certainly looks from 2 Kings 18:8, as though Yamani, the king of Ashdod, was a Jewish puppet ruler (Khorsabad Inscription).

Egypt still remained the main target of Sargon's ambitions (never fulfilled in his reign), and since the strong fortress of Ashdod stood right across his path, it must perforce be captured, just as Sennacherib besieged and destroyed Lachish and as Alexander the Great was to do at Gezer.

**20:2,3 "At the same time spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia;"**

Three years before this came about (when it did, it happened all within a year), Isaiah was commissioned to proclaim the details of it, and the importance of this development for God's own people. It was to be his only acted prophecy.

The revelation came "by the hand of Isaiah the son of Amoz." Why the third person here? Why not "by me"? It seems not unlikely that whilst Isaiah acted the prophecy, according to divine instruction, the equally important record of it was written down by his wife, the prophetess. She was "the hand of Isaiah..."

The words are often misread as though for three full years the prophet always appeared naked and barefoot. But the rabbinic punctuation of the Hebrew text pointedly associates the three years with his being a sign and wonder. In other words, Isaiah proceeded with his acted parable of men of Ashdod being led away naked and barefoot on one occasion only, perhaps three times at yearly intervals; and until the fulfilment three years later the thing was remembered and talked of as a sign and wonder. Indeed, had Isaiah appeared in this very unconventional style for three years, the force of the sign would have been largely lost in its familiarity.

It is possible that Isaiah, who was a statesman and a man of importance in Jerusalem, wore sackcloth only when making public prophecy to king or people. It was, so to speak, his regalia

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of office (cp. Zech. 13:4; 2 Kgs. 1:8; Mt. 3:4; Is. 50:3,4; and so also, probably 1 Sam. 28:14).

It is not to be assumed that Isaiah went about the city in a state of complete nudity, but certainly unclothed. If the former, there would have been no need for the word "barefoot".

Presumably Isaiah was backed up in this demonstrative prophesying by his colleague Micah, a member of the same school of prophets, for Micah declared: "I will wail and howl; I will go stripped and naked; I will make a wailing like the jackals, and a mourning like the ostriches" (1:8 RV). These prophets were determined to get home their message of woe and judgment, as also was their Heavenly Master.

Yet in the midst of the humiliation of acting the part of a captive being led off in shame and misery, as Hitler treated multitudes of Jews (cp. 8:18), the dignity of Isaiah was saved by God's reference to him as "my servant," for this was a title of honour bestowed on such men as Abraham, Moses, David, Job and the Messiah.

**20:4-6 "So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory. And the inhabitant of this isle shall say in that day, Behold, such is our expectation, whither we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria: and how shall we escape?"**

The chief problem here is to establish the link between the Assyrian capture of Ashdod and the shame (declared here beforehand) of Egypt-Ethiopia. The reconstruction seems to be this:

Ashdod had become a Jewish fortress, but already the lean-on-Egypt policy which Isaiah was to denounce so strongly later on, was beginning to dominate Judah's policy (the young king Hezekiah being under the influence of his princes, men of politics rather than faith); so evidently Egyptian help took the form of a garrison which to all intents and purposes made Ashdod into an Egyptian outpost.

These Egyptians, Isaiah now declared most explicitly, would experience the shame of captivity which the prophet himself had acted before the people of Jerusalem.

In all this he was trying to educate his nation to see Egypt as a worthless prop and an evil influence. Was it not Egyptian encouragement which had helped Jeroboam to bring about the schism between Israel and Judah (1 Kgs. 11:40)? The northern kingdom, remembering how its greatest tribes had been descended from an Egyptian mother (Gen. 41:50-52), had constantly followed a pro-Egyptian policy — to its own destruction (Hos. 7:16; 8:13; 9:3,6).

Ashdod was to be another, more immediate, reminder of Egyptian futility. Some years later Rabshakeh's scornful words were to imply that already Egypt's weakness had been exposed: "Thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust in him" (36:6). "They (the men of Judah) shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation" (20:5; cp. 30:3,5) — the repeated mention of Ethiopia being due to the fact that at that time Egypt was itself dominated by an Ethiopian dynasty.

The strange word "isle" in verse 6 may also mean "coastland, that which is beside the sea," with reference to Ashdod. But even more pointedly it may be used regarding Jerusalem which in the later grim days of Sennacherib was to be an island surrounded by the rising tide of Assyrian power.

If in the earliest encounter mighty Egypt is to be proved so futile and worthless an ally, what hope for Judah when Assyrian expansion comes to full flood? "How shall we escape?" If pagan nations with so little light suffer such retributions from God, what can faithless Chosen People expect from Assyria, the rod of God's anger?

And what a lesson to be learned by the New Israel: "*How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?*" (Heb. 2:3).

With this remarkable New Testament echo to suggest further reference of this prophecy, is it possible that in days soon to come modern Israel, trying to be friends with Egypt, will similarly pay for its faithless misguided statesmanship and be brought to a humiliation (but also deliverance) comparable to that which came about in Isaiah's day?

## Chapter 21

**21:1,2 "The burden of the desert of the sea. As whirlwinds in the south pass through; so it cometh from the desert, from a terrible land. A grievous vision is declared unto me: the treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth. Go up, O Elam: besiege, O Media: all the sighing thereof have I made to cease."**

This is the first of four "burdens" which clearly belong to each other: 21:1,11,13; 22:1.

The first and second both represent the prophet as a watchman; and the fourth speaks of Jerusalem as the valley of vision.

The first describes Elam and Media coming against Jerusalem (as will be shown by and by), and the fourth (22:6) has Kir and Elam involved in the siege of Jerusalem. Similarly 21:7 and 22:6,7 both feature chariots and horsemen in the campaign.

Over many years commentators rested satisfied that this burden is a prophecy of the capture of Babylon by Cyrus. C.C.W. in "Ministry of the Prophets: Isaiah" says the same. But this is only possible by leaving a number of questions unanswered, such as: Why should Isaiah suddenly, in the midst of a sequence of prophecies with evident contemporary reference, reach forward 170 years or so to the downfall of Belshazzar's Babylon? And why here so much emphasis on misery and fearfulness and the horrors of war regarding one of the most peaceful and easy city captures in all ancient history? And why emphasis on "the desert of the sea" (meaning the wilderness of marshes covering the Euphrates delta) when Cyrus made his invasion from the opposite direction?

Recognizing these difficulties, George Smith, a fine Assyriologist, and Boutflower, an excellent expositor, have suggested reference to the capture of Babylon by Sargon. This has more to recommend it. But here the reference to the Euphratean marshes, south of Babylon, is difficult. And there is also the tone of wretchedness in the burden which is difficult of explanation. Why should the prophet of the Lord be so miserable over the downfall of a city with which, up to the time of Sargon, his nation had had no dealings and which at the time had no direct connection with God's people? And why should the prophet say: "Go up, besiege" regarding a Babylon which sat in the middle of a dead flat plain? (But reference to Assyrian approach to Jerusalem, 2,400 feet above sea-level, is easy and obvious). Further,

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why the connection, already commented on here, between that Babylon and the other burdens concerning Dumah (part of Edom) and Arabia (Kedar is in the same locality) and Jerusalem (22:1ff)?

It becomes *much* easier to make sense of the details here when it is realised that, as in ch.14, the Babylon spoken of is Assyria, whose kings, from Sargon onwards, were so proud of their title as "king of Babylon." The ease of the exposition from this beginning proves its superiority over the other mentioned earlier.

Chapter 20 has briefly but powerfully spoken of the Assyrian threat against Phoenicia and Egypt and "the inhabitant of this isle" (Jerusalem), leading up to the horrified prospect: "How shall we escape?" Chapter 21 now provides the answer to this question in a vision of the fall of "Babylon", the Assyrian power putting fear into the hearts of all.

The experts in linguistics are very emphatic that this burden cannot have been written by Isaiah because of the marked difference in literary style, and on the strength of this they confidently assign this vision to the time of Cyrus — a poor piece of guesswork which goes no way towards solving their problems.

It is better to agree with their first conclusion about a different author, but then to find the explanation in 20:3 which uses the third person about Isaiah. Earlier it was suggested that there is here another hint of certain parts of "Isaiah" being written by the prophetess (8:3).

"The desert of the sea" is a phrase capable of reference in more than one way — (a) the wilderness between Jerusalem and the sea-plain of the Shephelah; (b) the Negeb stretching down to the Red Sea; (c.) the coast road into Egypt; (d) the wild country between Jerusalem and Dead Sea. It is difficult to be sure which of these is meant with reference to the tide of Assyrian invasion. The first or fourth of these is the most likely as having reference to Assyrian advance on Jerusalem. A reason for the use of this almost unique phrase will be advanced by and by.

The phrase "as whirlwinds in the south" finds its natural basis in the fact that any hurricanes that come into Judaea necessarily follow a path northward from the Red Sea, a route covering "a terrible land." But here unquestionably naturalistic language is used for the frightening and devastating phenomenon of the theophany called in Scripture "the whirlwind of the Lord" (Job 38:1; Zech. 9:14). Compare the language used in two places about the divine mode of destruction of Sennacherib's army: "with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones. For through the voice of the Lord will the Assyrian be broken down" (30:30,31). "The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet" (Nah. 1:3; see context; e.g. v.8,9.).

It is "a grievous vision" of an irresistible invasion by "a treacherous dealer who deals treacherously." This is precisely how Sennacherib honoured his treaties. "Bought off" by the massive tribute sent to him by the princes of Judah (2 Kgs. 18:14; see H.Gt., ch.9), he yet came on against Jerusalem as aggressively as ever (24:16; 33:1).

The mention of Elam and Media presents no difficulty. These were mercenaries in the Assyrian army, drawn from important parts of the Assyrian empire; compare the reference to Elam and Kir (22:6) in the same capacity.

The exhortation to "Go up, O Elam" was doubtless spoken in irony, for immediately there is a comforting assurance given to the intended victim: "All the sighing thereof have I made to cease." No more need to worry about what has seemed to be an inevitable fate.

**21:3,4,5 "Therefore are my loins filled with pain: pangs have taken hold upon me, as the pangs of a woman that travaileth: I was bowed down at the hearing of it; I was dismayed at the seeing of it. My heart panted, fearfulness affrighted me: the night of my pleasure hath he turned into fear unto me. Prepare the table, watch in the watchtower, eat, drink: arise, ye princes, and anoint the shield."**

There is here a piling-up of intensely poetic phrases, all descriptive of the impact made upon the prophet by the dire character of what he has seen in vision. The phrasing is reminiscent of the language of intensive sympathy expressed for Moab at the prospect of its being overrun by the same hated Assyrians (15:5; 16:9,11). But, on the other hand, it is difficult to see why this prophet of Zion should be so mightily concerned if the present vision is about the overthrow of Babylon.

"The *night* of my pleasure" is an allusion to the Passover being observed in Jerusalem at the time of the Assyrian siege. Passover was the only holy observance kept at night-time. Several later references make it clear that these events coincided (31:5; 30:29; 29:1; 26:20; 33:20; 52:12; see the commentary at these places).

This is the place to bring together other Passover allusions in this context. "Prepare the table...eat, drink..." (v.5) refers to the Passover meal. Also, the mention of chariots (v.7) and the desert of the sea (v.1) seems to be a deliberate echo of Israel's experience at the Exodus when the people found themselves trapped in the desert of the sea, and hotly pursued by Egyptian chariots (Ex. 13:18).

**21:6-9a "For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what the seeth. And he saw a chariot with a couple of horsemen, a chariot of asses, and a chariot of camels; and he hearkened diligently with much heed: And he cried, A lion: My lord, I stand continually upon the watchtower in the daytime, and I am set in my ward whole nights: And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen."**

The watchmen of Israel were the prophets (52:8; 56:10; 62:6; Ez. 3:17; Mic. 7:4). Remarkably enough, here one prophet is bidden to appoint another as God's watchman, particularly to be on the alert for further revelation. Probably the one assigned to this duty was Habakkuk, who was certainly a contemporary of Isaiah and whose language chimes in with the words here: "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower...Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables" (Hab. 2:1,2).

But there may be here another Passover allusion, for that feast was to be "a night of watching unto the Lord" (Ex. 12:42 RV), that is, watching for deliverance from oppressors — the very theme of the present vision.

In harmony with this is the instruction to "anoint the shield" (v.5). This phrase, as it stands, is meaningless; but LXX: "doorposts" is readily seen to be an allusion to the smearing of the blood of the lamb on the door frame (Ex. 12:22).

Also, "I am set in my ward all the night" (a strange expression) makes more sense when read as an intensive plural: "all the Night," that is, the night of the Passover feast. This is supported by the word "ward" which always refers to temple service.

The exhortation: "Arise, ye princes," is an appropriate apostrophe to Hezekiah's "cabinet", men who schemed to bring national salvation by their own devious methods, but who instead brought on total ruin. Here they are bidden lean upon the God of Passover deliverance rather than their own scheming.

The prophet sees a strange mixed-up vision. First, a couple of horsemen (the Assyrian

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cavalry are *always* represented in the bas-reliefs in pairs); this conveys the idea of a sorry remnant of a great army. And chariots of asses and camels (who ever harnessed either animal to a chariot?) — it suggests a pathetic and utterly dislocated baggage train trailing disconsolately back to Nineveh, the remnants of a mighty military machine smashed at Jerusalem by the angel of the Lord and his hurricane.

The reading: "And he cried, A lion" seems quite out of place. The Dead Sea Isaiah Scroll reads one letter different, thus repeating the word for "see" (v.7,8): "And he who saw cried out, O Lord (v.6 s.w.) I stand continually...". This is much more intelligible. But remarkably, the apostle John seems to have read his Isaiah according to the Received Text, for he has the rainbowed angel of Rev. 10:3 "crying with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth." Yet that chapter has nothing about the fall of "Babylon" — that comes in 14:8.

LXX of verse 8 is both perplexing and intriguing: "Hearken with hearkening (s.w. Jas. 1:22,23), and call Urijah (8:2) to the watchtower;" or: "and cry out, Prosperity to the watchmen" (i.e. good news for Israel). If the former reading, the worthless high-priest who had collaborated with Ahaz's apostasy (2 Kgs. 16:10), was pulled in to be a witness, against his will, to the power and truth of the word of prophecy.

**21:9b,10 "And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground. O my threshing, and the corn of my floor: that which I have heard of the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto you."**

The fall of "Babylon" looked forward to here was, in the first instance, the devastation of the Assyrian camp outside Jerusalem, a retribution which was to culminate in the sack and ruin of Nineveh by Nebuchadnezzar's father.

The contemptuous mention of the smashing of graven images is another large-size obstacle in the way of applying this burden to Cyrus' capture of Babylon, for as a matter of policy he praised and glorified the idols of all the nations he conquered. The idols mentioned here were the gods of Nineveh whose power Sennacherib had gloried in at the holy city of Jehovah (36:18-20), idols whose impotence Isaiah was to castigate in later prophecies loaded with sarcasm (40:19ff; 44:9ff; 46).

This detail about the shaming of pagan gods provides yet another link with Passover, for the last of the ten plagues is the final exposure of the futility of Egypt's deities (Ex. 12:12).

"Broken unto the ground" is perhaps hardly the best rendering of *I'aretz*. "In the Land (of Israel)" or "by reason of the Land" would be nearer to the right idea. Despite to God's Land must bring inevitable retribution.

Proud overbearing Gentiles who vaunt their might against Jerusalem must remember that Zion was originally a threshing-floor (2 Sam. 24:18,24); now centuries later the angel of the Lord was ready to rise up and thresh the vainglorious enemies of Israel.

Contemporary Micah used exactly the same figure: "Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion...thou shalt beat in pieces many people: and I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord" (Mic. 4:13).

This burden had begun with: "A grievous vision is declared unto me." It ends with: "That which I have heard of the Lord of hosts...have I declared unto you" (cp. 1 Jn. 1:3). The reader is left wondering in what way the voice came to the prophet. But there was also vision: "And he saw..." Here was heaven's television outmatching the technical expertise of the twentieth century.

The New Testament links with this prophecy are difficult, yet some effort must be

made to see a coherent meaning in them.

First, it is worth noting that Isaiah's threshing-floor reference is picked up in Daniel's exposition of Nebuchadnezzar's image-dream. The Stone grinds the Gentile metals to powder, and they are blown away as chaff of the threshing floor. All these power-hungry nations who have oppressed Israel in their own land will eventually suffer judgment from the King who rules in Zion.

Appropriate to this theme is the apocalyptic cry: "Babylon is fallen, is fallen" (Rev. 14:8; 18:2). This will be the fate of the power which, in the last days, oppresses God's New Israel.

Rev. 14:8 is one of the seven thunders, each of which is introduced by "an angel with a loud voice." That series of judgments is itself introduced by an angel who "cries with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth" (10:3). This is readily recognizable as Isaiah's language (21:8). John repeats and expands Isaiah's message of doom. And herein, as in Isaiah's day, so also in the last time the angel of the Lord goes into action, vindicating a Messiah who rules in Zion.

However, in Isaiah's time the agony of God's people was intense until the time when sudden dramatic deliverance came — by an angel. "Pangs took hold of them, as pangs of a woman that travaileth." The nation was unworthy (apart from its faithful remnant), hence first their long drawn-out travail in Hezekiah's reign, followed by an overnight act of divine rescue. In 1 Thes. 5:3 Paul uses the identical figure of a woman in travail to describe the experience of the unworthy in the New Israel who persuade themselves that they are at peace and in safety. Instead, they endure sudden destruction, but again the situation will be dramatically saved by the coming of the Lord of Glory with his holy angels.

**21:11,12 "The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?" The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come."**

Three separate identifications of Dumah are proposed:

- a. An oasis in the middle of the North Arabian desert.
- b. A town in the South Judaeian wilderness, towards the southern end of the Dead Sea (Josh. 15:52).
- c. Idumea, Edom.

Of these, a and b are really too unimportant to be considered; and the mention of Seir makes c almost certain, for Seir was part of the territory of Edom (Gen. 36:8). LXX version actually reads 'Edom' here.

The name Idumea is shortened here to the nickname Dumah, silence, suggesting the silence of death (Ps. 115:17; 94:17), the night that is soon to descend on Edom.

There is every reason in the world why a prophet of God should pronounce a doom against Edom, for these "brethren" of Israel, descended from Esau, were always bitter enemies glad of any opportunity to score over the kings reigning in Jerusalem. In Psalm 83 Edom is the leader of an Arab confederacy against Judah in the time of Hezekiah (not possibly Jehoshaphat, as is often surmised). And Thirtle has made a strong case for reading Psalm 137 with reference to the Assyrian Babylon and to Edomites gladly reinforcing the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem: "Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem, who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof" (v.7). So a sardonic unsympathetic pronouncement from Isaiah is to be expected. Along with this short burden the dooms in ch 34 and 63:1-6 should be compared. Both of them are judgments

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against a brother who has proved to be a faithless bitter enemy.

The repeated cry: "Watchman, what of the night?", in effect asks: 'What are the prospects for us in Edom?'

The answer is, at first, cheering: "The morning cometh" — a time of relief and Peacefulness after the destruction of Sennacherib's army.

But then — "also the night cometh." It can be readily inferred from ch.34: "the controversy of Zion" (v.8), and from 63:1-6 (see commentary on this), that when Hezekiah moved suddenly into an era of prosperity and strength, a punitive expedition went out against Edom — the "night" had returned. This episode is referred to in 1 Chr. 4:39-43.

Yet this burden ends using these Edomites to "enquire (of the God of Israel), turn (to Him), come to worship Him at Jerusalem." Just as the prophecy of a comparable judgment on Moab had concentrated on an exhortation to put faith in Jehovah and His king in Zion (16:4,5 RVm), so also with these Edomites. But there was little hope that this wisdom would be heeded. Edom's age-long hostility was too deeply ingrained. So the prophet's urging is curt and cool. He knows that he speaks in vain.

It is easy to see how there may yet be a further fulfilment of this short prophecy in the last days. The impending desolation of the state of Israel will seem to mean the dawn of a long-wished for "morning" for the Arab enemy. But the coming of Messiah at that time will bring Zion's glad morning and the pall of night for Edom. From this fate the only possible escape will be through enquiring, turning, coming to the true Light. But the evidence of Isaiah 34 suggests that even Edom will be stubbornly unrepentant.

**21:13-15 "The burden upon Arabia. In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O ye travelling companies of Dedanim. The inhabitants of the land of Tema brought water to him that was thirsty, they prevented with their bread him that fled. For they fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, and from the bent bow, and from the grievousness of war."**

It is not certain that this should be regarded as a separate burden. LXX does not give a separate heading. And the place-names — Dedan, Tema (Teman), Kedar — are all associated with Edom and its eastern desert.

The words present a picture of travelling caravans having their progress seriously interrupted by invasion of this territory and the consequent flight of the communities which would normally have welcomed them. Instead they have to improvise camping places in the "forest", that is, the rough scrub or bush land on the edge of the desert.

There is a picture of fleeing Arabians coming home, and being met by their fellows with food and drink (what a contrast with the inhospitable treatment accorded to Israel centuries earlier; (Dt. 23:4; Num. 20:17-19).

**21:16-17 "For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Within a year, according to the years of an hireling, and all the glory of Kedar shall fail: And the residue of the number of archers, the mighty men of the children of Kedar, shall be diminished: for the LORD God of Israel hath spoken it."**

In this doom spoken against the Arabian peoples there is no sign of sympathy, as to fellow-sufferers — in this respect a marked contrast with the Moab prophecies in ch.15,16.

The reason for this is obscurely alluded to in Psalm 120, one of Hezekiah's Songs of Degrees: "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar"

inscription about his Judaeen campaign: "The Arabs and his (Hezekiah's) trusty warriors whom he had brought in to strengthen Jerusalem took leave (i.e. deserted)." The idea of a man of such faith as Hezekiah's depending for defence on mercenary soldiers is a big pill to swallow. Most probably this military aid was brought in by the princes of Judah (Shebna & Co.) who ran the country in their sordid political fashion during Hezekiah's desperate illness.

The psalm speaks of the sick beleaguered king having to endure the "deceitful tongue" of Rabshakeh, at the same time aware that the hired troops from Kedar were on the point of turning traitor. Evidently when they did, they blithely joined the army of the enemy, for Josephus refers to Sennacherib as "King of the Arabians and Assyrians" (Ant. 10.1.4). And a contemporary reproach in Obadiah 10 has this: "For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever" (this last phrase anticipating God's final judgment against "brethren" who change from friend to foe.

No wonder the retribution now foretold is to fall "within a year, according to the years of a hireling," that is, for not a day longer will it be withheld. There is something savagely sarcastic about the use of that word "hireling" with reference to those helpers who had shown such a mercenary and undependable spirit.

And the Lord God of *Israel* took this stab in the back of His people as though perpetrated against Himself, hence the rigour and certainty of the retribution. It is known that Sennacherib devastated all the eastern peoples on the fringe of the desert. So presumably whilst his Judaeen campaign was in progress, he also had cavalry making a wide sweep on the far side of Jordan.

What sort of reference can this burden have to the last days? This is difficult. But it is useful to remember that there are plenty of West Bank Arabs co-operating with Israel — in local government, army, and police — who will one day be ready enough, in the time of Israel's adversity, to switch to helping their Arab brethren with whom they inevitably have much secret sympathy. And then the Arab situation of Hezekiah's day will be repeated. At the time of writing (Feb. 1988), this is already easily seen to be politically certain.

## Chapter 22

The first half of this chapter resolves itself into four paragraphs:

- a. v.1-3: "Peace" celebrations.
- b. v.4-7: A picture of the coming siege of Jerusalem.
- c. v.8-11: Frantic preparations for defence.
- d. v.12-14: Isaiah's condemnation of the optimistic celebrations.

Clearly, these are not in chronological order. It will simplify the exposition if they are taken in this order instead: c, a, d, b.

But first, the identification of "the valley of vision" (v.1). Evidently it was so called as being part of Jerusalem where Isaiah the prophet lived. Maybe there was a college of prophets there (see 2 Kgs. 22:14). Moriah, the temple site, means "the vision of Jehovah."

The valley must be identified as being either the Tyropoean running north to south down the middle of the city, or the Kidron down the eastern side of the city. Isaiah

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7:3 appears to be fairly decisive in favour of the latter, for it was the Pool of the Virgin where the prophet was to go forth and *meet* king Ahaz as he came thither full of concern about "the conduit".

**22:8-11 "And he discovered the covering of Judah, and thou didst look in that day to the armour of the house of the forest. Ye have seen also the breaches of the city of David, that they are many: and ye gathered together the waters of the lower pool. And ye have numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses have ye broken down to fortify the wall. Ye made also a ditch between the two walls for the water of the old pool: but ye have not looked unto the maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago."**

Here are described the early stages of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah, and the panic defence measures which were hastily adopted.

"The covering of Judah" was the line of fortresses across the northern and western border of Hezekiah's kingdom. "Covering" describes the curtain or veil of temple or tabernacle, marking off the holiest part of the sanctuary from approach by ordinary men. Here the word is used for the defences of the state, designed to protect the holy city from military threat or defilement.

These fortresses, maintained in fine condition in the time of Uzziah (2 Chr. 26:8,13-15), had degenerated into a state of disrepair in the decadent reign of Ahaz, so that Sennacherib's troops were able to capture them like plucking apples from a tree. That boastful monarch's own inscription on the Taylor prism says:

"Forty-six of his strong walled towns and innumerable smaller villages...I besieged and conquered."

Isaiah's comment on this is the same: "The forts and towers are for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses" (32:14).

Hosea also had foretold that this would come to pass: "Judah hath multiplied fenced cities; but I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof" (8:14).

Micah also (1:8-16) has a long and highly-coloured lamentation regarding the easy and hopeless fate of one city after another.

The measures taken to cope with this Assyrian threat were now frantic.

First, a deputation was sent off to the camp of the Assyrian to ascertain what sort of payment of tribute would buy him off.

And, meantime, there was feverish activity in Jerusalem to make it defensible.

The great armoury of the nation was the house of the forest of Lebanon. Built by Solomon as an important element in the complex of his palace buildings, it was so called because of its main architectural feature — four rows of magnificent cedar pillars imported from Lebanon. (1 Kgs. 7:2; 10:17).

Also, there was rueful inspection of the deplorable state of disrepair of the city walls: "the breaches of the city of David were many" (shiftless Ahaz, again!). Hezekiah "built up all the wall that was broken (it had suffered badly in the earthquake in Uzziah's reign), and raised it up to the towers, and another wall without (part way down the eastern slope down to the Kidron, or possibly to seal off the southern end of the Tyropoean), and repaired Millo in the city of David (this was a "filling" to reinforce the inside of the wall where the ground fell away)" (2 Chr. 32:5).

Also, an ambitious engineering project was pushed through at high speed to seal off the waters of the Virgin's Fountain, "the upper pool" (2 Kgs. 18:17), and bring

them through the hill to the "lower pool" at Siloam:

"There was gathered much people together, who stopped all the fountains and the brook (Kidron) that ran through the midst of the land, saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come and find much water?" (2 Chr. 32:4).

Such a scheme as this had not been practicable until the mighty earthquake in Uzziah's reign drastically altered the configuration of the Kidron valley. Ahaz had begun it (7:3) and then had fecklessly broken off.

Now the Virgin's Fountain (the upper pool; 7:3 36:2) was sealed off so as to be inaccessible to besieging forces. Instead, a winding and beautifully graded conduit was hewn for 1700 feet through the solid rock, to lead the Kidron waters to Siloam (the lower pool) inside the south-west corner of the city, between the two walls (Jer. 39:4). The detailed study of this conduit and its history is quite fascinating, but cannot be pursued here.

A further preparation for defence was the conscription of houses on or near the city wall that might be incorporated in the fortifications. Other houses were ruthlessly demolished to provide a quick supply of material for building up the breaches in the city wall.

Most valuable of all was the stout exhortation addressed by the king himself to all those involved in these anxious activities: "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor be dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh: but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles" (2 Chr. 32:7,8).

It must have been about this time that Hezekiah was struck down by his dire sickness, for there came a sudden drastic change of attitude in his people, so as to merit Isaiah's withering rebuke: "Ye have not looked unto the Maker thereof, neither had respect unto Him that fashioned it long ago."

The same theme was developed also into a mighty slap in the face for Sennacherib at the height of his propaganda war against Jerusalem: "Hast thou not heard long ago, how I (Jehovah) have done it; and of ancient times, that I have formed it? Now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste defenced cities into ruinous heaps" (37:26; cp. also 43:7).

**22:1-3 "The burden of the valley of vision. What aileth thee now, that thou art wholly gone up to the housetops? Thou that art full of stirs, a tumultuous city, a joyous city; thy slain men are not slain with the sword, nor dead in battle. All thy rulers are fled together, they are bound by the archers: all that are found in thee are bound together, which have fled from far."**

Here is an amazing picture of holy Jerusalem gone delirious with delight. And why? Because the invading Assyrians have been bought off (2 Kgs. 18:14-16). So the entire population is given over to celebration and self-indulgence — on the housetops elaborate parties and the enjoyment of the spectacle of people dancing in the streets. Those who were expected to be slain in battle are not slain after all. Those who expected to be reported dead at the hands of the enemy are still alive, and getting drunk on the strength of it.

But all this gaiety was premature. Things were not going to turn out as well as this optimism seemed to warrant.

Verse 3, in the AV., is quite baffling. LXX has an interesting and more intelligible variation (it assumes one letter different in the Hebrew text): "All thy princes have fled, and they that are taken have been cruelly bound; and the strong men in thee are fled far away."

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There is a suggestion here that some of the more far-sighted and better-informed, realising that trouble was bound to come, were hoping to find safety in flight. But the Arabian archers, deserting to the enemy (see on 21:15), sought to please their new masters by handing these fugitives over, bound as prisoners, to the Assyrians.

This suggestion, possible though not certain, goes some way towards making sense of a difficult passage.

**22:12-14 "And in that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die. And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord God of hosts."**

The prophet resumed his censure of the wild empty-headed self-indulgence by which the people were, for the most part, expressing their relief at being assured of "peace in our time" (like London in Sept. 1938).

Instead, there should have been a spirit of deep contrition for the national waywardness which had brought such a crisis upon them.

Yet they choose to signify their appreciation of the "cleverness" of their politicians with hedonism and debauchery, as though celebrating a mighty victory, when they ought rather to be prostrating themselves in shame before God.

"Let us eat and drink (they said), for tomorrow (and not today, as we feared) we shall die."

The words seem to imply a lurking uncertainty as to whether the empire-building Assyrian had been bought off for good, or only for a time.

Either way, the philosophy was pathetic and threadbare. Writing to his Corinthian converts Paul was to quote the words in biting tones and with a different emphasis. "If there be no resurrection of the dead...let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we *die* (and that is the end of us)" (1 Cor. 15:32). Yet he rounds off the same argument with the opposite truth (from Is. 25:8): "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54).

But, for these faithless men in Jerusalem indulging themselves to the top of their bent, there was another special revelation spoken in the prophet's ear: "Tomorrow they die? It is true. All their impending experiences of inevitable Assyrian frightfulness will not purge their sin. And in the end they *die*."

**22:4-7 "Therefore said I, Look away from me: I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me, because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people. For it is a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity by the Lord God of hosts in the valley of vision, breaking down the walls, and of crying to the mountains. And Elam bare the quiver with chariots of men and horsemen, and Kir uncovered the shield. And it shall come to pass that thy choicest valleys shall be full of chariots, and the horsemen shall set themselves in array at the gate."**

In sharp contrast with the pictures of wild celebration because the peace of Jerusalem was 'assured', there was now a series of vivid snapshots of what the reality would turn out to be, and right soon, too!

"Trouble...treading down...perplexity" — in the Hebrew there is a violent play on words here quite characteristic of Isaiah's style. Choice gardens outside the city are trampled flat by jack-booted warriors and their horses and chariots. In the valley of vision (Isaiah's home by the Kidron) there has been vigorous dismantling of houses to provide ready-made material for the building of new walls of defence. And "the daughter of my people," eloquently represented by

Isaiah's wife saying farewell to her well-loved home, weeps bitterly; and cries of despairing appeal go up towards Mount Zion that the God of Israel, whose House has gone untouched will yet vouchsafe help and relief from the misery of war. All this is set out in vigorous prophetic pictures.

Elam had been overrun by Sargon earlier, and now these Elamites, specialists in archery, were recruited into the Assyrian forces. So also other mercenaries from Kir (not identified with any certainty) were similarly part of Sennacherib's army — just as David had enrolled defeated Philistines into his palace guard (2 Sam. 15:19). Evidently one of the frequent switches of population, which were an important feature of Assyrian empire-building, had involved Kir and Syria (Am. 1:5; 9:7). This was the best way to keep restless conquered peoples quiet.

The peculiar phrase "chariots of men" readily becomes (by the smallest change imaginable) "Syrian chariots", that is, those that had been captured in an earlier campaign and were soon to be displayed in force against the panicky population of Judaea: "horsemen in array at the gate of the city." When there had been such a proud display of force at Dothan for the apprehension of Elisha the prophet, his courageous exhortation had been: "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2 Kgs. 6:16). And in this situation Hezekiah, before he was struck down by his vile disease, boldly quoted the same words (2 Chr. 32:7) to stiffen the resolution of his people; and in due time he was vindicated, for only one angel of the Lord was necessary, and the Assyrian scourge was swept away.

But first, without the faith of Hezekiah to inoculate the entire city against the microbes of terror, all was given up for lost.

**22:15-19 "Thus saith the Lord God of hosts, Go, get thee unto this treasurer, even unto Shebna, which is over the house, and say, What hast thou here? and whom hast thou here, that thou hast hewed thee out a sepulchre here, as he that heweth him out a sepulchre on high, and that graveth an habitation for himself in a rock? Behold, the Lord will carry thee away with a mighty captivity, and will surely cover thee. He will surely violently turn and toss thee like a ball into a large country: there shalt thou die, and there the chariots of thy glory shall be the shame of thy lord's house. And I will drive thee from thy station, and from thy state shall he pull thee down."**

This very unusual section of Isaiah's prophecy is also one of the most difficult, through the reader's lack of knowledge of the background situation. Use has to be made of every little detail and every smallest inference, and even so a fair degree of uncertainty of interpretation exists.

The introductory phrase: "Thus saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts" is identical with verse 14. This uncommon combination of divine names links the two halves of this chapter. They both concern the early days of the Assyrian invasion.

Shebna's name is possibly, but not certainly, Aramaic — linking with a word for "sit" (i.e. in dignity, not stand in servitude), but also suggesting "go into captivity" (cp. v.17; "a mighty captivity," and v.18: "toss thee into a large country, and there thou shalt die").

The rather contemptuous phrases: "*this* Shebna" and "What hast thou here?" support the idea of a foreigner, brought in (may it be surmised?) by faithless Ahaz, with his craze for foreign religions (2 Kgs. 16:10-16).

It is also remarkable that in ch.36:3, when Shebna is mentioned along with Eliakim and Joah, he is the only one of the three whose family is not mentioned.

Fairly recently a seal of the Isaiah period, inscribed "Shebna, son of Shahur," was found at Ramat-Rachel between Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

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Several of the details about Shebna employ priestly terms:

- a. "Over the house" must mean "over the palace" or "over the temple" (1 Kgs. 9:1,10; 2 Chr. 26:21).
- b. "Thy robe...thy girdle" are both priestly terms, the latter being used exclusively about the high priest.
- c. "The glory...vessels, cups, flagons" all suggest association with the sanctuary of the Lord.
- d. "The chariots of thy glory" especially suggest allusion to the cherubim-chariots of the Lord (as in Ezekiel 1).
- e. "A nail in a sure place." The Hebrew word refers, in scores of passages, to a holy place, an altar, or a sanctuary.

Yet at the same time quite a few phrases are regal in tone:

- a. "This treasurer" is really "this official, or administrator" (but LXX has the same word as in Lk. 12:21).
- b. "Government...a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah."
- c. "The key of the house of David...upon his shoulder".

It is not difficult to reconcile these apparent inconsistencies. It is not unlikely that Shebna was brought in from Syria (or even from Assyria?) by worthless Ahaz. And when wholesale alterations were made in the temple administration (see on chapters 8 and 28: "The Stone of Stumbling"), he was exalted to office as high priest. That particular dignity would be lost on the accession of godly Hezekiah, but evidently he still retained considerable influence among the princes of Judah.

When Hezekiah was afflicted with leprosy, just at the time of the Assyrian invasion, the running of the nation's affairs would be in the hands of the princes, and evidently among them Shebna achieved a leading role as Regent (as Jotham was Regent in the time of his father's leprosy; 2 Chr. 26:21). Thus, both priestly and kingly terms were quite suitable in the prophet's exposure of his ambitions. If indeed he had come from the north, it is conceivable that he led the pro-Assyria party in Judah, and was optimistically hoping that when Judah was overrun he would be appointed their puppet king in Jerusalem.

The word for "treasurer" (v.15) was perhaps an assumed title to help boost his own reputation: "The Intelligent; the Knowing One" (cp. use of the same root in Ps. 139:3; Job 22:21).

The instruction to Isaiah: "Go, get thee" unto this upstart fellow, the triple use of "here" and the caustic description of his ambitious project all serve to express the Almighty's intense indignation with this eager seeker for power.

The most recent and most nauseating symptom was his new resolution to prepare for himself a superb sepulchre in the city of David in the very area reserved for the burial of the kings of Judah (1 Kgs. 2:10; 2 Chr. 32:33). In the LXX version the Greek for "on high" is identical with that used for the burial of Hezekiah. What a contrast with Joseph of Arimathea graciously lending his new tomb as a resting place for the crucified Jesus!

The very word that was used for "a *habitation* in the rock" describes the "*dwelling places* to all generations" which are the foolish pride of the selfish rich pilloried in Psalm 49. Like all the other Sons-of-Korah psalms, this also belongs to the reign of Hezekiah. It is hard to resist the conclusion that the main part of this psalm has Shebna specifically in mind, for he was a "man that understandeth not and like the beasts that perish," And there are several verses in Psalm 146 which suggest a contrast between Shebna and Hezekiah.

"He *graveth* an habitation in the rock" is specially incisive, for here is a double meaning word: "he makes himself a governor."

There are several marked divergences between the Hebrew and LXX texts, and it is difficult to be sure which is the more dependable. In verse 18 the Hebrew is very striking: "He (the Lord) will roll thee, rolling thee up into a roll." It is a contemptuous picture of this great man not being laid reverently to rest in a great sepulchre with any amount of pomp and ceremony, but instead his corpse is roughly rolled up in any piece of material available, and stowed away with complete lack of concern. So much for thee, Shebna, "thou shame of thy lord's house."

And the prelude to this fate was to be degradation from office, and this in an obvious public fashion (v. 19).

Psalm 82 is demonstrably another psalm of the reign of Hezekiah, and there verse 7, otherwise rather bewildering, is a clear allusion to Shebna: "Ye shall fall like one of the princes," that is, the demotion he has experienced will be yours also.

The strange thing is that apparently this shameful dismissal did not happen. For some time later (within a year, surely) when the Assyrians were at the gates of Jerusalem, and Hezekiah only just recovered from his fatal illness, Shebna was one of the three dignitaries who represented the king in negotiations with Rabshakeh (36:3,22). True, he was no longer "over the house," but instead was filling a more ordinary role as secretary.

It is not out of the question that Isaiah's fierce denunciation made such an impression on Shebna that there was immediate repentance, but how can one be sure? "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown," Jonah proclaimed. Yet it was clearly a hundred and forty years before that overthrow came — because its king and its people repented, for a while. (For other examples of this, see Rev., p.264ff).

**22:20-24 "And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah: And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house. And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons."**

With one consent the commentators read the rest of this chapter as a prophecy about a virtually unknown Eliakim who was to replace Shebna as steward of the palace or as high priest, or both — and thus a most eloquent and powerful Messianic prophecy gets lost in misdirection and obfuscation.

Strange that it seems to have gone unobserved that the Hebrew phrasing: *w'qarathi l'avdi l'Elyaqim ben-Hilqiyahu* can be read equally well (or even better): "And I will call my Servant to Eliakim, the son of Hilkiyah." The only comparable instance of a repeated prepositional prefix *l'* is in 1 Kgs. 1:32: "Call me Zadok the priest" (*q'ru li l'tzadoq ...*). This clearly supports the reading just suggested.

The context also requires this. For such phrases as "government, throne, girdle,

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shoulder, father, house of David" so obviously allude to one who sits on the throne of David. And since, right through Isaiah, from chapter 7 through to chapter 66 *the* prototype of Messiah is Hezekiah (development of this theme being the main theme and purpose of this commentary), it is to be expected that here again, in chapter 22 (which the New Testament says is Messianic) the prototype shall be not a virtually unknown Eliakim but the king who is unquestionably one of the finest foreshadowings of Messiah to be found anywhere in Holy Scripture. "Father" is an honorific title applied in the Old Testament to Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David and Messiah. Does Eliakim deserve to rank with these great men? Hezekiah certainly does.

All through Isaiah "my Servant" (in the singular) is Hezekiah, as prototype of the Messiah. And there is a very good reason why he, the Suffering Servant, should be called to Eliakim the new high priest. It is this:

The word for Hezekiah's "boil" (38:21 — obviously something vastly more serious than an ordinary boil) is used more than fifty times for leprosy, the incurable sin-disease. And the Law of Moses laid down that "in the day of the leper's cleansing, he shall be brought unto the priest."

One further detail: "I will *strengthen* him" (v.21) uses the very verb which is the foundation of Hezekiah's name: "strengthened by Jehovah."

Thus, from every angle it is clear that the present prophecy is to be read with reference to Hezekiah and not to Eliakim. The latter, worthy man that he was, was only an auxiliary in a greater scene with an incomparably greater prophetic meaning.

The intermingling of priestly and kingly terminology, impossible of application to any save Melchizedek, David and Christ, has been shown to have a certain spurious reference to Shebna, but of course the real point of it is in the Messianic reference, as will be seen by and by.

"The key of the house of David" belongs much more obviously to the king who sits on David's throne than to any steward. And the reference to opening and shutting is readily seen to refer to the royal house, for it was Ahaz who "shut up the doors of the house of the Lord" (2 Chr. 28:24; 29:7), and it was Hezekiah who "opened the doors of the house of the Lord, and repaired them" (29:3), thus foreshadowing the fulfilment of Isaiah's later prophecy that Jerusalem's gates of holiness "shall be opened continually" (60:11).

At the beginning of this verse (22), LXX has a significant addition: "And I will give him the glory of David; and he shall rule, and there shall be none to speak against him" (as Rabshakeh did, in very rough fashion; 36:4ff).

The figure of "a nail in a sure place" is almost unique in Scripture. It is essentially a priestly metaphor, for "place" is Hebrew *maqom* the normal meaning of which is a "holy place." Ezra (9:7,8) gives it this meaning, but concerning both kings and priests! And "sure" is really the word 'true', with reference to the utter dependability of the promises of God.

On this nail there is to be sufficient support for large and small, for cups of gold (Ex. 24:6) and flagons of earthen ware (so Paul interprets: "vessels of gold and of silver, also of wood and of earth" (2 Tim. 2:20), yet all purged and "sanctified, and meet for the Master's use."

Thus "they shall hang upon him all the glory (Hebrew=also 'weight') of his father's house."

In a variety of details the way has been already prepared for a more complete fulfilment of this prophecy in Christ. Some of the ideas could do with further emphasis.

The "Shebna" to be cast out of office is the Mosaic priesthood which was not only inadequate in itself but also utterly corrupt and full of pride. "Carried away with a mighty captivity" is a phrase needing no explanation. But the hint elsewhere of repentance and continued favour (on a lower level; 36:3) may well pre-figure Jewry's change of heart and re-acceptance in the days to come.

The restoration of Hezekiah from his sin-disease has its ready counterpart in the suffering and resurrection of a Christ pronounced "clean" before God.

The swing between priestly and royal terminology is absolutely right for One who sits as both king and priest upon his throne (Zech. 6:13). ' Tokens of divine authority are vested in One who "liveth and was dead...and has the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. 1:18). And He, in turn, commits them to men who continue His work — the keys of the kingdom, with power to bind and to loose (Mt 16:19): "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (Jn. 20:23).

The letter to Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7) is full of interpretative allusions to this prophecy:

"These things saith he that is holy, he that is true (two indirect references to "a sure place"), he that hath the key of David, he that openeth (the temple of God. 2 Chr. 29:3), and no man shutteth; and shutteth (in the Day of Judgment; Mt. 25:41), and no man openeth...I have set before thee an open door (the re-sanctified temple)...thou hast a little strength (cp. the name Hezekiah)...the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews (as did Shebna) and are not, but do lie: behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet (Shebna's — and Israel's — repentance)...the hour of temptation (like the Assyrian invasion)...that no man take thy crown (22:21 LXX: I will grant him thy crown with power; Rev. 19:12)...Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God (22:23 LXX, Cod. B: I do make him as a pillar, as a ruler)."

All this is possible because He is "an high priest over the house of God" (Heb. 10:21) and "upon him shall every one *trust* (this is faith), from the least to the greatest" (22:24 LXX).

**22:25 "In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall the nail that is fastened in the sure place be removed, and be cut down, and fall; and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off: for the Lord hath spoken it."**

At first sight this verse seems to contradict by its tone what has just been said about the Servant of the Lord. The identical switch of emphasis comes in another prophecy of the Suffering Servant:

"Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, and shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high" (52:13) "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great..." (53:12). Yet in the same prophecy there is this:

"A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed...The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (53:3,5,6). It is for completeness' sake that these two aspects of Hezekiah as Servant of the Lord — the suffering and the glory — need to be mentioned in the Shebna prophecy.

The fact that this present picture of seeming failure comes in at the end is surely to remind Isaiah's readers that what happened in those days was only a foreshadowing of an impressive fulness of fulfilment yet to be seen in the suffering and glory of a greater Servant of the Lord.

## Chapter 23

**23:1-5 "The burden of Tyre. Howl, ye ships of Tarshish; for it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in: from the land of Chittim it is revealed to them. Be still, ye inhabitants of the isle; thou whom the merchants of Zidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished. And by great waters the seed of Sihor, the harvest of the river, is her revenue; and she is a mart of nations. Be thou ashamed, O Zidon: for the sea hath spoken, even the strength of the sea, saying, I travail not, nor bring forth children, neither do I nourish up young men, nor bring up virgins. As at the report concerning Egypt, so shall they be sorely pained at the report of Tyre."**

Tyre and Zidon, the two cities of the Phoenician seaboard, were both great mercantile centres. With their development and extension of sea trading, for centuries they dominated all international commerce except that which necessarily depended on the land routes.

Zidon was the older city, called "great" even in the time of Joshua. But a few centuries later Tyre surpassed it in development and enterprise.

Because of their tremendous mercantile prosperity, these cities became the target of a long series of greedy expansionist Assyrian kings. Time and again inscriptions mention "the tribute of the ships of Tyre and Zidon." When these invasions came, the usual Tyrian policy was to buy off the aggressor. It had to be this because their small country did not have the manpower to match the might and the mercenaries of Nineveh. But the heavy payments exacted by the Assyrians could always be re-couped in the form of increased charges to their international customers. To this very day the shopkeeper does the same thing.

The extent of the prosperity of Tyre may be judged from the fact that whereas Shalmanezzer V records his extortion of ten talents of gold from Hoshea, king of the ten tribes of Israel, from tiny Phoenicia he squeezed 150 talents of gold.

Almost certainly Isaiah's "burden of Tyre" belongs to Sennacherib's famous campaign, the third against the land of Canaan. His inscription mentions success against Zidon, but Tyre is omitted, perhaps because of lack of success against the developing island-Tyre, but it may be taken that the mainland city was plundered.

The identification of Tarshish is a problem which has never been completely settled. Equation with Phoenician Carthage can be ruled out, for there are several mentions of Tarshish before even Carthage was founded. There are four possibilities:

- a. Tarshish was the name of island-Tyre (cp. Ps. 72:10).
- b. Tarsus. One authority claims that Gen. 10:4 is decisive in favour of this.
- c. Tartessus in southern Spain. The tarshish stone is chrysolite, and this is known to be found in Spain.
- d. Cornwall. It is very, very doubtful whether the Tyrians came to England at such an early date as this prophecy. And in any case, the metallic leads in Ez. 27:12 are better satisfied by Tartessus.

The most probable solution is that Tarshish was island-Tyre ("ships of Tarshish" meaning, quite simply, ships that sail from Tarshish). But of course all colonising nations have taken homeland names with them overseas: New York, Boston, Plymouth, Perth — nearly every English and Scottish place name is duplicated somewhere round the globe — and this phenomenon would explain the evidence for more than one Tarshish, especially in the far

east (cp. 2 Chr. 20:36,37; Jer. 10:9) The opening words of this burden present a dramatic picture of Phoenician ships on their way home from a long voyage learning with dismay when they touch at Kittim (Kition, Cyprus) that their home harbour is now in enemy hands.

Similarly (v.5) the ill news has reached Egypt, referred to here also as Sihor (black), with reference to the black silt of the Nile. Tyre was the carrier of the massive corn harvests of Egypt. The two countries were considerably interdependent. When the judgments of God shattered Egypt in the time of Moses, "sorrow took hold of the inhabitants of Palestina" (Ex. 15:14). And now there is consternation in Egypt at the ill-fortune befalling Tyre.

**23:6-9 "Pass ye over to Tarshish; howl, ye inhabitants of the isle. Is this your joyous city, whose antiquity is of ancient days? her own feet shall carry her afar off to sojourn. Who hath taken this counsel against Tyre, the crowning city, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth? The Lord of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth."**

Archaeological evidence suggests that although Sennacherib overran Phoenicia and subjugated Zidon, he did not entirely capture Tyre. Doubtless the mainland city became his. Psalm 83:7 points to this, and no doubt the Tyrians sought Assyrian favour by contributing fighting men and naval aid down the coast for the furthering of Sennacherib's campaign against Judah.

But until the time of Alexander the Great, island-Tyre was inviolate. "Pass ye over to Tarshish." There have been plenty of parallels to this in history. When Alexander besieged, Tyre's women and children were sent off to Carthage. When Napoleon invaded the Iberian peninsula, the Portuguese royal family fled to Brazil. In the eighteenth century when French power looked like swamping the Lowlands, Dutch merchants made plans to transfer all their activities to the Dutch East Indies.

But the ancient mainland city of Tyre, going far back in history (much farther than Josh. 19:29), though not so long established as Zidon, was bound to suffer when "her own feet carried her far off to sojourn" — it is a picture of captives being led away to a distant land (to use their ship-building skills on the Euphrates?).

And such a fate as this is in store for proud Tyre, called here "the crowning city" because of its many overseas colonies each having its ruler appointed from the mother city. Hence Jeremiah's phrase: "all the kings of Tyre" (25:22). Such was its wealth that lesser kings in not a few countries were on its pay-roll, selling mercantile privileges to these men of Phoenicia. "Merchant princes" was a phrase first put to use by Isaiah. The word for "traffickers" is really "Canaanites"; the connection sprang first from Zidon being the son of Canaan, Noah's grandson (Gen. 10:15) and became established in later generations when the traders of Tyre became the best-known internationally of all the peoples of Canaan (Zech. 14:21).

Besides the materialistic self-sufficiency of Tyre, God also abhorred its religion: The Lord of hosts hath purposed it, to *profane* (RV) the pride of all glory." The worship of Melkart (=king of the city) was modelled on that of Jehovah — as a direct consequence of the close friendship between Solomon and Hiram. Hence is explained the remarkable language of Ezekiel 28:12ff concerning the "king" of Tyre. Over the centuries the pattern of worship had continued the same, but the religious character of it was greatly debased, and in this evil form had been exported back to

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the people of God in the time of Jezebel. Tyre deserved judgment as much as does modern London.

**23:10-14 "Pass through thy land as a river, O daughter of Tarshish: there is no more strength. He stretched out his hand over the sea, he shook the kingdoms: the Lord hath given a commandment against the merchant city, to destroy the strong holds thereof. And he said, Thou shalt no more rejoice, O thou oppressed virgin, daughter of Zidon, arise, pass over to Chittim; there also shalt thou have no rest. Behold the land of the Chaldeans; this people was not, till the Assyrian founded it for them that dwell in the wilderness: they set up the towers thereof, they raised up the palaces thereof; and he brought it to ruin. Howl, ye ships of Tarshish: for your strength is laid waste."**

Just as "the daughter of Zidon" (v. 12) means Zidon, so also "the daughter of Tarshish" means Tarshish-Tyre. The opening phrase describes the rush of a river to the sea. It is a figure appropriate enough to the Phoenicians abandoning their small but very fertile and prosperous plain in order to crowd on to ships that will take them away to safety (as they hope). The girle ("strength") of defences on the landward side can do nothing to fend off the invader. The divine decree has gone forth against "the merchant city" (Hebrew: "Canaan"). Zidon had hitherto gone unravaged by war, for although before this there had been several Assyrian invasions, the payment of tribute had bought off the plunderer. But now Sennacherib, the latest of these marauders, would work his will on "the oppressed virgin daughter of Zidon."

Even flight across the sea to colonies in Cyprus was to provide no lasting comfort. It is not certain whether Sennacherib was able to achieve a sea-borne invasion of that island, but his successor Esarhaddon certainly did.

In the received text, verse 13 is full of difficulty, but the reading in the LXX is perfectly straightforward: "And if you depart (being led away captive) to the land of the Chaldeans (i.e. to Babylon), this also is laid waste by the Assyrians, for their wall is fallen."

About the same time that Sennacherib overran all the territory from Assyria southward to Judah he also had a very successful campaign against Babylon, and promptly led off thither many of his captives from "the western land." There would be no joy for his Tyrian prisoners there.

So this burden ends, as it began, in misery: "Howl, ye ships of Tarshish."

**23:15-18 "And it shall come to pass in that day, that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king: after the end of seventy years shall Tyre sing as an harlot. Take an harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered. And it shall come to pass after the end of seventy years, that the Lord will visit Tyre, and she shall turn to her hire, and shall commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth. And her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the Lord: it shall not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing."**

Because of the repeated emphasis elsewhere on Israel's seventy years of captivity in Babylon (Jer. 25:11; 29:10; Dan. 9:2; 2 Chr. 36:21; Zech. 1:12; 7:5) there is a general inclination among commentators to apply this prophecy to the same seventy years. But this is irrelevant. Isaiah prophesies about his own times and about the Messiah, as foreshadowed in his own times. This principle of interpretation must dominate.

Again, the fact has to be faced that neither in Isaiah's day nor in the time of the Babylonian captivity was Tyre "forgotten" for a period of seventy years. It was not until long after the Christian era that Tyre dwindled away from its high commercial status.

But when this passage is read as a reminder of how for a period of seventy years the long-standing alliance between Tyre and Jerusalem lapsed or was interrupted, it has immediate relevance to all that the prophet has to say in these burdens. That period would come to an end "in the days of a certain great king" (reading B for K, a common confusion; and taking *echad* in its frequent idiomatic sense, as in Ex. 11:1; Gen. 48:22; 2 Sam. 7:23 etc.), and then "the Lord will visit Tyre (in blessing)" and the old alliance be resumed, with all the finest of that city's resources being again available for the temple service (v. 18).

The king referred to is, of course, Sennacherib who swamped all the Levant in his imperious conquest. Yet as a direct result of the cataclysmic destruction of his army at Jerusalem, Tyre, who had paid tribute and supplied mercenaries for the Assyrian campaign (Ps. 83:7), was now happy to return to its former close connection with Jerusalem (Ps. 87:4; 45:12; 2 Chr. 32:23).

The language of harlotry, so unseemly in the modern ear, is the prophet's very apt figure for the eager Tyrian emphasis on trade. As the harlot's way of life combines pleasure and profit, so also did the international commerce of Tyre's big business. Nahum (3:4) uses the same figure about Nineveh. In verse 17, LXX interprets the figure: "she shall be a market for all the kingdoms." The hire of a harlot was not to be brought into the sanctuary of the Lord (Dt. 23:18), but when Tyre turned in reverence to the God of Israel, then this other "harlotry" could be tolerated (cp. Lk. 7:37).

It remains to consider what further fulfilment this Tyre prophecy might have in the last days. Such a reference seems to be called for by the sweeping assertion that "thou shalt *no more* rejoice" (v. 12) — that is, in the self-indulgence and self-glorification of a harlot's trade. Yet the prophecy does conclude on a very different note.

The days have gone when it was possible to speculate that in a last-day sense "Tyre" is Britain (although the 70 year period from 1917 is tempting). And in this connection why the marked disinclination to apply Ezekiel 26-28 to Britain?

On the other hand, the Book of Revelation interweaves allusions to Tyre with caustic references to both Babylon and Jerusalem (Rev., pp.208ff). "Harlotry" with the kings of the earth (v.8 = Rev. 18:23; v.17 = 17:2) is followed by a time when she is ravaged by a great king (v.15=17:10). Yet the unexpected outcome is a Jerusalem adorned as a bride for her husband, precisely as happened in Hezekiah's day.

It is remarkable that whereas certain of the Arab powers seem to be marked out for hard discipline or even utter destruction in the time of the end (e.g. Is. 34; Obadiah), there is to be a willingness on the part of others to acknowledge God's King in Jerusalem. Is it relevant that there are more (nominal) Christians among the Arabs in Lebanon than in any other part of the Arab world?

Then, although there has been no friendship in Lebanon for the new state of Israel, perhaps this seventy-year estrangement is due to be replaced with a new spirit of amity and service.

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## Chapter 24

**24:1-3 "Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof. And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer' so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him. The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the Lord hath spoken this word."**

There can be little doubt that throughout this chapter the word *eretz* should read Land (16 times). Certainly in its primary reference it is the Land of Israel whose misery is being foretold (in future tenses, in Hebrew). But, significantly, Jerusalem itself is not mentioned — appropriately enough, for it was the only city in Judah not to suffer directly in the Assyrian campaign.

"Turning upside down" describes the cleaning and setting aside of a dirty dish. In a later reign (2 Kgs. 21:13) the same graphic figure is used again, this time about Jerusalem, for then its turn to endure judgment was inevitable (cp. also the familiar words of Ezekiel: "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it..."; 21:27).

The scattering of the inhabitants of Judah, as they sought refuge from rapine and captivity, by the flight to any near-by country that would have them, was only the first taste of what was to come on Jewry, and is yet to come on them, for their faithlessness (Dt. 28:64).

The long catalogue of all segments of society all brought to a common level of misery is a highly effective characteristic of Isaiah's writing; cp. 2:12-16; 3:1-3,18-24. Land and people will experience the same wretchedness. Contemporary Hosea has a similar description: 4:3,6,9. It is all in close accordance with the curses of Leviticus 26. Now the fulfilment is inescapable: "The Lord hath spoken this word."

**24:4-9 "The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left. The new wine mourneth, the vine languisheth, all the merryhearted do sigh. The mirth of tabrets ceaseth, the noise of them that rejoice endeth, the joy of the harp ceaseth. They shall not drink wine with a song; strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it."**

There can be little doubt that the triad in verse 4 is about the Land of Israel and its Jewish "world" (there are similar verbs in 3:26). "Fade away" and "languish" link the phrases together. It is a depressing picture, with the nobility suffering as much as the rest. God's Holy Land is defiled by violence and by heedless transgression of God's laws (Lev. 26:46), by gross neglect of His Passover ordinance (s.w. Ex. 12:14,17,24) and a callous disregard of the covenant made between Jehovah and Israel at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24). The most obvious token of this was the

shutting of the temple by Hezekiah's evil father. Not a few commentators take this 'everlasting covenant' to be God's promise (Gen. 9:16) when the Flood was over. But that can hardly be correct, for the covenant with Noah was God's one-sided undertaking. How can "broken the everlasting covenant" apply to that? Also, all the context here in Isaiah 24 concerns the Land of Israel and the people in it (compare how the decay of the nation is exposed in contemporary Micah 2,3).

In retribution the curse (of Dt. 28) was to go forth over all the Land. The dross of its guilt was to be burned out (1:31; 5:24; 9:18,19; 10:16,17). Isaiah's repetition of this figure was a grim anticipation of how Assyrian invaders would ruthlessly fire towns and villages. Columns ("palm trees"; Jl. 2:30 Heb.) of smoke would be seen going up to heaven from all parts of the Land.

And the population would be decimated. Sennacherib had 200,000 of them marched off to Babylon. At least as many more would be slain. And a comparable number would flee to any neighbouring country they could reach.

The emphatic mention of harvest festival song and celebration (Jl. 1:10,12) replaced by misery and silence might perhaps be a prophetic hint that the invaders would come into the Land at that time of the year — October. Other indications are that it was to be six months later, at Passover, before deliverance could come.

**24:10-12 "The city of confusion is broken down: every house is shut up, that no man may come in. There is a crying for wine in the streets; all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone. In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction."**

Even in the city of Jerusalem there is to be over all a pall of wretchedness, for apparently the situation will be past saving. The word "confusion" is *tohu*, as in Genesis 1:2: "the earth was *without form*." Before the Genesis creation began, a former ordered world was apparently brought to ruin. And now the prophet envisages that the ordered world of God's nation will similarly come to confusion and desolation (cp. 50:3,9; 51:6).

In the city all strong houses were barricaded up against the time when "the gate is smitten with destruction" and the ravaging troops of an invading army roam the streets in search of plunder. And people lament because wine and all the other good things of life seem to be gone for ever, as the ordered pattern of existence crumbles into ruin. (Yet by and by Isaiah goes on to paint a very different, heartwarming picture; 25:6,8,9; ch.35).

In actual fact, when Sennacherib's men did besiege the city they never succeeded in storming it; but in the present passage all the worst fears of the people are pictured as apparently inevitable. Not so, however, thanks to the staunch faith of Hezekiah and the godly remnant who shared his loyalty to Jehovah.

Years later Ezekiel, describing God's new order when a repentant people are restored to Him (Ez. 48:35) makes a delightful play with *Shammah*, a double-meaning word — instead of "in the city *desolation*" (Is. 24:12), the name of that same city is: Jehovah-shammah, the Lord has *gone thither*.

**24:13 "When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, there shall be as the shaking of an olive tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done."**

The valid alternative: "For thus it shall be..." gives a tidier meaning. It is the theme which is never far away throughout Isaiah's copious prophesying, that amidst national decay there will be a faithful remnant, so that amidst national overthrow there will be, for their sakes, a divine salvation, Isaiah's own son Shear-jashub (10:21,22) was a prophecy of how this would work

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out — and himself probably one of the multitude of captives who were dragged away to labour and suffer and die but who miraculously were back home again within the year.

The figure of the precious gleaning of grapes and olives after the main crop has been destroyed comes again and again at this period: "The glory of Jacob shall be made thin...yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the utmost bough, four or five in the outermost fruitful branches thereof" (17:4-6). "The Lord shall beat off (the fruit), from the channel of the River (Euphrates) unto the streams of Egypt, and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel" (27:12; cp. Mic. 7:1,2).

All this is to come about "in the midst of the land, among the peoples (*amim*, the tribes of Israel)." Everything in Hezekiah's reign shows that he was the mainstay of his people's faith. Apart from his unflagging lead (except when he was laid aside stricken with disease), Isaiah and his school of prophets would have achieved almost nothing.

**24:14-16a "They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord, they shall cry aloud from the sea. Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires, even the name of the Lord God of Israel in the isles of the sea. From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous."**

In the Cambridge Bible, Skinner, a competent scholar, says frankly he does not know what this prophecy is about: "Events must have occurred which excited the premature expectation of an immediate deliverance. It is difficult to conceive the historical situation which is presupposed."

This is a remarkable statement to make, for Isaiah supplies the history (ch. 36-39) that goes with this prophecy, and (as will be seen by and by, and as has been seen already in other chapters) they match perfectly.

The rejoicing of v. 14,16a seems out of place after the sustained picture of woe in the first half of the chapter. But the destruction of Sennacherib's army is more than adequate explanation. However, men like Skinner do not believe in the reality of the cataclysm, and thus they blindfold themselves to the graphic primary reference of the words.

LXX ascribes these songs of thanksgiving to "those that are left in the Land," Here, by implication, there is a hint of a mighty destruction of many of God's people and a mighty captivity of others.

The song extols "the majesty of the Lord" which has destroyed the invincible enemy. It is the very phrase that is used in Moses' song about the sweeping away of Pharaoh's hosts at the Red Sea — a comparable deliverance. This Exodus allusion is reinforced by many other similar "Exodus" references in the later parts of Isaiah (e.g. 49:8-12).

But why should there be a cry of alarm "from the sea"? In more than one place the prophet supplies beforehand details of how the Assyrian destruction is to be wrought: e.g. "The Lord shall make his glorious voice to be heard, and shall shew the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones. For through the voice of the Lord (Ps. 29) shall the Assyrian be beaten down" (30:30,31). Sometimes the emphasis is on whirlwind (as also in 17:13; 66:15; 40:24; 41:16; Am. 1:14; Nah. 1:3) and sometimes on the Glory of the Lord (2:10,19,21; 63:1; 42:12; 10:16; 4:5; Ps. 29:2,3; 102:16).

The effects of the whirlwind would be specifically impressive by the sea. LXX has: "the waters of the sea shall be troubled." "Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind" (Ps. 48:7, a psalm which is clearly about the Assyrian destruction).

And because of this mighty phenomenon ("wherefore") "glorify ye the name of the Lord in the fires, the name of the Lord God of Israel in the coastlands." The word "fires" is difficult to make sense of. It is actually *'orim*, a word very commonly used of the light of dawn. By the common figure of synecdoche it is put for "the regions of sunrise", i.e. countries east of Israel, whereas the coastlands or isles are put for the west. In the history, international reaction to the great deliverance is stated explicitly: "Many brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth" (2 Chr. 32:23). "Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee" (Is. 25:3).

Just as God's deliverance at the Red Sea moved the people to almost delirious joy celebrating the triumph in the song of Moses, so also now: "from the uttermost parts of the Land have we heard songs (26:1; 25:1,5,9; LXX: wonders), even glory to the righteous one." Almighty God is never called the Righteous One, so the best alternative is reference to Hezekiah, especially since the word here for "glory" describes personal well-being, physical beauty. This is precisely how the king was personally blessed in his recovery from leprosy (38:21). LXX translators must have had this approach, for they read: "hope (that is, as often: hope of children; 38:19) for the Righteous One."

**24:16b-20 "But I said, My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously. Fear, and the pit, and the snare, are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth. And it shall come to pass, that he who fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the snare: for the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth do shake. The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again."**

Whereas through most of the first half of Isaiah, interpretation with reference to contemporary events is relatively easy, but regarding the last days much more difficult, here all at once the "Little Apocalypse" (Is. 24-27) seems to demand application to the end of the age, and only with difficulty to Isaiah's own times. However, just now consideration of the apocalyptic meaning must be deferred in order to treat the passage consistently with what has already been said about verses 1-16a.

There is a dramatic intensification of style, made yet more pointed by a switch from the plural pronoun "we" to "And I said..."

The impressive repetition can read, as AV: "My leanness, my leanness," or as AVm.: "My secret mystery, my secret mystery." The former is an appropriate beginning to a picture of the kingdom of Judah ravaged and smashed. The latter suggests the idea: Whatever this prophecy may mean *now*, there is a much more complete and unexpected fulfilment to follow in due time. As will be seen, New Testament usage confirms such a reading.

"The treacherous dealers," as in 21:2 and 33:1, the latter especially, is splendidly

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appropriate to the way in which the Assyrian king accepted tribute as part of the peace treaty with Judah, but then proceeded with his campaign of conquest and destruction as though the men of Judah were utterly recalcitrant (2 Kgs 18:14-17). This imprecation was also specially appropriate to the Arab mercenaries who deserted Jerusalem and joined the enemy and hence the maledictions against Moab (25:10) and Edom (34:5).

The anguish and torment about to harrow the soul of the people of God is summed up in a dreadful and portentous triad: the fear, the pit, and the snare — in Hebrew *pachad*, *pachath*, *pach*. Nowhere else is Isaiah's paronomasia more effective.

The first of these has its root in the curse of Deuteronomy 28: "the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear." The Hebrew phrase is, literally: "the voice of the fear." These Assyrians were masters in the art of psychological warfare. Not only was their propaganda superbly presented so as to convince the faint-hearted in Jerusalem, but it was also said in *Hebrew* and in loud confident fashion to reach every one of the population on the walls of the city (36:4-22). Thus "the sinners in Zion were afraid; fearfulness surprised the hypocrites" (33:14).

The precise form of 'fear, pit, and snare' goes undefined, but the associated phrases suggest the frightening violence of earthquake. "Fear" is the very word that is used three times about Uzziah's earthquake (2:10,19,21); and "the foundations of the Land do shake" seems clear enough, especially since LXX uses this very word for earthquake. "The *noise* of the fear" also chimes in very well.

But in this context the word "snare" is difficult, for its normal meaning is a trap by which animals are caught. But Psalm 11 suggests another idea: "Upon the wicked will the Lord rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest" (v.6). It is a picture of scarifying storm, with thunder and lightning, such as Isaiah himself describes (30:30,31). So perhaps the "snare" could be a violent storm not only frightening friend and destroying foe but also bringing flash floods down the wadis with such a startling and horrifying suddenness that their violence is powerful to sweep away those who would sweep away the holy people. But Psalm 18 is emphatic that this kind of display of the powers of nature is to be seen as a theophany, nothing less (18:7-15).

The build-up of awe-inspiring phrases seems to be framed so as to emphasize to God's people and to the enemy alike that there is to be no escaping the might of the wrath of God. It is "as if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand upon the wall, and a serpent bit him" (Am. 5:19). "He that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered. Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down..." (Am. 9:1-4).

God's "opening of the windows of heaven" can be either in blessing (Ps. 78:23; Mal. 3:10) or in judgment (Gen. 7:11; 8:2). There can be little doubt which is meant here.

The figures of speech to describe irresistible destruction are very powerful. An ordered society which hitherto has felt pleased with itself now staggers aimlessly and helplessly like a bemused drunk; and what had seemed stable and permanent is now no better than a watchman's booth in a vineyard (s.w. 1:8) that has been battered flat by the intense gusts of a hurricane.

"Fall and not rise again" has an element of finality which did not prove true either of Jerusalem or of the Assyrian attacker. Both of them rose to fresh assertions of prosperity or power. But the Hebrew phrase is, literally: "and shall not add to rise," i.e. without any power of immediate recovery.

The reason for this judgment is spelled out in very explicit fashion: "the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it." The holy Land and its many unholy people needed a good shaking, and got it. And the pride of Assyria was too nauseating to be tolerated. On that proud tyrant the stroke came with shattering thoroughness.

**24:21,22 "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited."**

Reference of this passage, and of v.23, to the Last Days is comparatively straightforward. It is not so easy to see just what the contemporary meaning might be "In that day" continues allusion to the great theophany in Hezekiah's time.

Centuries later the highest point near Jerusalem was still known as "the camp of the Assyrians" — "the host of the high (proud) ones that are on high." And "the kings of the Land" would be the various rulers in near-by territories (they are listed in Psalm 83) who, whether gladly or under compulsion, joined in the Assyrian invasion.

Those were "shut up in the pit" in the sense that after the great manifestation of divine power and indignation they were no more trouble to God's people, but kept themselves to themselves.

That, however, was not to be the end of the story. "After many days" there would come a further visitation of punishment, a final end. This came, more than a century later, with the sensational uprising of Babylonian power which reduced mighty Nineveh to uninhabitable ruins and swept into Nebuchadnezzar's grand empire all the lesser powers of the Levant as well.

**24:23 "Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously."**

LXX has an exceptionally meaningless reading here: "And the brick shall decay, and the wall shall fall..." Yet it is possible to see how this sprang from unpointed Hebrew with only one letter different. Sun, moon, and stars are so often put figuratively for Israel (T.E. ch. 11) that one marvels that any other meaning was ever considered; yet even the great Sir Isaac Newton went sadly astray on this.

The meaning here must be either a national humiliation of Israel by their enemies or Israel's self-humiliation in repentance before God. Of these the latter seems the more likely, for the reason that the nation's reformation, already much encouraged by Hezekiah, would be furthered much more by the divine deliverance which came soon after.

The title "Lord of hosts" is especially appropriate to this deliverance brought by an angel of the Lord.

It is remarkable that at the first Passover, after the angel of the Lord had brought the people safely out of Egypt, the Song of Moses celebrated that "the Lord reigns for ever and ever" (Ex. 15:18). So, appropriately, after a Passover in Hezekiah's reign, a like deliverance was celebrated in similar words: "the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion and in Jerusalem." These two geographical allusions are fitting, the first referring to the temple cleansed and re-glorified, and the second to the renewed allegiance of the common people.

The reference to elders or ancients of the nation is also appropriate, for whereas before Hezekiah's reformation gained momentum the leaders were a worthless lot

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(3:14), now (thanks to the support which came from Isaiah's school of faithful prophets) God has "restored thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, the city of righteousness, the faithful city Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness" (1:26,27).

But when all is said that can be said, from this angle of contemporary fulfilment about this remarkable and impressive chapter, the fact has to be faced that its real significance concerns the last days and the coming of Messiah's kingdom. In this respect there is much similarity with the familiar and powerful utterances of Isaiah in ch. 2:1-5; 8:13-15; 9:3-7; 11:1-16, and others. In all these places a contemporary reference is readily traceable, but it needs a Messianic meaning to fill out the details and to provide a really satisfying picture.

*The last day reference of ch. 24 will now be sketched briefly.*

The repeated reference to *eretz*, the Land of Israel, insists that for fulfilment one must keep eyes focussed on the Holy Land, not on the super-powers.

The early verses describe an impending state of social and religious chaos. And "turned upside down" is surely to be linked with the third of the three overturnings foretold in Ezekiel 21:27. All the high hopes centred in the modern state of Israel — "the world's fourth super-power" — are here brought to ruin. There is nothing, nothing to inspire optimism.

The worst thing of all is that all this has to come to pass because "they have broken the everlasting covenant" (v.5). There is nothing left to the age-long bond with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The prospects of this heart-breaking situation about to bring Israel to ruin are already bleak. Most of the nation is starkly irreligious. The ultra-orthodox wing is violently aggressive and at least as far removed from the spirit of the Law of Moses as were the Pharisees and Sadducees (the Separatists and the Righteous) in the time of Christ. The faithful remnant is so small and obscure as scarcely to be found.

Yet verse 13 makes clear that there will be a handful of the righteous in the last days, as in the days of Noah and the days of Lot, "seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal" (1 Kgs. 19:18; Mal. 4:5,6). It is only the existence of this valuable minority that will save Israel from utter extinction (T.E. ch.2). And it may well be that the emphasis here on ingathering and harvest songs is intended to suggest that Israel's political disaster comes at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles (but this also needs reconciling with the Passover hints associated in Isaiah with the second coming of the Lord).

"The majesty of the Lord," inciting His people to "lift up their voice" in gladness, is of course the appearance of the Shekinah Glory (Mt. 24:30). In chapter 2, which the New Testament specifically applies to the Second Coming, the same expression is used three times over (v.10,19,21). And with this open manifestation there will come a call not only to the Jews but also to countries east and west of Israel to "glorify the name of the Lord."

The Land itself will be filled with songs of gladness: "our hope is in the Righteous One." It never has been hitherto, but now at least there will come, through sheer force of circumstances, the change of heart for which the God of Israel has looked ever since Sinai. That reading: "hope" (LXX), if it can be sustained, is particularly eloquent; for it is a word that is often associated with the hope of children (e.g. Hos. 2:15; Ruth 1:12; Jer. 31:17; Ez. 37:11; Rom. 4:18; 15:13; Josh. 2:18), an emphasis which is never far away in the Promises to the Fathers (Gen. 15:5; 28:3,14; 48:16,19).

The dramatic change in the middle of verse 16 switches to the catalogue of horrors to be experienced immediately before the Second Coming.

Here the "treacherous dealers" are unquestionably Israel's implacable enemies, the Arabs. Jeremiah (48:42,43) quotes this passage from Isaiah with specific reference to Moab. Isaiah himself excoriates Moab (25:10). And in Psalm 83 all the Arab neighbours of Israel are listed as enemies of their "brethren".

The triple terror — "fear and the pit and the snare" — together make a marvellously accurate and frightening anticipation of nuclear war. "The *noise* of the fear" is appropriate to a mighty explosion, a destruction coming down out of the sky when "the windows from on high are open." In this context "the foundations of the earth do shake" hardly needs explaining (cp. Ps. 46:2, a Hezekiah psalm).

"The pit" to which men flee could well be the underground shelter which every major government of the world has made preparation to use at the first threat of nuclear war.

And "the snare" is surely the insidious unperceived radiation which is the inevitable aftermath of every detonation of a nuclear device.

"The windows of heaven" were opened to bring destruction on an evil world in the days of Noah (Gen. 7:11; 8:2), and in the days of Lot (Gen. 19:24). And "as it was in the days of Noah" and of Lot, so it will be again, but with safety for the righteous (54:9-11; Lk. 17:26-30).

The force of all this language of terror is much intensified in the Hebrew text by the duplication of the verb forms: "broken, broken down...dissolved, clean dissolved...moved, moved exceedingly," and also by the assonance of the key words: "pachad, pachath, pach — scare, lair, snare."

But there is a strange "inconsistency" between the explicit declaration that "the Lord shall punish" and the Hebrew verbs which insist that "the earth has utterly broken itself down, the earth has clean dissolved itself, the earth has moved itself exceedingly."

The paradox is only apparent, for in other places where the judgments of the Almighty are detailed it is likewise emphasized that the modus operandi will be by allowing men to use their own diabolical cleverness against their fellows (Zech. 14:13; Ez. 38:21; Hag. 2:22; Jer. 25:32; Is. 50:11; 49:26; 19:2; 9:4).

The two kinds of warring hosts — "the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth" — seem to be a perfect anticipation of modern warfare, the latter phrase describing what has come to be called conventional warfare, and "the high ones on high" might, a generation ago, have aptly described the thousand bomber raids of World War II, but today have much more appropriate reference to the thousand pieces of sophisticated "hardware" now flying round this planet at varying distances up to five hundred miles, most of these being most certainly not for "scientific research" purposes but to be pin-pointed by electronic signal on an enemy target when occasion arises. "Star Wars" is now a familiar phrase in the world's vocabulary.

Commentators are fond of identifying these "high ones on high" as wicked angels filling the world with evil. But why invent such when men are capable of filling that role even better? There are *no* wicked angels. But the Bible has much to say about angels of evil, those whose dispensation from Almighty God is to exercise control in this domain of nature and human affairs (B.S. p.372f). Compare Paul's allusion to "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). So it is not impossible that there is here an anticipation of the final winding up of this side of angelic activity. Regarding the last days did not Jesus foretell that "the powers of heaven shall be shaken"

(Lk. 21:26)? Between the Olivet prophecy and this part of Isaiah 24 there is a remarkable series of verbal contacts (these are listed in "The Time of the End", ch. 20, where a number of other interpretative ideas are also suggested).

The gathering of these warring forces into a prison seems to be alluded to and expanded in the apocalyptic picture of the restraint put on "that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan" when Messiah's reign begins (Rev. 20:1-3). In "Revelation" H.A.W., ch.38, it is suggested that a proper reading of the Gog-Magog rebellion requires reference to the beginning, and not to the end, of the millennium — the equivalent, in fact, of Psalm 2 and Ezekiel 38. The traditional view involves a considerable series of discordant interpretations.

The reign of the Lord of hosts in mount Zion is clearly the climax of this last-day crisis. Christ and his redeemed extend their authority not only over the Holy Land but over the entire world.

At such time "the moon confounded and the sun ashamed" describes either the preceding phase of Israel's downtreading by triumphant enemies, or — more likely — the long-overdue repentance of the nation, its self-humiliation before the Man whom, formerly, they would not have to reign over them. At that time not only those who are the Lord's true temple, his mount Zion, but also the entire city of Jerusalem will gladly receive Jesus as "the Lord our Righteousness." And with them there will be the "ancients" of the race, the Fathers: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David — men of faith who received promises, believed them with heart and soul, but who have slept through long centuries till the day of fulfilment. Here, and not here only (25:8; 26:19), is Isaiah's confident doctrine of the resurrection.

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## Chapter 25

**25:1-5 "O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built. Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee. For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers, as the heat in a dry place; even the heat with the shadow of a cloud: the branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low."**

"They shall sing for the majesty of the Lord...songs, even glory to the Righteous One."

This was almost the only touch of happiness in chapter 24. Now the promised songs (25:1ff,9ff; 26:1ff) lighten the gloom. The second and third of these have a formal introduction, but not so this first one — unless 24:23b has somehow got misplaced.

The repetitious character of this chapter is very emphatic. Kay (in Speaker's Comm.) lists no less than 22 phrases which occur twice, and 3 which are found three times over. Also, in a remarkable way, the phraseology of this song intertwines impressively with the wording of the Song of Moses (Ex. 15) and with Psalm 118 (a Hezekiah psalm). The first of these celebrates a deliverance of the nation by the Glory of the Lord, and the other deliverance of God's royal

Servant, also by the Glory of the Lord. The appropriate Messianic fulfilment, quite inescapable, is also to be worked out here in due course.

The "wonderful things" wrought by God are the saving of His holy city from capture and devastation by the Assyrians, and the saving of His godly king from what seemed to be an inevitable and miserable death from an incurable disease. The siege and the sickness were two simultaneous trials, in both of which there was no hope of human salvation but only by dramatic act of God (38:5,6). These marvels are said to be "counsels from afar" because both had already been foretold some years before (14:25; 17:13; 4:2; 1:26; 8:14; 16:5; 22:20,21).

"Faithfulness and truth" was a well-established idiom for the promises of God (B.S. ch.17.15), especially those made to the ancient fathers and to David (Mic. 7:20; Ps. 89:1,2,24,22,29; Gen. 24:27).

The city whose humiliation is described is, of course, Sennacherib's Nineveh, which then vaunted itself as the queen-city of the world. Yet commentators have been known to make such observations as this one: "It is useless to try to determine which city, or who the 'strangers' are". Others, with studied vagueness, identify with the world-city which sets itself in opposition to Almighty God. Yet if there is one lesson the student of Holy Scripture needs to learn it is that always the specific interpretation is to be preferred to that which is vague or general. The Bible does not talk generalities.

Remarkably, the Targum seems to look in a different direction: "The idolatrous house of the nations (Gentiles) in the city of Jerusalem shall never be built again." This is actually a remarkably good interpretation, for in the days of Ahaz an important part of the temple had been handed over to an Assyrian garrison (2 Kgs. 16:18), and the rest of the temple had been handed over to an Assyrian god (16:10ff). The tremendous rivalry between the worship of Jehovah and of Ashur completely dominated Sennacherib's campaign. (On this, see H.Gt., pp.61 f). The contrast between the two holy cities is very marked in ch.26:5,1: "the lofty city, he (the Lord) layeth it low...even to the ground... We have a strong city: salvation will He appoint for walls and bulwarks."

But the city of Nineveh, the "palace of strangers (invaders; 1:7; 29:5)", stood proud and prosperous for another century. Then why does Isaiah speak here of its destruction as already accomplished? This is characteristic prophetic language (Rom. 4:17), asserting inevitable overthrow in these terms because Isaiah himself (ch. 13,14) and also Micah (5:6) and Nahum (ch.2,3) had already foretold this judgment. And once it was destroyed, then, unlike many another Near-eastern city, Nineveh never was re-built.

In Isaiah's own time that 'city of the terrible nations' came to fear Jehovah through the havoc and slaughter wrought in the Assyrian camp outside Jerusalem. There "the noise of strangers" was brought to nought as though by the fire of the altar-sacrifice in Zion (=dry place). Indeed, it was "the shadow of the cloud" of the glory of the Lord which "brought low the Branch of these terrible ones." Sennacherib, aware that prophecies had been spoken about the Branch of Jehovah (4:2; 11:1) who would reign in righteousness and with divine power, was resolved on making himself into an even greater Messiah of his own people, under the aegis of "mighty Ashur." Instead, he became "a branch brought low" (25:5), a humbled tyrant fearing Jehovah and glad to send back to their homes the many thousands of Judaeon captives he had rounded up. The "blast of his terrible ones" was truly devastating "as a storm against the wall" of the city of Lachish at the very time when he began

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the siege of Jerusalem. The archaeological reconstruction of the capture of that mighty fortress makes grisly reading. But Jerusalem remained inviolate because the Lord Himself was "a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat." For the sake of faithful Hezekiah and the remnant who were justified by their faith in him and his God, Jerusalem was inviolate, unmarked by the horrors of war, for it had "a Man as...a covert from the tempest...as the shadow of a great Rock (Jehovah) in a weary land" (32:2).

The "poor and needy" saved out of distress (note the singular pronoun) is none other than Hezekiah delivered simultaneously from the threat to his own life and the threat to his city. In the Psalms especially these terms "poor" and "needy" always have a strong flavour of godliness, not just the abject poverty of homeless refugees or of the helpless and starving.

Isaiah's language prophesying their salvation is almost a quote of his own earlier expectation:

"And the Lord will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from the storm and from rain." (4:5,6).

**25:6-8 "And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth; for the LORD hath spoken it."**

It is a phenomenon readily recognizable in Isaiah's prophecies (and most others) that of the two-fold fulfilments to be sought — contemporary and Messianic — sometimes one and sometimes the other dominates the phrasing and imagery. This has already been readily observable in many examples in the present exposition.

In this paragraph now under consideration the Messianic kingdom clearly dominates, in a quite thrilling fashion, as will be seen by and by. Even so there is marvellous appropriateness to Hezekiah's times, and this must receive attention first.

There is clear evidence in chapters 58,59 of an outstanding Day of Atonement (after the Assyrian overthrow). With this there would undoubtedly be an almost deliriously happy Feast of Tabernacles, only four days later.

The language of verse 6 — "a feast of fat things, wines on the lees, marrow" — is markedly Feast of Tabernacles in character. What a contrast with the black threat of starvation throughout the Land as the invaders devastated or burned crops and destroyed fruit trees! "In this mountain" is, of course, the temple. And Isaiah says "this" as implying that he himself lived close by.

"The covering cast over all the peoples" (*amim* nearly always=Israel) refers to death (cp. v.8) rampant in the Land. But also there was a like veil over "ail (Gentile) nations" wherever brutal Assyrian power had struck. This "covering" also recalls that, worn by the leper when, crying 'unclean, unclean!' he declared his own living death. How appropriate considering that Hezekiah was himself struck down by a galloping leprosy then miraculously healed.

And suffering Gentile nations shared in the gladness (14:1; 16:4; 19:18-25; 23:18; 2 Chr. 32:23; 2 Kgs. 20:12).

Hezekiah's sickness was swallowed up in victory (38:19-21), his tears were wiped away (38:5; 30:19; Ps. 116:8), and the reproach of his people — the Assyrian menace — was taken away from off all the Land (Ps. 44:13-16; 79:10,11; 89:50,51; Mic. 6:16).

But Isaiah must surely have known, as on other occasions, that whatever fitness his words had as commentary on the stirring, indeed unbelievably exciting, events of his own day, their *real* force must yet be looked for in the majestic days which even today still lie in the future.

**25:9-12 "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For in this mountain shall the hand of the LORD rest, and Moab shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill. And he shall spread forth his hands in the midst of them, as he that swimmeth spreadeth forth his hands to swim: and he shall bring down their pride together with the spoils of their hands. And the fortress of the high fort of thy walls shall he bring down, lay low, and bring to the ground, even to the dust."**

"The reproach of God's people rolled away" (v.8) reads like a direct quotation of Joshua 5:9. There, at a special Passover, the people said farewell to the reproach of Egypt and began with confidence to enter into their inheritance. The mass circumcision before that feast signified the renewal of their Abrahamic covenant.

The deliverance from Sennacherib took place at the time of a Passover celebration (31:5; 30:29; 26:20,21). Then, indeed, was the reproach of Assyrian propaganda (36:4ff) rolled away when divine power shattered all the might of the enemy. There was no offensive action by the men of Jerusalem. This was entirely the act of "our God." They had "waited for Him" (26:8; 33:2). And now they rejoiced in His salvation (Ps. 118:24). "In this mountain (Zion) the hand of the Lord rested" in protection. But for the enemy, Zion, originally a threshingfloor, became a place of downtreading of the Lord's enemies.

But why should Moab be singled out for special judgment? The double reason would appear to be that Moab, exhorted to put confidence in the God of Zion at the time of Assyrian invasion, had cravenly gone over to the enemy, seeking to curry favour with the invader as the men of Esau had also done (20:13-17)

Accordingly, Isaiah's language makes a characteristic play on the names of Madmenah (dunghill) and Misgab (fortress) two of the main Moabite cities (Jer. 48:2).

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At first the Messianic reference of this chapter seems to be vague and imprecise. Here, in the opening verses, is the destruction of a hostile city and the saving of another, as in Hezekiah's day. But which cities? The mention of Moab in verse 10 suggests the Muslim hostility to Israel in the last days. It may be taken as fairly certain that as a "palace of strangers" the Dome of the Rock is due for divine demolition, "it shall never be re-built." But so also the rest of the Old City. After all, if the Mount of Olives is to be riven by an earthquake (Zech. 14:4), this may be taken to guarantee utter ruin for the city which is half a mile away.

But the New Jerusalem, already in existence, will survive "when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall." When God brings judgment on the ungodly, He takes care not to involve His faithful remnant (Noah, Lot, Rahab, Hezekiah, and such). The "wonderful counsels" promised from "of old" will come to

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fruition through him who is also foretold as God's "Wonderful Counsellor" (9:6), whose name in the day of his might and majesty is "Faithful and True" (Rev. 19:11). And, by contrast, the branch of the oppressors — Mohammed, no less — will be brought low. "With the sword of Zion" (so the Hebrew text may be read) thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers."

There is a remarkable parallel to these opening verses in Rev. 11:13: "And in the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted and gave glory to the God of heaven."

In the next paragraph (v.6-8) every detail seems to be explicitly about Messiah's kingdom. Its blessings begin "in this mountain", that is, in mount Zion. The evidence that the Judgment will take place in Jerusalem is considerable: Mt. 25:31 (24-26)-3:12; 13:41; Lk. 19:15; Is. 66:23,24; 51:16; 40:9; Ps. 50:1-5; 122:4,5; Mt. 27:53. And the evidence that saints will receive their immortality at Jerusalem is even more specific: 25:6 by itself could hardly be more explicit; but also: 4:3; Ps. 133:3; 87:6; 102:18-22; Joel 2:28 (Acts 2:17,28; Gal. 4:26).

In several places here Isaiah intensifies his description of this Feast-of Tabernacles celebration (Zech. 14:16) by repetition and play upon words in the manner that he is so fond of. Of these the most striking is "fat things" (*sh'manim*), "wines on the lees" (*sh'marim*), this latter word meaning "wines that have been *long kept*" (*shamar*); cp. Ps. 36:7-9. The first of these terms refers to the meal offering, which was never offered without oil (Lev. 2:1,2,6; s.w.), the oil being *God's* portion. Thus the idea, more clear in the Hebrew than in the English, is an emphatic repetition: Bread, Wine, Bread, Wine; precisely as Jesus promised at the Last Supper: "I will not any more eat thereof until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Lk. 22:16); "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Mt. 26:29). So it is wine long kept (two thousand years, nearly) and yet in its forward-looking meaning it is the new wine of the new life of the kingdom. This emphasis on Bread, Wine, Bread, Wine, is repeated in 55:1,2 (see the exposition there).

A further implication behind this promise of a heavenly meal emerges from its designed echo of the meal of fellowship which was provided for the representatives of Israel when the Mosaic Covenant was ratified at Sinai (Ex. 24:11). That covenant was set aside by Jesus with "a New Covenant in my blood for the remission of sins" (Mt. 26:28). Now Isaiah describes the full achievement of all that the New Covenant stands for — and not only for "all the peoples" (*amim*, that is, the tribes of Israel), but also for "all nations" (*goyim*, the Gentiles); were there not *seventy* elders who participated in that first covenant? Yet the promise of that symbolic experience was never realised by Israel's dutiful evangelisation of the Gentiles. Now Isaiah tells how it will be realised: "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down (to the Messianic feast) with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob (the 'ancients' of 24:23), in the kingdom of God" (Mt. 8:11).

The "covering" which is the "vail spread over all nations" is helpfully identified by the next verse as "death swallowed up." The allusion is to the linen wrapping round a corpse, especially "the face bound about with a napkin" (Jn. 11:44), "the linen cloths with spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury" (Jn. 19:40). "The napkin that was about the head" (Jn. 20:7) repeats with reference to Jesus what was true concerning Lazarus. Accordingly Isaiah's Hebrew has the word for veil (*lōt*) twice over. Furthermore this word *lot* is a double-meaning word, describing also the myrrh which came twice in the experience of Jesus (Mt. 2:11; Jn. 19:39). Hence the

unusual word "swallow", used twice (v.7,8) with reference to the myrrh of suffering. This, with its symbolism of suffering, is now to be removed for all time. It stands true specially for Isaiah himself, for his mysterious phrase "*the face of the covering*" can also be read (with one different vowel) "before me, in my presence"; thus here the prophet declares his personal faith in his own resurrection to share in the fulfilment of his own prophecy, as he does also in the next chapter: "Thy dead men shall live, together with *my dead body* shall they arise" (26:19).

Paul, combining Isaiah with the story of the unperceived glory in the face of Moses, writes of his own people as smothered in a spiritual death: "Even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart (their mind). Nevertheless when it (their heart) shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away" (2 Cor. 3:15,16). This is a truth proclaimed in many places in Scripture, that the Second Coming of the Lord and the resurrection of the dead can only take place when there is repentance in Israel (Rom. 11:15 especially).

"He will swallow up death in victory" can be read quite dogmatically as an announcement of the resurrection of the dead, for it is in an unambiguous context about the resurrection that Paul quotes these words (1 Cor. 15:54). And he is so thrilled with the power of the passage that he repeats the word "victory" twice more, thus steering his readers not only to Isaiah 25:8 but also Rev. 15:2 and 1 Chr. 29:11.

The word is specially appropriate as being yet another of the double-meaning words that Isaiah loves to play with. Not only "victory" but also "eternity, for ever." And this meaning Paul also insists on with his emphatic "immortality" and "incorruption."

The last figure of speech here is surely the best. "The Lord God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces." It is a picture of the angel of the Lord personally wiping away for ever the tears of sadness which have been inevitable in the experience of all saints in Christ. This incomparable comfort will be one of the greatest of the blessings of the kingdom of God. For the assurance of the sore-tested believer it is so picked out in two apocalyptic visions of the age to come (Rev. 7:1 7; 21:4).

Behind these words is yet a further comfort. More than once it has been said: "How shall I be able to enjoy the blessedness of the kingdom if one whom I have so long and so dearly loved does not share it with me?" To this Isaiah's answer is that even such tears will be wiped away. The implication is that all memories involving sadness will be blotted out by the imparting of a superb faculty for forgetting: "Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded" (Jer. 31:16).

Christ wept at the graveside of Lazarus, and his prayer was heard (Jn. 11:35). In Gethsemane there was "strong crying and tears" (Heb. 5:7). Yet he sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied. He wept over Jerusalem, and still weeps; but Isaiah gives assurance that "in this mountain" these tears also will be wiped away. In misery indescribable a stricken father, figure of faithful Abraham, beseeches Christ for help: "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief", that is, the faithlessness of my son, this nation of Israel. This is said in the day of Transfiguration, and with tears; and these tears also are wiped away, for the son is beloved for the father's sake. By the space of three years Paul ceased not to warn the brethren at Ephesus night and day with tears (Acts 20:31). And, taking no heed, they left their first love (Rev. 2:4). Will these tears also be wiped away?

"To them that look for him shall the Lord appear without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28). Here, in Isaiah, there is not only a waiting for him (repeated) but also

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rejoicing in his salvation: "Lo, this is our God," the "mighty God" who is to sit on the throne of David (9:6,7).

But for those who, out of kinship with the people of God, should have been loyal friends and allies, but instead of that turned to be bitter foes (e.g. the Arabs of the West Bank and other Arabs of the land of Moab) — for such there will be punitive measures to teach the salutary lesson which should have been learned long ago. This is only one of the many neglected prophecies about the hostile role of Arab peoples, and about their correction, which are associated with the pictures of Messiah's coming (J.A.B.P. ch.4-6).

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## Chapter 26

**26:1-4 "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength:"**

Here is yet another song of rejoicing, following on those of chapter 25.

This paragraph is a classic example of how vague and pointless commentators can be when they fail to recognize or make use of the historical background of the prophecy. In the Cambridge Bible, Skinner, a very competent scholar, can only achieve this: "These verses might have been written for a dedication of the fortifications of Jerusalem" — but at least he is right in focussing on Jerusalem! And Birks describes them as "a devotional meditation rather than a prophecy."

The evident Messianic reference of these words will be detailed at the end of this chapter. But first it must be shown how every phrase belongs, in the first instance, to the great deliverance in Hezekiah's time, and for his sake.

The resemblances of these verses to Psalm 118 are quite unmistakable, and that is without doubt a psalm about Hezekiah's deliverance:

"The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation...Open to me the gates of righteousness...This gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter...The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner" (v.14,19,20).

There is emphasis on "the land of Judah" not only because Judah means praise but also because the entire land, overrun and devastated by the Assyrians, was being promised deliverance. What a contrast also with the down-treading of Moab (25:10), and the judgment threatened against "the city of the terrible nations" (Nineveh; 25:3,12; 26:5).

"Salvation will God appoint instead of walls and bulwarks." Here is a sharp contrast with the frantic efforts made (22:9,10; 2 Chr. 32:3-5) to restore the decrepit neglected defences of the city. Instead — complete safety ("peace, peace") because the Covenant God of Israel encircles it with *His* protection. This sentence has no specified subject, thus allowing a lovely ambiguity of reference either to Hezekiah, the strength of his people, or to Hezekiah's God who now gives this assurance. "The wisdom and knowledge (of Jehovah) shall be the stability of

thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the Lord is his treasure...thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down" (33:6,20).

Two sections of the nation are described: Those already in the city, protected by the might of Jehovah (25:4); and the "righteous nation" which holds on to the Promise of God ("the Truth") and which now comes in solemn procession to join in the honouring of the God of (their) battles. But why is the word "nation" (*goy*), used here since it normally describes Gentiles? Because here is one of the earliest anticipations of the deliverance from Assyrian bondage of the 200,000 captives who had been marched off to Babylon (Taylor Prism). Turned into Gentiles in a foreign land, they are to be as speedily and unexpectedly restored by the might of their God.

It is uncertain whether these are being described as "the righteous nation" or "the nation of the Just One (Hezekiah)". But in any case the gates are opened to them with gladness and praise to enter only after the Just One himself, the King of Glory, has entered in (Ps. 24:8,10).

In Jerusalem "the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah: With us is the Lord our God" (2 Chr. 32:8). Their imagination (faith making real what was not visible) was stayed on Him, and there was therefore "peace, peace, to him that is far off (the multitude of captives), and to him that is near (the reassured citizens of Jerusalem)" (57:19).

The Hebrew of verse 4 could hardly be more emphatic than it is: "...because he *trusteth in thee*. *Trust ye in the Lord for an eternity of eternities*, for in *Jah Jehovah* is a Rock of Ages." The figure of the Rock (17:10; 44:8m) finds its meaning with special reference to the altar stone where Abraham was ready to offer his son and which became the foundation of the altar of burnt offering (Ps. 118:22): "Come into the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock of Israel" (30:29m).

**26:5-9a "For he bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he layeth it low; he layeth it low, even to the ground; he bringeth it even to the dust. The foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy. The way of the just is uprightness: thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just. Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early:"**

The repetitions here are remarkably effective:

them that dwell on high	—	the lofty city;	
even to the ground	—	even to the dust;	
the foot shall tread it down	—	the feet of the poor	—
		the steps of the needy;	
the way of the just	—	the path of the just;	
uprightness	—	thou, most upright	
O Lord — thy name	—	thy memorial; (R.V.)	
my soul	—	my spirit;	
I have desired thee	—	I will seek thee early.	

"Them that dwell on high" may be the Assyrians looking down on Jerusalem from Mount Scopus. And "the lofty city" to be "laid low" can hardly be other than Nineveh whose pride was crushed with the destruction of its army. One modern commentary suggests here 'the fortress of Moab" or Susa (Shushan) or Tyre!

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"Poor and needy" are terms to be read always in psalms and prophets with a religious sense — those whose faith leaves them apparently helpless (as the worldly man would think) in the face of hard circumstance.

"We have waited for thee" echoes 25:9. After God had given assurance (37:22-29) of deliverance from the Assyrian siege, it needed a special kind of tenacity to hold on in confidence that the help of heaven would not fail them. This confidence built on the certainty of God's Promises: "Thy Name, Thy remembrance or memorial." Careful use of a concordance on these two words will reveal that they occur always in a context of the Covenant Name.

So Hezekiah and his faithful remnant gave themselves to watching and prayer in the night (the night of Assyrian destruction), and seeking God early in the morning, they beheld their enemies "all dead, corpses!"

**26:9b-11 "for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD. LORD, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them."**

When God's judgments, already foretold several times by Isaiah, are in the Land — manifested in the destruction of Sennacherib's army, then "the inhabitants of the world", that is, the surrounding nations, will learn to appreciate His righteousness, and that which happened was a salvation that He had brought.

This duly took place: "Many brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah" (2 Chr. 32:23).

But before all this came about, "favour was shewn to the wicked (Assyrian)" in the lavish payment of tribute at the time when he was poised to invade the Land.

"And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended; return from me: that which thou puttest on me will I bear. And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house.

At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria." (2 Kgs. 18:14-16).

That Hezekiah himself would do such a thing is in sharp contrast with his godliness and the faith he showed in Jehovah (see 2 Chr. 32:6-8). The only possible explanation is that this craven submission took place during Hezekiah's sickness when the administration of national policy was in the hands of Shebna and the princes, men whose faith in the Lord was so flimsy as to be politically worthless.

But Sennacherib was a "treacherous dealer." There was no uprightness in him. His invading army came on just the same, "dealing unjustly" in "the land of uprightness," in Hezekiah's Judah with its recent reformation. There was no regard, no respect for the majesty of Hezekiah's God: "Let not thy God, in whom thou trustest, deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria" (37:10). By these words Sennacherib showed that he knew the prophetic counsel with which Hezekiah was being reassured. He had his informers inside the city. Shebna may have been his chief spy.

But the prayer of verse 11 is an expression of the king's intense faith. The almost unnecessary repetition of God's Covenant Name builds up a most impressive emphasis: "Lord, when thy hand is lifted up (as it was in the land of Egypt long ago), although they do not want to see (and acknowledge) thy might, this they shall most certainly see," to their discomfiture: "they shall be ashamed." Micah 7, a prophecy of the same events, has the same language: "The nations shall see, and be confounded at all their might" (7:16).

The bitterness and malevolence behind Sennacherib's campaign is clearly exposed. It sprang from "their envy at the people" (*amim*, Israel). This invasion was a backlash from the austere campaign by Jonah in Nineveh, bringing complete humiliation to all that people and kingdom. In these later days Sennacherib, zealous for the honour of Ashur, now came intending to rectify the balance: "Yet forty days and Jerusalem shall be overthrown." Everyone knew that this war was a contest between Jehovah and Ashur. In it "the fire of the Lord's enemies" would destroy them — the ferocity of their hostility would make the judgment of heaven inevitable.

**26:12 "LORD, thou will ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us."**

Here, the name of Jehovah, already repeated so many times, is specially intense. The dependence on Him expressed here is very strong.

The spirit of this verse is precisely that of verse 17 and the desperate appeal of the nation's leaders to Isaiah: "The children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth" (37:3) — that is, we have no recourse by which we may save ourselves. So "it may be that the Lord thy God" will yet come to the rescue. With little confidence in Jehovah themselves, they feebly and pathetically sought comfort in Isaiah's and Hezekiah's faith in Him.

But God can "work" best of all in the midst of men's desperation. Therefore, "fear not ye: stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord" (Ex. 14:13).

**26:13,14 "O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name. They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish."**

Who are these "other lords"? who have "baaled it over us"? Are they foreign kings who have dominated Judah? Or are they the pagan gods which the chosen people were fond of importing?

The answer is: both. There is a double usage here, highly appropriate especially to the reign of Ahaz who weakly brought in an Assyrian altar to be the centre of worship in the temple court (2 Kgs. 16:12-14) and who also handed over part of the temple area to an Assyrian garrison (16:18).

But now, even in the face of the challenge and frightening threats of the king of Assyria, Hezekiah was putting his trust in "Jehovah our God."

Here Isaiah's scorn is caustic. These gods are dead, and will never have any life in them. And the bullying Assyrian who worshipped them will assuredly share their fate (pp. 14:9-12). LXX reads: "Thou hast made every male to perish" (the word for "memory" is the same in Hebrew, except in its pointing). But the reading "memory" must not be let go (one of Isaiah's characteristic double meanings!) This allusion (see v.8,13b) contrasts the futile "memorial" of the Assyrian god with the utterly dependable Covenant Name of Jehovah. Here then, is explicit prophecy of the visitation which would leave the hills and valleys round Jerusalem carpeted with Assyrian corpses (Heb: *rephaim*). What a contrast with the confidence in verse 19!

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**26:15-18 "Thou hast increased the nation, O LORD, thou hast increased the nation: thou art glorified: thou hadst removed it far unto all the ends of the earth. LORD, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them. Like as a woman with child, that draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain, and crieth out in her pangs; so have we been in thy sight, O LORD. We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind; we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen."**

The Hebrew text hereabouts is difficult, as indeed it is nearly all through Isaiah, but here especially so. By their variations the LXX translators seem to concur with this sentiment.

If AV, then the repetition of "increased the nation" may be intended to cover first the renewed adherence to the temple of the people out of the northern tribes (9:3,4; 2 Chr. 30:10-12), and also the return of the multitude of captives from Sennacherib's Babylon (49:19,20 etc).

But LXX adds the words "evils", thus making this verse a comment on all the tribulation through which the nation was passing (Lev. 26:18).

But yet another possible reading makes the words a prayer for God to show His hand against the oppressor: "Add unto them evils, O Lord, add evils to all the glorious ones on the earth." However, the context seems to favour reference to a stricken Israel struggling to survive as the waters of the great River overflowed through the Land (8:7).

Similarly, the second half of this verse is susceptible of two opposite readings, as meaning either: "Thou hast removed it (the nation) far unto the ends of the earth" (cp. 6:12; 43:6; Am. 9:9; Dt. 28:64), or as RV: "Thou hast enlarged all the borders of the Land" (Ps. 48:10), as much of the northern kingdom was now joined again in loyalty to Jerusalem. Again, the context (v. 16,17) encourages the former reading.

And in all this dire trouble king Hezekiah visited the Lord his God in the sanctuary, there to pour out a prayer (2 Kgs. 19:14-19; cp. Is. 37:4) to the only source of succour for his people. The word for "prayer" strictly describes a secret incantation bringing magical results. In spite of its normal heathen associations, the word is marvellously appropriate, for this prayer of Hezekiah, uttered quietly in the sanctuary, achieved what nothing else could, and in almost magical fashion.

The nation in its trouble is likened to a pregnant woman suffering all the pain of delivery, yet unable to give birth to her child. Micah (4:9,10) has the same figure in the same sort of context. When the official deputation — Eliakim the high priest, and Shebna — returned from the fruitless and discouraging encounter with Rabshakeh, the king promptly sent them to seek the aid of God through the mediation of Isaiah; and here again the same harrowing figure of speech was employed: "The children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth" (37:3), the implied meaning being: the nation has made its effort to achieve a new birth (the reformation Hezekiah himself had led), and yet has found itself suffering more than ever. "So have we been in thy sight, O Lord." The Hebrew text here suggests: "from before thy Beloved," with reference to the messengers sent by the son of David. Isaiah, characteristically, probably meant both ideas.

"We have as *it were* brought forth wind" should be more probably read: "Like him (Hezekiah) we have brought forth wind," i.e. no real achievement. "We have not wrought deliverance in the Land" (or, possibly, "we do not make the Land salvations") alludes to the apparent failure of their Passover observance to be followed by the sort of deliverance which the first Passover brought. There are not a few other Passover allusions to follow (e.g. v.20,21).

It is surely likely that the figure of a woman suffering all the pangs of child-birth, and yet to no purpose, is also an allusion to the familiar promise of a redeemer who will be the long looked-for Seed of the Woman (Gen. 3:15,16). Hezekiah was one of the finest foreshadowings of the promised Saviour, but only a prototype.

The final phrase: "neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen" seems to be pointless. Nor is there *any* Biblical evidence for the desperate RVm reading: "been born" (for "fallen"). Perhaps LXX comes to the rescue here: "We shall not fall (in military disaster), but all that dwell in the Land shall fall." Jerusalem was saved, but the whole Land was ravaged, and then its ravagers were themselves swept away in the wrath of the Lord.

**26:19 "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead."**

The real fulness of meaning of this verse, or indeed of the entire chapter, belongs to the days of Messiah and the resurrection of the dead. But there is another sense of the words appropriate to the prophet's own day that is not to be ignored. But from both angles there are real difficulties here in the Hebrew. The LXX reading is much more straightforward and perhaps therefore to be preferred:

"The dead shall rise; and those in the tombs shall rise up; and those in the Land shall rejoice, for the dew from thee is healing for them; but the land of the ungodly shall fall."

Is this a simplification (and distortion) of a difficult Hebrew original, or is it a translation of an older more dependable text?

In several places, beside the familiar Valley of Dry Bones prophecy, the raising of the dead is an evident figure of the restoration of a stricken Israel:

"The sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him (this is Is. 26:17,18)...I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction" (Hos. 13:13,14) — a passage which clearly applies initially to Israel, but which is strongly quoted by Paul with reference to the resurrection of the dead. (1 Cor. 15:54); see B.S.p.347.

So there is no difficulty about taking the present passage to foretell the nation's revival in Hezekiah's day, with perhaps specific reference to the multitude of captives who were to return home after the overthrow of the Assyrian army.

The singular: "my dead body" is taken by most commentators to be a collective plural (a parallel to "thy dead men"). But why should not this personal pronoun refer to the king himself, stricken with the killer sin-disease and yet miraculously restored to another fifteen years of life?

However it is taken, the figure of the dew is not easy. RV "dew of light" may be safely discarded as meaningless. "Dew of herbs" is strongly reinforced by Mic. 5:7 (in an 'Assyria' passage immediately after the figure of Israel as a woman in travail: 4:9,10): "The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people (the invaders?) as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass." And Isaiah has the same figure to describe the wondrous blessing of God coming in the night, "like a clear heat upon herbs, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest" (18:4). "The wrath of the King (the Almighty) is as the roaring of a lion; but his favour is as dew upon the grass" (Pr. 19:12).

The final clause in this verse 19 can be read in more than one way. The AV is not very literal, for "cast out" should certainly be "fall" or "cause to fall." Instead, then: "the land of the dead (meaning: oppressing Assyria) thou shalt cause to fall" (cp. LXX reading). Or, with reference

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to God's Land: "On the earth, on the dead, thou wilt cause it (the blessing of the dew) to fall." But of course there is much more meaning, as will be seen by and by.

**26:20,21 "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast."**

For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain."

The "people" appealed to here are not the nation as a whole, for the big majority merited retribution (24:5), and the Assyrians were God's instrument in this (10:5,6); but they are the faithful remnant who in spirit gathered round God's king and prophet. This remnant has been symbolized as a woman in travail (v. 17), and accordingly this command to "hide thyself" is feminine in Hebrew.

The instruction to these is precisely that given by Moses to Israel at their first Passover: "None of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning...the Lord will pass over (i.e. hover over) the door, and will not suffer the destroyer (the angel) to come in unto your houses to smite you" (Ex. 12:22,23).

This instruction to "shut thy doors about thee" is the first of four Passover phrases here: "until the indignation be overpast...to punish the inhabitants of the earth (cp. the Egyptians)...and shall no more cover *her slain*."

The "little while" which would see both retribution on the brutal invader and salvation for the faithful had already been anticipated by Isaiah: "For yet a very *little while*, and the *indignation* shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction" (10:25). It is expressions like these which make it palpably clear that Isaiah was not writing after the event. These were genuine prophecies of what would soon come to pass when "the Lord cometh out of his place" i.e. from His dwelling in the temple. There was no human saviour in sight.

It is remarkable that in this place Isaiah quotes from Micah (1:3; contrast Is. 2:1 -4) when he prophesies punishment on Israel and Judah for their ungodliness, an anger which expressed itself in the Assyrian invasion; and now the same words are the prelude to the punishment meted out against the invader (cp. 10:5,6,12,13).

Thus "the earth shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain." Too many dead to allow of burial! "The blood of thy saints (holy people) have they shed like water round about Jerusalem, and there was none to bury them" (Ps. 79:3, another Hezekiah psalm). But also the angel of the Lord went forth (from his 'place'), and smote in the camp of the Assyrians...and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead — corpses!" (37:36).

### The Last Days

The good student now begins afresh on such an impressive chapter as this, in order to ponder it as a revelation of the great climax of the divine purpose.

It begins with a song of praise sung by the redeemed in the land of praise. They celebrate a salvation and a Saviour Jesus in a city with a wall of jasper (salvation; 60:18; Rev. 21:11), and with foundations (of praise) in the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Humanly speaking "they dwell without walls and have neither bars nor gates" (Ez. 38:11).

Its gatekeepers lift up their heads at the honour done to them as the King of Glory enters with his "nation", which is reckoned righteous because by faith it has cherished the Promises of God as immutable "truth". They are the nation of the Just One, whose hearts and minds have

been kept in the perfect peace of God (Phil. 4:7) through Christ Jesus. Because they trusted always in the Lord, they are now kept in Him — Jah Jehovah — for an always of always (v.4). He is their Rock of Ages against whom the gatekeepers of hell (the angels of death) cannot prevail. The Lord is "a wall of fire round about, and the glory in their midst" (Zech. 2:5).

Now, when the meek inherit the earth (v.6) the oppressor is brought down to the dust (v.5). It is a day of judgment for the upright as well as for the godless nations of the world (v.9). The swashbuckling power-drunk dictators of the world now meet their due fate: "They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise...thou (Jehovah) hast made all their memory to perish" (v.14).

There has been a final time of anguish for the stricken nation of God, like the pangs of a woman in travail giving birth to a new creature. All the self-reliance of the world's cleverest nation, ever intent on achieving salvation by reliance on its own powers, is now gone, sunk in the utter hopelessness of its final crisis (v.17). Now, at long last, there is a willingness to recognize that only in the Lord is there righteousness and strength.

At this point in the prophecy comes the powerful passage telling how salvation will be provided in the last days for the dead and the living alike. "Thy dead (God's men) shall live again, together with Messiah's dead body shall they arise." In token of this, when the Messiah rose from the dead, sleeping saints came forth out of their graves because of him and appeared in the holy city (Mt. 27:53). It was probably from this Isaiah passage that Paul inferred his doctrine that "them which sleep will God (because of Jesus) bring with him (from the grave)" (1 Th. 4:14) — "together with my dead body"! "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live" (Jn. 5:25,28,29). Then they that "dwell in the *dust*" shall "*awake* and sing" (cp. Dan. 12:2). So also Hosea. Immediately after his description of the sorrows of a travailing woman, he has this: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave: I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction" (13:13,14) — which powerful message is interpreted by Paul as a prophecy of the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:54).

"From the womb of the morning" the dead are as so many young people in the bright vigour of their best powers: "the dew of thy youth" (Ps. 110:3) — called "dew" because of its mysterious appearance and its sparkling freshness seen in the early rays of the Sun of righteousness. Yet the same psalm, like Isaiah, has a picture of dead bodies "in the day of his wrath."

For the living, in this day of divine action, there is a different kind of assurance: "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers." Jesus interprets this place of safety as the place of prayer: "Thou when thou prayest, enter into thy chamber, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father..." (Mt. 6:6). The place of prayer can be anywhere. And this is as far as Scripture goes in telling *how* and *where* the faithful will be kept safe in the last day. Remarkably, Elisha (=God saves) brought salvation from the stroke of death when he entered into the chamber, and shut the door, and prayed; then stretching himself on the dead, he brought resurrection (2 Kgs. 4:33,34).

"Hide thyself as it were for a little moment." Perhaps by implication Jesus also bids his disciples hide themselves from danger in the time of his coming in judgment, but only for "a little while", and then will come (as in Isaiah) the joy of the woman when her travail is over and she rejoices in the miracle of a birth (Jn. 16:16-19,21).

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But of course this is Passover language. In Egypt the Lord's destroying angel went forth in judgment, but those who had learned to hide themselves under the blood of a Passover Lamb were safe.

This is by no means the only place in Isaiah which suggests that the coming of the Lord will take place at Passover. The full evidence is given in a separate study "Passover", H.A.W. ch.14.

At that time "the Lord cometh out of his temple to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity," for refusing to honour him and for the despite done to his people. In fact, this will be the retribution due to the men of Arabian Edom "because of a perpetual hatred" and "shedding the blood of the children of Israel by the force of the sword" (Ez. 35:5). It is a grim conclusion to a most graphic prophecy.

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## Chapter 27

**27:1 "In that day the LORD with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea."**

There is here an amazing diversity of possible interpretations. It is commonly agreed that three (or two) of the great Gentile powers dominating Israel are symbolized.

Certainly the evidence for identifying "the dragon in the midst of the sea" (cp. Nah. 3:8) with Egypt is fairly strong: "art not thou he that hath cut Rahab (a familiar nickname for Egypt), and wounded the dragon? art not thou he which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep?" — this last phrase an allusion to Israel's crossing of the Red Sea. (Ez. 29:3; 32:2 mg. are strong supporting passages).

"The swift serpent" and "the crooked serpent" are commonly identified with the fast-flowing Tigris (=arrow) and the tortuous slow-moving Euphrates, as symbols of the powers of Assyria and Babylon. Yet already (8:7) Isaiah has used the River (i.e. Euphrates) as a symbol of Assyria. And it needs to be stressed that, apart from the spasmodic rebellion of Merodach-baladan, throughout this period Babylon was entirely subject to Assyria, a province of its empire.

For these reasons it is more likely that both serpents represent the Assyrian conqueror whose heartland stretched across both the great rivers. Note the omission of Babylon in v.12,13. Quite a case can be made for reading Job's leviathan as a highly poetic picture of the power of Assyria entirely in the hand of God — proud of his own power, yet utterly under the control of heaven (cp. Is. 10:5-7). And as Nimrod was believed to be represented in the heavens by the constellation of Orion (Job 9:9), so also the power of Assyria was seen in Draco, the dragon, the long chain of jewels near the Pole-star: "By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens: his hand hath formed the crooked serpent" (Job 26:13 — the previous verse refers to the crossing of the Red Sea, and the vanquishing of the power of Egypt).

In Psalm 74, a psalm contemporary with Isaiah, if not by him, the same collection of ideas comes together: "Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters. Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces (more than one head!), and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness (the plundering of Sennacherib's shattered army as they trailed disconsolately back to Nineveh?)" (Ps. 74:13,14).

Very remarkably, identical language to Isaiah's has been found in one of the Ugarit religious tablets: "Didst thou not smite Leviathan the swift serpent, even the crooked serpent? Didst thou not break in pieces his seven heads?" This inscription dates back to 1,400 B.C; so there is the remarkable phenomenon of an inspired prophet of Jehovah quoting from what was evidently familiar literature of an earlier pagan religion. Presumably in the first instance some Ugaritic priest wrote the words to celebrate an earlier period of Assyrian expansion (under Ashur-Uballit I?) which somehow suffered a serious reverse. Now Isaiah picks up the familiar words, rightly attributing this latest mighty Assyrian disaster to the angel of the Lord (37:36). "His sore and great and strong sword" probably makes a play on the word Cherub.

One is sorely tempted to read these serpent allusions as a side-long reference to the brazen serpent, made by Bezaleel and smashed up in the fervour of Hezekiah's reformation (2 Kgs. 18:4). If Ahaz had encouraged his people to associate that image with the power of the Assyrian overlord, its destruction would be an open flouting by Hezekiah of the authority of the bully of Nineveh, and then it is understandable why Sennacherib made such a vicious onslaught on the tiny state of Judah. To cock a snook publicly at a dictator usually asks for trouble. Sennacherib was not amused!

The further reference to Nehushtan (a compressed form of 'Serpent-Leviathan?') is encouraged by the further allusion (v.9) to: "making all the stones of the altar (Ahaz's pagan altar: 2 Kgs. 16:12-16) as chalkstones that are beaten in sunder, the groves and images shall not stand up."

It is doubtless right to look, as Dr. Thomas did, for a further fulfilment in the end of the age. With his eye on Daniel 7, he saw here a parallel to the Fourth Beast — "this Egypto-Romanic-Babylonian crocodile", an identification which is not very meaningful, especially since the prototype requires some brutal power which tramples flat God's Israel, but not Jerusalem.

**27:2-5 "In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day. Fury is not in me: who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together. Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me."**

Back in the corrupt days of Ahaz, God's people had been described as a vineyard much cared for, and yet hopelessly unfruitful. Now, after Hezekiah's reformation it is "a vineyard of red wine" or, as the Hebrew should more probably read, "a vineyard of delight." So now, by contrast with the divine outburst of reprobation and threatening (5:3-6), "fury is not in me." Instead of: "I will command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it," there is now a promise that I will keep (guard) it night and day." Briars and thorns there will be, as in the earlier vineyard parable (5:6), but now they will be as a badge of defence and protection "in the battle" (here, and in several places symbolic parable suddenly becomes literal fact). Those briars and thorns in the vineyard itself will be burned together with the enemy who seeks to desolate it (33:14).

The one who would survive through difficult times, "let him *take hold* of my strength (here is one of Isaiah's frequent jugglings with the name of Hezekiah), let him make peace with me, let him make (this kind of) peace," not the utterly futile Political bargain with a crafty deceitful adversary who means to break his word (2 Kgs. 18:13-17). It is puzzling to know how the

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LXX translators managed to get this other slant (was their text quite different here?): "They that dwell in her (in Jerusalem) shall say: Let us make peace with him (the enemy), let us make peace " But: "Thou wilt keep him in peace, peace (the same repetition), whose mind is stayed on thee" (26:3). "O Lord, *thou* wilt ordain peace for us" (26:12; cp. 57:19)

**27:6-9 "He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit. Hath he smitten him, as he smote those that smote him? or is he slain according to the slaughter of them that are slain by him? In measure, when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it: he stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind. By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sin; when he maketh all the stones of the altar as chalkstones that are beaten in sunder, the groves and images shall not stand up."**

The language of the vineyard parable is still employed, but only spasmodically: "take root...his rough wind...this is all his fruit..." But both translation and interpretation are beset with difficulties.

"They that come of Jacob" who are caused to "take root" could well be repentant worshippers coming out of the northern tribes to keep Passover at Jerusalem and thus to re-root themselves in the vineyard of the Lord, But RV reads very differently: "In days to come shall Jacob take root" — thus with reference to the entire nation which is being devastated and reduced to wilderness by the invader.

The prospect that "Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit" is an anticipation of the startling and utterly unexpected blessedness of an abundantly fruitful Year of Jubilee (2 Kgs. 19:29,30), which God promised beforehand, and then gave (Is. 61) — in contrast to the empty blandishments of the Assyrian emissary, promising these very blessings, but not at all intending to fulfil (2 Kgs. 18:31,32). Here Isaiah says: "fill the *world* with fruit", not just "the land", because this latter word might be taken to mean Judah only, whereas here is a promise for both Israel and Judah. What a contrast, too, with the invader whose ambition it was to "fill his own land with cities" supported by the plunder and tribute drawn from an empire built by ruthless militarism.

To emphasize how thoroughly God is to bring retribution on the brutal enemy, there is (as in English: 'the biter bit') a powerful repetition: "smitten... smote...smote...slain...slaying...slain." The stroke of the Lord came on the Assyrian in full measure — or does 'in measure' mean 'with a carefully administered discipline'? And thus, in the day of the north-east wind (from far away Assyria), "God will stay His rough wind" which He Himself has brought against His own people. Compare Hos. 13:15: "an east wind shall come, the wind of the Lord shall come up from the wilderness."

The deliverance will come only because "the iniquity of Jacob is purged." And how is "his sin taken away"? By "beating in sunder as chalk stones the stones of the (pagan) altar, and the groves and images" which decadent Ahaz had earlier encouraged (e.g. 2 Kgs. 16:3,4,10-16). The tornado of destruction which Hezekiah and his zealots let loose (2 Kgs. 18:4; 2 Chr. 31:1) was a much-needed catharsis.

**27:10-11 "Yet the defenced city shall be desolate, and the habitation forsaken, and left like a wilderness: there shall the calf feed, and there shall he lie down. and consume the branches thereof. When the boughs thereof are withered, they shall be broken off: the**

**women come and set them on fire: for it is a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour."**

Still the prophecy oscillates between the literal and the parable of the vineyard: "consume the branches thereof...bough withered...broken off...the women come and set them on fire." So even though this is "a vineyard of desire" (v.2), its older character (5:1-7) is not yet done with. Hence the drastic action indicated in these figurative phrases and yet more pointedly in the literal description of a punitive invasion: "the defenced city shall be desolate" — Sennacherib's commemorative inscription, ignoring as inconvenient the ultimate decimation of his army, boasts of "forty-six fenced cities" of Judah captured and destroyed (see also 2 Kgs. 18:13). And of course his men, ravaging the countryside "left it like a wilderness."

Psalm 80, a Hezekiah psalm, describes the vineyard of the Lord (v.8-11) now with its hedges broken down so that it is ravaged by the boar (Assyria) and other wild beasts (Sennacherib's allied and tributary nations), and ultimately burned with fire (v. 12-16). Only faithful Hezekiah, "the man of thy right hand," can save it.

So also here, national helplessness is portrayed as like a vineyard with boughs withered, broken off, and burned — by *women!* Here is a figure of feeble nations near to Judah, who would normally not raise a finger against God's people, but who are now glad to join in the unrestrained plundering of a defenceless countryside.

Isaiah's picture of the calf feeding and lying down and consuming the branches might be a different figure of the bull-calf of Assyria (lots of figures of these in Nineveh) working its unhindered will on the countryside of the Holy Land; or, very differently, it could be a picture of what literally happened — farm stock left to wander loose because "the habitation is forsaken," a sad figure of the derelict condition of the faithful remnant of the Lord apparently (but not actually) left without care or sense of direction.

All these sad and grievous developments come about because the low spiritual state of the decayed nation (the mass of it) calls for a divine surgical operation: "it is a people of no understanding." Here the prophet quotes with perfect appropriateness from Deuteronomy 32:28, a chapter which is one of the most eloquent and complete prophecies of Israel's chequered history. Contemporary Hosea has the same sort of comment: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (of their God): because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will reject thee" (4:6). "Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Is. 1:3). It is a wilful lack of knowledge.

Isaiah goes on to echo Hosea more specifically: "Therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them" — Lo-Ruhamah! — "He will shew them no favour," because if "favour be shewed to the wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness" (26.10; cp. 42:18-22).

**27:12,13 "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the LORD shall beat off from the channel of the river unto the stream of Egypt, and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem."**

After denunciation, there is comfort (as in 2:2; 10:20; 29:18,19). The opening phrase here does not speak of judgment but rather of God's solicitous care of every single one of those who are truly His people. "Beat off" might refer to the knocking down from the olive tree of

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every single berry on the remote branches (as in 17:6,9), or the picture can be that of the threshing of the harvest corn. Even "gathered one by one" does not exclude this idea, for in a similar passage Amos (9:9) says: "Yet shall not the least grain fall to the ground." The word mistranslated "channel" normally refers to an overflowing flood or, very differently, to ears of corn

The River is, of course, the great Euphrates. And "the stream of Egypt", often mistakenly taken to be the Nile, is actually the Wadi el Arish. This passage denotes the most northern and southern borders of the Land, as it was promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:18). The reference is, in the first instance, to Hezekiah's idealistic effort to gather into the renewed worship of Jehovah all God's bewildered people, especially those of the northern tribes so long bereft of wholesome spiritual guidance and help. His "posts passed from city to city through all the country" (2 Chr. 30:10). It was also a plain declaration by this son of David of his right to rule all the people and all the Land which had once given allegiance to David.

But the language of verse 13 is more far-reaching than that. Those carried captive and "ready to perish in the land of Assyria" were also to be gathered in; and also those who had fled the Assyrian terror, seeking refuge in Egypt.

This duty came to pass in Hezekiah's reign. The sign given to the king (2 Kgs. 19:29,30) of full divine protection and blessing was that, willy-nilly, a unique Year of Jubilee would be kept: "The great trumpet (*shofar*) shall be blown" by which, on the Day of Atonement, the great Year is to be inaugurated (Lev. 25:9). There are plenty of indications in Isaiah's later prophecies of the extraordinary fruitfulness of this promised Jubilee year (Lev. 25:9). But also Jubilee meant the freeing of all bondslaves and the return of every man to his family inheritance (25:10).

All this duty came about after the dramatic holocaust in the Assyrian camp. Then, of course, those multitudes of captives who had been dragged away to bondage, hard labour, and early death were now summarily bidden "be gone", as happened at the first of all Passovers in Egypt. And, again of course, those who had sought safety in Egypt and were tolerated there only as despised fugitives, were also both free and eager to return to their homesteads in the Holy Land.

More than this, Jehovah's mighty act of judgment would leave such an impression in all the lands round about that Gentiles, even from Assyria and Egypt, would be glad to come and proclaim with awe their respect for the God of Abraham and Hezekiah, "worshipping the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem." It is yet another picture of the glories of the later years of the good king's God-given extension to his reign (cp. 24:23; 25:6,7,10; 2:2,3; 19:23-25), and yet another witness that all these fantastic and unexpected happenings were nothing but eloquent foreshadowings of the even greater glories of the deliverance Messiah will one day bring to Zion.

### "The Last Days"

When it comes to re-reading this prophecy seeking its eschatological message (as *all* these Isaiah chapters should be read), some features of the yet-future fulfilment stand out clearly. Others are more problematical. When there are doubts, the primary reference, already covered, should be allowed to steer the interpretation.

The two-fold leviathan of the north — "the piercing serpent, and the crooked serpent" — stands for the cruel (Arab) enemy of Israel in the last days who will overrun the Land. And "the dragon in the midst of the sea" is the power of Egypt in the south which, in the 20th century, is a false friend to Israel (30:2,3; 31:1) precisely as it was in Hezekiah's day.

The "vineyard of desire" is not Israel but the faithful remnant yet to be found in Israel in the time of the nation's travail. Already, when these words are being written, there are clear signs of some among that brilliant and wayward people (they are estimated at several thousands) turning to faith in Christ as their promised Messiah. "God will keep it (this wholesome nucleus) night and day." In the presence of invading enemies — the "briars and thorns" encroaching in His Land — God will be a protecting presence. Indeed, He appeals to all the nation to "take hold of my strength" and to "make peace with me."

Is it conceivable that He will bring on His own people the same punishment (v.7) that He designs for their enemies? No! The idea is too absurd.

Instead, there is a lovely picture (v.6) of a returned and settled Israel taking root again. Now it "blossoms and buds, and fills the face of the Land (and of the whole world) with fruit." And in the day of the whirlwind against Israel (Am. 1:14) God will smite the vicious enemy with a tempest — precisely as happened to the self-confident army of Sennacherib (cp. Ez. 34:12). Thus, "in the day of the east wind" (v.8) shall the tribulation be stayed.

But this salvation can only come because the faithful turning to God also reject with equal emphasis all the Judaistic and materialistic idols which now dominate the life of the nation (17:7,8). Like Isaiah here, Joel (3:13; and also Rev. 14:15,17) has the double figure of a corn harvest and the treading of the grapes — two separate judgments, on Jew and Gentile? Or two aspects of the same outpouring of wrath?

It is certain that there will be much suffering for Israel — cities desolated, habitations forsaken (v. 10) — and the invader will make the most of his success, glorying in the opportunity to plunder and to let in the wilderness. The withered boughs of Israel will be broken off and given over to burning (v.11). Even the weak amongst the bitter hostile Arabs will be able to find pleasure. It means desolation and deprivation for most of the nation — Jesus uses precisely the same figure for discipline applied to the unworthy in his New Israel, the True Vine (Jn. 15:6).

The Jubilee trumpet and year of redemption which signified such dramatic changes for Hezekiah's kingdom will again become the sensational introduction to a wonderful new era of blessing. Precisely what the trumpet blast will be which is repeatedly associated with the Lord's coming (Mt. 24:31; 1 Th. 4:16; Rev. 11:15 etc.) is by no means clear; but it may be taken as certain that, corresponding to the trumpet blast which summoned the leaders of Israel to conference or the people of the Lord to keep the Day of Atonement (Is. 58:1), there will be some startling phenomenon which neither Israel nor the New Israel will be able to ignore. They will "come and worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem."

## Chapter 28

This chapter is the first of six Woes (28:1; 29:1,15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1) matching those of chapter 5. In spite of one or two details which seem to be directed differently, these are all against *Jerusalem*. This is true even of chapter 33, for only its first verse is directed against Assyria. And has not Isaiah said explicitly that his prophecies concern "Judah and Jerusalem" (1:1)? Right through the rest of the chapter every detail is about Jerusalem, and there are several echoes of verses 1-4; e.g. "crown of glory, diadem of beauty" (v.5), the horrible

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picture of drunkenness (v.7,8). And 34:1-4 has been almost universally misread.

**28:1-4 "Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which are on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine! Behold, the LORD hath a mighty and strong one, which as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand. The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet: And the glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley, shall be a fading flower, and as the hasty fruit before the summer; which when he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand he eateth it up."**

The mention of Ephraim here has hoodwinked the commentators most successfully. All the rest of these Woes are clearly about the Assyrian invasion of Judah. Therefore, say they, this Woe must have been spoken concerning the fall of Samaria (2 Kgs. 17:6); so these four verses must have originated twenty years earlier. Which is hardly likely when (a) all the other woes belong to the time of Sennacherib's invasion; (b) the theme of drunkenness and mockery runs on through the rest of the chapter (v.7-11,14,22).

It will be shown by and by that those denounced here are the corrupt and drunken priests in the temple at Jerusalem. They are called "the drunkards of Ephraim" because their evil way of life was an efficient emulation of the decadent and apostate leaders of the northern kingdom (see Amos 6:1,6). It was Isaiah's neat way of saying: "You know what happened in judgment on *them*. Since you unashamedly follow their ways, can you expect anything different?"

There is also the possibility that "Ephraim" (=double fruitfulness) was used with reference to the Year of Jubilee (2 Kgs. 19:29,30) soon to be celebrated. Had the nation already got the beginnings of a wonderful harvest in the sixth year (Lev. 25:21; cp. "the very early fruit" in v.4), so that these debauched priests of God felt that they had licence to drink up all the existing store of wine from the previous year?

Even more likely than this explanation, or in addition to it, is the idea that the leaders in Jerusalem were so delighted that their attempt to buy off Sennacherib had succeeded (when actually it had failed most abysmally), that they gave themselves over to an unexampled drunken spree. Note especially verse 15 and the commentary on 22:1,2,12,13.

The repetitious character of the language, which comes again in verse 10, suggests a mockery of men who are tipsy: "drunkards of Ephraim, crown of pride, glorious beauty, fat valleys, a fading flower" — these all occur a second time in verses 3,4.

The meaning of some of these phrases is not easy to make out. "Crown of pride" and "glorious beauty" are expressions appropriate to the splendid accoutrements of the priests, and especially of the golden crown on the head of the high priest (Ex. 28:2; 29:6). It is not unlikely (see commentary on ch.22) that Shebna had got himself made high priest of the debased religion imported by Ahaz, and that this Woe was the occasion of his being replaced by Eliakim (22:20). Yet he managed to hold on to office (36:3), possibly because of the influence and support of some of the princes who also come in for denunciation from Isaiah (30:1,2 etc).

The figure of "a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing" (cp. v. 15,17) is readily seen as a graphic anticipation, already foretold more than once (8:7,8; 10:22; 17:12), of the irresistible Assyrian invasion.

The entire country, all but Jerusalem, was to find itself "cast down with the hand, and trodden under foot." The flush of first-ripe fruit before the summer (Song of Songs 2:11-13 — Spring time) would be greedily devoured by the marauders, for they would come in at precisely that time of the year. Several times Isaiah mentions passover (see on 31:5). This very indulgence was to backfire on them, for the prophet Nahum proceeds to use precisely the same figure about the inevitable downfall of Nineveh (3:12).

**28-5, 6 "In that day shall the LORD of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people, And for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate."**

"In that day" always means the day when God goes into action — in the day of His Messiah or a day which foreshadows His Messiah (which amounts to the same thing). Here, first of all, the prototype is considered.

"Crown of glory" and "diadem (circlet) of beauty" imply a worthy king and a worthy high-priest: Hezekiah (who was hardly this whilst he was stricken with leprosy) and Eliakim. What a contrast between "crown of glory" and "crown of pride" (v.1,2)! Words which equate with "diadem" are used of both king and priest (62:3; Ex. 28:4).

"The residue of his people" means, of course, the relatively small section of the nation who remained faithful to their king and their God (4:2,4; 11:11,16; 37:4). The last of these references indirectly indicates what flight and devastation and slaughter there was in the time of the Assyrian inroad.

Nevertheless, all is to turn out well. The king's "spirit of judgment" would be reasserted (11:2; 32:1), and the courage of the defenders would be marvellously transformed by seeing the enemy destroyed at the very gate of their city (22:7). There would also be discomfiture for the defeatist peace party who thought there was no hope except by craven submission. The Hebrew word for "gate" here makes a very effective pun on the word for "remnant."

Everything about this short passage emphasizes that the preceding four verses must also be read with reference to Jerusalem — and all the rest of the chapter also.

**28:7,8 "But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean."**

This is a bitter and intensely realistic picture of the ungodly sottishness of priests and prophets (but not of men like Isaiah, Joel, Micah, Habakkuk, Nahum). Micah has a similar picture painted with powerful sarcasm: "if a man walking in a spirit of falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people" (2:11).

Thus holy men were setting an appallingly bad example for all the rest. And apparently this was their normal way of life (56:10,12; 5:11). They did not need the excuse of a special occasion to encourage them down the road to blinding excess, so that they could neither see straight ("they err in vision") nor could they walk straight ("they stumble in judgement"). The Hebrew has an impressive alliterative effect, but even so is by no means as powerful as in verse 10.

These hard drinkers could not even sit straight. Their tables were a cess-pit of vomit, and themselves sprawled in it. And these were tables in the court of the Lord which normally

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should be devoted to holy meals of fellowship for families partaking in sanctified gladness of peace-offerings. The phrase: "so that there is no place clean" means 'an unclean temple' (*maqom*). The sanctuary was desecrated by this beastliness. The phrase even suggests: "without any rising up" — they are slumped unconscious in all the foulness of their drunken sleep.

Arising out of the drunken sin of Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, it had been laid down that no priest on duty should partake of wine or strong drink (Lev. 10:1-9). Then by this unsanctified behaviour these priests were declaring their own unfitness for office. Accordingly, Isaiah goes on (in v.9,11) to point to others, not of the tribe of Levi, who will take over the work of instructing the rest in godliness (v.11).

**28:9-13 "Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little. For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to his people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken."**

The first two of these verses should probably be read as an expression of the mockery of the tipsy priests as they spoke scornfully of Isaiah's choosing to spend time instructing his faithful remnant (v.5), people of little education and of uncultured speech. "A priest's lips shall keep knowledge" (Mal. 2:7). 'Isn't that what he is there for, to instruct the unlearned? Then why should we priests take any notice of the rubbish he talks?'

Yet this simple repetitious message which Isaiah had imparted to his disciples was precisely what was going to equip them to be teachers of these self-disqualifying alcoholics.

The background to this shameful situation was that at Hezekiah's first Passover, and thereafter, a minority of the ordinary people from the northern tribes (2 Chr. 30:11) had come to Jerusalem, renewing the great festival begun by Moses. These by their dutiful attendance were a rebuke to the supercilious worldliness of Zion's religious professionals. Isaiah taught them simply, dinning in the message by repetition, like reciting nursery rhymes or the multiplication tables: "precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little," so that they, believing and learning the message, were soon qualified to instruct these scornful men in Jerusalem.

"With stammering lips and another tongue" a new and better instruction was now imparted in the holy city.

The usual reading of the passage is that it is a sardonic prophecy of the coming of the Assyrians, talking a rough dialect and instilling panic in the minds of these inebriated scoffers who were congratulating themselves that the northern scourge had been fended off.

However this reading, specially beloved of the modernists, reduces to nonsense the application made of these words by Paul to the early church's gift of tongues (1 Cor. 14:21).

But if reference is to the uncultured Galilean speech heard in Jerusalem at the Passover, Paul's reading presents a perfect parallel. The gift of tongues, first spoken in Jerusalem by

apostles from Galilee of the Gentiles, was written off by men more clever than they, as so much bibulous nonsense: "these men are full of new wine." The word "stammering" means "that which is ridiculous or can be so represented". Yet it was by this means that God was speaking to these self-intoxicated men of the Law. "He will speak a vision unto the people" — so the Hebrew text could read: "Surely he scorneth the scorers: but he giveth grace (the Holy Spirit) unto the lowly" (Pr. 3:34).

What was the "rest" that was promised? Not infrequently the word means rest from war — and at this time there was nothing the people desired more than that. Is it accident that "rest" echoes the name of Noah who came through the deluge to a new world and a divine blessing? (cp. 54:9). But there was also a rest to their souls in a participation in the uplifting service of God in the temple. "In returning and rest shall ye be saved: in quietness and confidence (in God) shall be your strength" (30:15). By contrast, there was to be no rest for those who thrust the message aside, but instead a wearisome lack of rest, this was one of the great curses of Moses' ancient invective (Dt. 28:65).

"Yet they (these drunken mocking fools) would not hear" (cp. 30:15 again).

So to them the word of the Lord would indeed be "precept upon precept, — precept upon precept" a simple repetitious plainness which would only serve to increase the sin of their refusal, thus making their calamity inevitable, so that (Heb: *l'maan*) they must "go and fall backward and be broken and be snared and be taken." Here Isaiah quotes his own almost over-emphatic speech (8:15) about those who had reinforced Ahaz's religious apostasy. This detail by itself identifies the men of Isaiah's censure as priests like Urijah who readily followed the way of evil religion for the sake of present self-interest.

**28:14,15 "Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves:"**

That "Wherefore" is specially significant. It implies: *Because* you who hold such high authority in Jerusalem are so scornful of a healthy reformation movement, and because you think your own clever scheming has found you a way out of present problems, *therefore* God will go into action (v.16,17) to prove your self-confidence misplaced, and you will find yourselves overtaken by circumstances which you thought yourselves clever enough to control (v.18-20).

Here, then, is another "word of the Lord" in addition to the earlier ABC instruction given by the prophet to simple pious believers.

These "scornful men", steering the nation's affairs whilst their good king was laid aside by a mortal sickness, had assembled all the silver of the temple and the treasures of the palaces and had even gone so far as to strip off the ornamental gold of the temple (2 Kgs. 18:15,16). The present passage establishes clearly that (a casual reading of the Kings record notwithstanding) it was the priests and princes, and not Hezekiah, who were responsible for this craven policy of appeasement. The outcome was that the crisis had become worse. (It is interesting to note the disparaging tone in which the prophets speak of the contemporary princes of Judah: Is. 1:23; 3:14; 21:5; 30:4; 31:9; 43:28; Hos. 5:10; 7:3,5,16; 9:15; Mic. 7:3. But it remains an unsolved problem why the contemporary history presents them in a different light: 2 Chr. 28:21; 29:30; 30:12,24; 31:8; 32:3).

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These faithless leaders were congratulating themselves on their "covenant with death" made by placating Sennacherib with a massive payment of tribute. They were confident that a friendly agreement with what had seemed earlier to be an inevitable grave, would save them, for (30:2,3; 31:1) had they not already sent secret emissaries to Egypt to negotiate immediate military support from a Pharaoh who was already becoming scared of the Assyrian threat? (Verse 17 rebukes this policy of duplicity).

With lying protestations and assurances they had achieved, as they thought, a binding peace treaty with the northern invader (contrast 25:4; 14:32). Was there not every reason in the world for self-congratulation. So by all means let there be a mighty celebration of gladness (22:13), and a great drinking. Yet, in fact, their duplicity was to be completely outmatched by "the treacherous dealer dealing treacherously" (cp. 33:7,8). The siege of Lachish was not relaxed at all. Instead, very soon there would be an Assyrian army at the gates of Jerusalem itself. As Isaiah now foretold, "the overflowing scourge" (a strange mixed metaphor!) did not pass through, intent on a conquest of Egypt. It concentrated on the elimination of any possible threat from Judah. (One additional Hebrew letter would give the reading: "the overflowing overflow" (cp. 8:7,8; but see v.18 here).

With the exception of Hezekiah, a helpless dying king, all the men of authority in Jerusalem were violently angry with Isaiah. However, he had the reinforcement of fellow-prophets who gave such assurances as this: "In that day will I (Jehovah) make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground; and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the Land, and will make them to lie down safely" (Hos. 2:18).

**28:16,17 "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place."**

"Therefore" — as a necessary counterpoise to the foolish optimism of these political manoeuvrers — Jehovah Adonai provides a refuge on which reliance may be placed with all confidence. It is Himself and the renewed and reformed worship which Hezekiah, before his sickness, was insisting on.

"The precious corner stone, the sure foundation" was the unbudgeable rock in the temple area where Abraham had framed to offer Isaac and which in the time of David had been the foundation and corner stone of the great altar of burnt offering. See the commentary on 8:13-15, and also see B.S. ch.4.09. To find a place of prominence and glory for the Assyrian altar which he had brought in, Ahaz had removed Solomon's altar, but had found himself baffled by the grand solidity of its rock foundation. Now, in the more wholesome days of Hezekiah, the former arrangement of the true altar founded on the Eternal Rock had been restored. So, in the impending crisis, let men put confidence in the God whose redemption of His people was symbolized there. It is surely one of Isaiah's double meanings that the Hebrew for "in Zion" also means "for a signpost or waymark." When Peter quotes this scripture, he also alludes to altar and worshippers (1 Pet. 2:5,6).

"He that (so) believeth shall not make haste (to flee from the 'overflowing scourge')." But the LXX reading here is: "shall not be ashamed." This must be accepted as correct, for it is confirmed by the inspired commentary of the New Testament (Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pet. 2:6); like Isaiah, Peter refers to the instruction of babes; (v.2, cp. Is. 28:9-11). And there is here

also the plain implication that he who does not believe in God's true altar, and all that He symbolizes *will* be put to shame. Rather significantly, Peter's version has the added words: "believeth *on him*" W.A. Wordsworth has suggested that since Isaiah wrote 'stone, stone, founded, founded' his Hebrew text probably had also 'lo, lo' (with *ayim* and then *aleph*) This would give Peter's reading exactly.

"A tried stone" is, more strictly, "a stone of proof." In a double sense the true altar and its foundation has this special character. It had been "proved" through three centuries as the true centre of worship. And itself was the proof and test of a man's loyalty to the God of his fathers. The careful measuring up with line and plummet of the altar on its old God-appointed foundation was itself an evident symbol for the "judgment and righteousness" which the worship of Jehovah called for in the life of the nation. What a contrast with the perversions of the reign of Ahaz, as they were still continued by these "scornful men" who at present held sway in Jerusalem. "Put to shame" by the crass failure of their political scheming, they would "make haste" to flee for their lives before the Assyrian tide, only to be overtaken by the judgment of the Lord which at the appropriate moment was to wreck the Assyrian camp and army. The "hail" which was to vindicate "the indignation of the Lord" (30:30) in that astonishing and terrifying act of judgment would overtake these others also as they sought to hide from the siege of the city and the wrath of Sennacherib in some obscure wadi. There the violent rush of "storm waters would overflow their hiding place."

Centuries later, when Jerusalem was a rejected and doomed city, Jesus had counselled his faithful ones: "Then let them which are in the midst of her depart out" (Lk. 21:21) — and they did, and found safety. But now those who in faith had come to Jerusalem to keep Passover, emulating Hezekiah's trust in Jehovah, found themselves in the *only* place of safety, whilst those who fled, relying on their own judgement and their own efforts at salvation, were swept away by the wrath of the Lord (see on 30:16).

**28:18-20 "And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report. For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it."**

Isaiah's diatribe against these evil men now climbs towards its climax. They have made a cunning and deceitful agreement by which to stave off disaster, have they? It will not hold. The very writing of their treaty will be smeared over contemptuously by Sennacherib — and by God. Was not the Assyrian dictator wild with religious indignation against the reforms brought in by Hezekiah? The altar copied from that which Sennacherib had installed in Damascus had been contemptuously thrown out, and every symbol of Assyrian religion introduced by Ahaz the sycophant, was already smashed to bits. The Assyrian garrison which had been quartered in the western court of the temple had been told they were no longer welcome. The spirit of Jonah against Nineveh was abroad again in Jerusalem.

So Sennacherib saw himself as the scourge of the divine Ashur against contemptible Hezekiah and his futile Jehovah. The Assyrian whip would come down with full force on Judah's back. The invasion about to roll was to be not merely an extension of empire but an act of homage to a slighted Assyrian deity.

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These priests and princes would certainly feel the full blast of it. Their country estates, in which they took so much delight, would be trampled into desolation by Assyrian jackboots. From the very first inroad along the coastal plain, every message that came in, morning by morning, would bring sickening news. Day and night the threat which hung over them became more frightening, more demoralising.

"Whom shall he make to understand?" was the jibe they had thrown at Isaiah (v.9a). Right soon, in ironic contrast with that, this message from the north would make itself plain enough. It would be "a vexation only to understand the report." Hezekiah used the same word (2 Chr. 29:8=trouble) in his much-needed exhortation to the priests and Levites — Hezekiah the prophet anticipating Isaiah the prophet.

How telling is the double figure of speech in verse 20. The bed too small for comfort, and the blanket too short to keep the sleeper warm. Depend on your own contrivances, declares Isaiah, and this discomfort and frustration is all you can expect.

Remarkably, LXX of this verse is totally different, and much inferior. It is difficult to see what the connection between the Hebrew and the Greek might be.

**28:21,22 "For the LORD shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act. Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth."**

When Israel was in the wilderness, and it was time for them to move on, then as the ark of God set forward, the people proclaimed: "Rise up, O Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered" (Num. 10:35). It was surely with reference to this that Isaiah now declared: "The Lord shall rise up" — and His enemies, the leaders of His own people, would be scattered! These men were the enemies of the Lord's anointed, Hezekiah, through scornfully refusing to share his faith in Jehovah. In David's time, his implacable enemies, the Philistines, were set on getting rid of him in the early days of his reign, and in the valley of Rephaim (does it mean "giants" or "dead men"?) David's cause seemed lost. But David left the outcome of that grim day in God's hands, and somehow — if only we knew just how! — the might of God broke forth and vanquished those who thought their human might mightier than the might of Jehovah. At Baal-Perazim He showed Himself the Master of the breaking forth of waters (1 Chr. 14:11). And now (see v.17) this Assyrian "torrent" was to be harnessed in judgment against God's people, and then would itself be brought under control (cp. Hab. 1:5, which has the same context).

After a pause to gather strength the enemy came again. But this time David held his hand until he heard a sound of watching angels in the tops of the mulberry trees, and then, with the Lord on his side, victory was inevitable, and he smote the invaders all the way from Gibeon to Gezer (1 Chr. 14:16).

Now, says Isaiah, what God did then He will soon do again. It will be "His strange act", one of the strangest things God ever did, for in the first instance it will be *against* His own people — these who seem incapable of mustering faith in His protecting power. So "a great consumption is determined in all the Land," precisely as Isaiah had already foretold: "The Lord will perform his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem...the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness; for the Lord God of hosts shall make a consumption even determined, in the midst of all the Land" (10:12,22,23). This happened

when the vicious Assyrian plundering and ravaging of the Land, savagely and systematically reduced it to wilderness.

But then, comparable to that angelic marching in the tops of the mulberry trees, there came a drastic and dramatic angelic action like that rout of hostile Canaanites at Gibeon: "The Lord shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall shew the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones (as at Gibeon on an earlier occasion; Josh. 10:11,12). For through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be beaten down which smote with a rod" (30:30,31).

With such a God ready to go into action, ought not these mockers to cease from their mockery, lest their Assyrian bands be made more and yet more strong?

**28:23 "Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech."**

Here is Isaiah's appeal to "low and high, rich and poor, together," to take heed (51:1,4,7) to the highly important parable he is about to proclaim. Without the wisdom and insight which this teaches, much of the rest of his message will be lost. There is the same sustained appeal at the beginning of Psalms 49 (v. 1-4) and 78 (v.1,2) — the first of these probably by Isaiah himself. Jesus began and ended his parable of the sower with the same sort of underlining: "Hearken: Behold" (Mk. 4:3), "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Mt. 13:9,14 etc; this phrase is the commonest repetition in the Bible next to one of the promises made to Abraham: B.S. 12.03).

**28:24,25 "Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and the rye in their place?"**

The point of this husbandry operation is easy to pick up. The farmer does not go on ploughing every day. It is not a non-stop operation. He does not keep at it all the year round (57:16; Ps. 103:9). Instead, the ploughing finished, he carefully levels and smooths the soil.

Then comes sowing time. And according to each crop that he plans there is a different operation, some seed being sown broadcast, and some in drills and rows, some planted individually, and some as marginal catch-crop.

And why does he go about things in these diverse ways?

**28:26 "For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him."**

Now this is a mystery. To the countryman, growing up to the life of agriculture, it all seems so obvious and straightforward. But set an uninstructed townee to take over his work, and what a thorough mess of things may be guaranteed.

Yet, insists God's prophet, if the former does achieve a sequence of efficient operations and his season is crowned with success, it is because of the special nous that God has imparted to him — weather lore, sense of timing, capable handling of animals and farm equipment, and all that. All this may come to him as by instinct, but in fact behind that, not only the mysterious processes of growth and fruition but also, and just as importantly, in his own flair for doing the right things at the right time and in the right way, there is a special gift from God which ninety-nine farmers out of a hundred fail to acknowledge.

**28:27,28 "For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and**

**the cummin with a rod. Bread corn is bruised; because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break it with the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen."**

The same farming truth continues to proclaim itself right to the end of the season. When the crops are brought in, each in its time, are they not each threshed according to their individuality or character? Some with a heavy flail, some with a lighter tool, some trampled by horses and some by cattle, some crushed by a heavy farm cart (nowadays not by any of these means — God has now instructed men to a different "discretion").

**28:29 "This also cometh forth from the LORD of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working."**

When Isaiah says: "This cometh from the Lord...", does he mean the threshing as well as ("also") the ploughing and sowing, or is he referring again to a God-imparted shrewdness of operation (as in v. 26), or is it the complete parable and its application to current experience which is important? Perhaps there is studied vagueness here, to set men pondering all these different and mysterious aspects of heavenly wisdom. Significantly, the Hebrew word for "his strange act" (v.21) means "service in farm or agriculture." Hosea laments that God's people will not co-operate with Him in His farming (10:11,13).

For his contemporaries the main points of Isaiah's parable are these:

Just as the farmer has his specific seasons for ploughing, sowing, reaping and threshing, so also God does not always deal with the same individual (or nation) in the same way. Each man has his times when care, comfort, or encouragement are what are best for him. There are times also when hard discipline, rough tribulation and suffering are what he needs, but never wants. The word 'tribulation' comes directly from the Latin word for a threshing sledge.

Even in this matter of discipline God knows better than to treat all men or nations alike. With consummate wisdom He handles each individual according to his need.

But who is the farmer who is taught by God and instructed with discretion?

Here are some possible answers: either the angel of the Lord, or the prophet of the Lord (Isaiah himself, no less). Of these alternatives, the former is the more likely, for although Isaiah certainly had already gone in for some straight talking to his faithless contemporaries, the use of strong language was the limit of his mandate, and even that came to him only through the inspiration imparted by angels: "His God doth instruct him...This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts."

Now it is time to turn attention again to the bearing of Isaiah 28 upon —

### **The Last Days**

Indeed, the Messianic reference of this remarkable prophecy is, in this 20th century, by far its most important message, but, alas, also its most difficult aspect, for there is no lack of New Testament intimation that these words are to be read with reference to drunken Judah's rejection of the Lord's Anointed and the judgment which ensued, even whilst there was also special comfort and blessing for the faithful remnant. Also, everything about the circumstances of the Chosen Race in modern times suggests an even more dire fulfilment in days not far ahead.

The rulers who should have welcomed the Lord Jesus, giving respect to his person and his message, were sunk in apostasy — "drunkards of Ephraim." Everything about them was disgusting in the sight of the Lord. Yet out of their sense of superiority they mocked this preacher from Nazareth, of humble birth and devoid of college training. "They that sit in the gate speak against me; and I was the song of the drunkards" (Ps. 69:12). Even his own brothers were cynical and unbelieving (Jn. 7:3-5).

There was a fair amount of repetition in the teaching of Jesus. It is readily traceable in the text

of the gospels. Isaiah's message was openly derided for the he said it over and over again; the clever men (who had themselves been taught that way) made fun of his "precept upon precept, line upon line..." But Isaiah knew the power of this good method. And so too did Jesus. Elements of his teaching often recur. Hence the constant repetitions in the gospel which the moderns failing to appreciate turn into a fine source of criticism of an "inaccurate" tradition. "For the preaching of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness; but unto us which are being saved it is the power of God unto salvation" (1 Cor. 1:18).

And if those disciples seemed to be no better than children, Jesus was content that it should be so: "Have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou has perfected praise?" (Mt. 21:16). Cp. also Paul ("Enjoying the Bible", H.A.W., p.55).

With caustic mimicry these leaders mocked his disciples also: "These men are full of new wine", which in truth they were.

Therefore their "crown of glory and diadem of beauty" and their vaunted temple, the finest building in a rich and cultured world, were all to be exposed as paltry and shameful. Why could they not see that their self-indulgence in the intoxication of authority and the exercise of power made them, in the sight of God and His indignant Son, as so much nauseous and abhorrent spewing. "Wherefore fill ye up the measure of your fathers" — they were even worse than Hezekiah's cynical worldly princes. Another generation, and he would spew them out of his mouth.

But this Jesus deliberately chose ordinary uncultured men as his official representatives. Never did he say to them: "Rabbi So-and-So saith..." but instead: "I say unto you..." and he told them trivial childlike stories (some of them taken from Isaiah's own ministry). Why doesn't he teach them "knowledge" and make them understand "doctrine"?

Indeed he did! — a knowledge and doctrine which right soon his disciples would be qualified to impart to these "scornful men": "With stammering lips (talk that invites ridicule) and another tongue will he speak to this people".

So Paul was right when he picked up this Isaiah passage (1 Cor. 14:21), for through the mouths of "unlearned and ignorant men," intellectual babes (as they seemed), God spoke to the nation the word of the gospel. They were mere Galileans, for all the world as uncouth as broad-spoken Yorkshiremen, who nevertheless brought divine truth to men priding themselves that they already knew it all. And a special qualification was added — an ability to speak with ease and fluency in the holy tongue, "the tongue of the learned," and to speak the praise of God in a diversity of languages which they had only heard a few times.

But the mockery did not cease. Warnings of coming judgment went unheeded. "We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement." We know how to keep friends with our Roman overlords, so there is no likelihood that we shall be thrust out from the place of power or from our temple. Yet even when, in the time of mounting crisis, "they made lies their refuge," there was no evading the well-deserved retribution. "The overflowing scourge (of the legions) passed through, and they were trodden down by it."

Thus they "went backward, and were broken, and snared, and taken." Their experience when arresting Jesus in Gethsemane anticipated this: "They went backward, and fell to the ground" (Jn. 18:6).

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Yet to them it had been said: "This is the rest, to cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing." With his eye on Isaiah 28 (and also on Jeremiah 6) Jesus had appealed: "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28).

But "they would not hear" (Is. 28:12). "How often would I have gathered thy children together, and ye would not" (Mt. 23:37). So the overflowing Roman flood passed through and the hail destroyed their temple, the refuge of lies (Mt. 7:26,27).

By contrast with this clean sweep of the unworthy, God vindicated One whom He appointed to be a sure and eternal foundation, a chief corner stone. The details of this Messianic symbol, as vouched for repeatedly in the New Testament, have already been worked out in the commentary on chapter 8. The sequence of passages is impressive: Isaiah 8:13-15; 28:16; Ps. 119:22; 1 Pet. 2:4,6; Rom 9:33; 10:11; Eph. 2:20-22; Col. 2:7; 1 Cor. 3:11.

It still remains to consider the relevance of this powerful prophecy with reference to the Second Coming.

The picture here of worldly self-indulgence and unfaith is highly appropriate to describe the modern state of Israel, whose leaders know that their little country has no foreseeable future, politically speaking, whilst surrounded by its implacable Arab enemies. All the resources of manpower, wealth, and military equipment are on the side of those pledged to destroy Zionism in a holy war. The Arab philosophy is: We can afford to lose, and lose again; but Israel cannot afford to lose once.

This prophecy says plainly that one day Israel *will* lose: "A flood of mighty waters overflowing shall cast down to the earth" (v.2).

Yet even in such a time as this, there is to be a faithful remnant rallying to the Lord's Anointed. These are the unimportant simple folk who are teachable concerning the Messiah. For their sakes there will be salvation out of wreck and ruin. These "Messianic Jews" will become the teachers of a new era in Israel.

The details in this chapter 28 and the clear parallel with the Hezekiah period require that amid the political decay and religious corruption there be found in Israel a faithful remnant. Already there are signs of numbers of observant Jews who without converting to orthodox Christianity, are putting their faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah. It is for their sakes that salvation will come at a time of agonizing inadequacy when "the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it."

The deliverance will be comparable to the great victories wrought by the powers of heaven when David and his new-found kingdom were on the point of extermination. There will be a sound of marching in the tops of mulberry trees (the trees of Israel's weeping), and the valley of Rephaim will be filled with dead bodies, as in the time of Sennacherib. The temple of evil religion which now stands on the site of Solomon's temple will disappear; but the indestructible Rock, the tried stone, will then become the centre of worship for a revived nation which at last has made its peace with God.

And now what of Isaiah's agricultural parable?

It teaches, first, that God's attitude to His people is not always the same. There has to be a breaking down of hard unprepared soil, a smoothing and levelling, and then a re-sowing according to the quality of the tilth and the lie of the land. And when the time of harvest arrives, each part of the yield will be dealt with according to the God-given wisdom of the One in charge of the operation.

Thus, God who has had to use rough methods in the discipline and education of His people will at last see them bringing forth fruit to His glory. The final operation by the angel of the covenant will ensure that the best possible result accrues, for now he operates under the direction of "the Lord of hosts, the King of Glory, which is wonderful in counsel (Wonderful Counsellor), and excellent in working."

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## Chapter 29

### **29:1 "Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices."**

There is no doubt at all that Ariel is another name for Zion. But why? Several possibilities present themselves:

- a. The meaning: "Hearth of God", alludes to the altar of burnt offering (as 28:16). The mention of sacrifices in this verse supports this view. In Ez. 43:15,16 Ariel has this meaning.
- b. "Hearth of God" in the sense of fierce destruction by fire (v.6; 31:9). A similar idea crops up in Ezekiel (11:3) and Jeremiah (1:13), in each case regarding Jerusalem.
- c. "Lion of God", with reference to the Lion of Judah (Gen. 49:9; 1 Kgs.10:19,20; Rev. 5:5). Jeremiah (12:8) seems to allude to this passage, but in a bad sense — a lion hostile to God, not defensive of His kingdom.
- d. Ariel can also mean "I will provide a ram," as happened at the intended sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22:14). The implied idea is, then, one of rescue when all seems hopeless. Compare also David's provision of sacrifice at the same place, staving off disaster in Jerusalem when the angel of destruction went forth (2 Sam. 24:16,25).

Which of these meanings?

Very probably, all of them; for Isaiah is a writer much given to making varied play on words in this way.

"The city where David dwelt" was Zion. In Isaiah's time that north-east corner of Jerusalem contained little besides temple and palace.

But LXX reads the phrase as meaning not "dwelt" but "encamped against, made war;" and this is the very idea in verse 3. David only captured Jebus when he made war against it, and because of the jeers of the Jebusites about his inability to succeed, even if it were defended only by "the lame and the blind," David's permanent resentment of this was marked by his exclusion for all time of the lame and the blind from the sanctuary he set up there. And that is why to this day spiritually lame and blind Jews are unable to worship their God on the temple mount.

In Isaiah's time those who scorned his message were deaf and blind drunk (28:7,8), and accordingly they lost their rights to enjoy the temple of the Lord.

"Add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices" can refer only to Passover sacrifices (the lamb, not the lion), for concerning that feast it was decreed: "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months; when year is added to year" (Ex. 12:2). Other Passover references in Isaiah (e.g. 26:20,21; 30:29; 31:5) support this view.

But the allusion cannot possibly be to the great Passover at the beginning of Hezekiah's reign

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(2 Chr. 30). However, this phrase: "add year to year" implies what would be an obvious inference from the character of the king, in any case, that with a cleansed temple and a re-organized temple service the Passovers would be observed regularly right to the end of his reign.

**29:2-4 "Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness and sorrow: and it shall be unto me as Ariel. And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee. And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust."**

There is a sharp contrast between verse 1 and this picture of distress. The first word: "Yet" (AV) is really the simple Hebrew conjunction "and" which, says Delitsch (an unsurpassed Hebraist) would better read: "Then" i.e. when the specified feast (Passover) comes round again. If this is correct, the present prophecy was spoken just a year before the Assyrian destruction (note 32:10 AVm).

The hopelessness of the situation is emphasized by a characteristic play on words: "heaviness and sorrow" (like horror and sorrow?). Then Zion truly will be "as Ariel", the hearth of God, the centre of a mighty conflagration.

"I will camp against thee" means the Assyrians, as God's instrument of discipline, will do this.

The modernists seem glad to accept the story in Herodotus that Sennacherib's army was not destroyed at Jerusalem but near Pelusium on the way to Egypt. A plague of mice is said to have gnawed away the bow strings of the Assyrian soldiers, with the result that next day the Egyptians were able to win a total victory.

Yet Isaiah says here that Jerusalem will be besieged, and that a mount and forts will be raised to help forward the attack. But that attack was never pressed (37:33). All the details in Isaiah point to the conclusion that Jerusalem was invested, but the intended onslaught never took place. The Hebrew word for "round about" actually means "a catapult" (s.w. 22:18). In 37:33 "cast a bank" may have the same meaning (see Jer. 6:6; 32:24 AVm).

Sennacherib's own inscription makes clear how far his military plans went: "Hezekiah himself I shut up like a bird in a cage in Jerusalem his royal city. / *raised forts about him*, and whosoever came forth from the chief gate of his city I barred" (Taylor Prism, cp. also Ps. 76:3; by contrast, Is. 37:33 is to be read with reference to Sennacherib *in person*; he did not come to Jerusalem, but entrusted that operation to one of his generals; note the close connection between verses 34 and 37).

Isaiah's words describe, at the very least, a state of misery and hopelessness within Jerusalem, the city more dead than alive (cp. 59:10 RVm); and this is matched by the dejection of Hezekiah's men (36:22) and the king's desperate importunity in the sanctuary of the Lord (37:14ff). But the phraseology here may mean more than that. It echoes the earlier warning (8:19) given by Isaiah against resorting to the hocus-pocus of spiritualism. So perhaps it is possible to infer from this remarkable language — "speak out of the ground...speech low as the dust...as a familiar spirit...speech chirping out of the dust" — that in their desperation the princes would seek comfort and guidance from mediums. But Hezekiah, both sane and devout, laid the problem before his God, who very soon answered with a voice of thunder (v. 6).

**29:5,6 "Moreover the multitude of thy strangers shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the terrible ones shall be as chaff that passeth away: yea, it shall be at an instant suddenly. Thou shalt be visited of the LORD of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire."**

From the humiliation of Jerusalem the prophet turns to the humiliation and shattering destruction of the invaders. These contrasting prophecies — the Lord against Jerusalem, the Lord saving Jerusalem — occur several times in Isaiah, and there is no sense to be made of them except against the background of the history of how boastful Sennacherib vaunted himself against a trembling city and then saw his army destroyed by the majesty of the God of Israel.

The repetition of "multitude" (four times) again makes nonsense of the critical contention that the Assyrians never came against Jerusalem. Rather it reinforces the plain record: "And the king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish unto king Hezekiah with a great army" (36:2).

But this "visitation" of the wrath of Sennacherib was nothing in comparison with what God purposed: "Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts." The word is used often in both a good and a bad sense, both in blessing and in judgment. In this instance, both, simultaneously, for the blessing and protection of the holy city was to mean devastation in the Assyrian camp.

The vivid pictures of the manifestation of the might of the Lord were long explained by the present writer as a specially intense and frightening hurricane which was all the more destructive for being so intensely localised. This was almost certainly part of the phenomenon, for LXX reads: "a dust cloud from a wheel;" and Psalm 83 describes the same dramatic crisis thus: "O my God, make them like a wheel, as the stubble before the wind" (v. 13).

But such a naturalistic explanation comes nowhere near accommodating all the details in Isaiah. The bald catalogue of phenomena is itself awe-inspiring: Thunder Earthquake Great noise Storm Tempest

The flame of a devouring fire. Additional details given elsewhere are these:

"A burning like the burning of a fire...it shall burn and devour the thorns in one day" (10:16,17).

"The rushing of mighty waters...as the chaff of the mountains before the wind" (17:13).

"The Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon...his strange work" (28:21). "A marvellous work and wonder" (29:14).

"A devouring fire...an overflowing stream...his glorious voice...the indignation of his anger, the flame of devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones (Gibeon! Josh. 10:10,11)...battles of shaking...Tophet is ordained of old...fire and much wood: the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it" (30:27,30-33).

"Who shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (33:14).

In the face of such terrific language as this naturalistic explanations fly out of the

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window, and instead the curt record of the history becomes all-sufficient: "Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians...and when men arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead — corpses!" (37:36) The earlier passages merely describe some of the phenomena which accompanied his stroke of power. It was like the Glory of the Lord when the angel of His Presence came down on mount Sinai (Ex. 19:18,19).

The further mention of Ariel (v. 7) is certainly in the sense of "the hearth of God " for the context mentions "devouring fire," as though eating up the sacrifices — as happened on mount Carmel (1 Kgs. 18:38). God makes His ministers a flame of fire (37:36; Ps. 104:4).

Yet "whisper out of the dust" (v. 5) makes a striking contrast with the thunderous roar of Ariel, the lion of God. This word "whisper" (*tzaphzaph*) also looks back to the *tzavtzav* of 28:10, said in mockery.

**29:7,8 "And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, even all that fight against her and her munition, and that distress her, shall be as a dream of a night vision. It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite: so shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion."**

"The multitude of all the nations" pointedly suggests that Sennacherib had vastly augmented his army of Assyrians with considerable detachments from other nations which were now part of his empire. It was ever thus among the empire-builders. A list of these auxiliaries is given in Psalm 83:5-8, a psalm which fits very ill the "Jehoshaphat" reference often proposed, but which on the other hand has pointed contacts with Isaiah. It also supplies the reason why Josephus unexpectedly refers to Sennacherib as "king of the Arabians." Isaiah has also mentioned Elamites and Medes as prominent in the Assyrian army.

All this 'distress' for Jerusalem was according to divine intention; (s.w. Dt. 28:53,55,57); nevertheless these nations must be called to account for it, first by the acute frustration a fighting force can have — the certainty of victory and plunder snatched suddenly out of their grasp.

The figure of a man dreaming of a wonderful meal and of enjoying a sparkling refreshing drink and then waking to find it all a delusion and instead himself facing only hard wretched deprivation — this has been summed up in these words: "A more vivid representation of utter disenchantment than this verse gives can scarcely be conceived"(Skinner).

The Assyrians were hungry to swallow up Jerusalem, but their confidence was frustrated. They encamped about the city — they and their horses — desperately thirsty, but there was no water, for Hezekiah's engineers had made clever use of the rock falls brought about by the mighty earthquake in Uzziah's reign and had covered in completely the Kidron stream. More than that, they had led those life-preserving waters along a conduit cut with superb ingenuity and accuracy through the hill to make a pool just inside the south wall of the city.

So "the multitude of all the nations" (a contemptuous repetition here!) found their expectations thwarted. The Kidron was water of life only for the defenders of the city, but for these besiegers this Kidron wadi soon became the valley of the shadow of death. That is all their alluring dream was worth.

**29:9,10 "Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered."**

By common consent there are problems of translation here. Is the prophet repeating his terms of scorn, for effect? or is he using them with varied emphasis? Context gives support to RVm reading: "Blind yourselves, and be blind," that is, blind drunk.

The words read like a further allusion (as in 22:13) to the revelry and celebration in Jerusalem because the people, and the rulers especially, thought that their double-dealing had removed the Assyrian threat.

But, says Isaiah, your literal drunkenness and stupor is only an outward token of your general spiritual depravity. "Your eyes the (false) prophets (clairvoyants)" can see nothing of any value; their entire message is a delusion. "And your rulers the seers hath he covered." It is the figure once again of a man curled up in bed (28:20; 30:1) and heedless of all the serious action that goes on in the world around him (Mic. 2:11; 3:6,7).

This spiritual stupor Isaiah sees as a penalty now imposed by Almighty God for earlier unwillingness to receive the warnings of heaven. This is the inspiration *you* have from God: "The Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep." What a contrast with the clear incisiveness of Isaiah's own inspiration, specially claimed by him (28:14,29; 29:13).

**29:11,12 "And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned."**

It is Isaiah's message that is referred to. His Immanuel prophecy in the reign of Ahaz had been "bound up and sealed among his disciples" (8:16), but not before it had been expounded to them in detail. The prophet's present contemporaries were incompetent to make sense of the book of revelation which he now offered to them (the record of all that he had been declaring). The educated had it in their hands as a sealed book, and made its being sealed an excuse for not exerting themselves to learn its contents. The fact was: they did not *want* to read it.

Others had a different kind of excuse — "It's no use to me. I've not been to college!" Yet everyone knew that Isaiah had among his eager disciples those who, because of their eagerness, had been taught as children: "line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little" — precisely as earnest seekers of the present day must learn, whether learned or not.

Jeremiah found himself faced with the same provoking situation. "Though they say, The Lord liveth; surely they swear falsely. O Lord...thou hast stricken them (by Jeremiah's message), but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock...Therefore I said, Surely these are poor; they are foolish: for they know not the way of the Lord...I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them...but these have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds" (5:3-5). In both classes, no *intention* to learn. And this is why, when Daniel's words were "closed up and sealed till the time of the end," whilst in that day (*this day*) "the wise man shall understand," those who do not understand are not called "poor" or "ignorant" or

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"deprived" or "uneducated," they are called "wicked" because that is what they are (Dan. 12:9-10).

**29:13,14 "Wherefore the LORD said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid."**

Now, in caustic contrast with *their* seers and prophets (v. 10), Isaiah proclaims truth — what the Lord has really said; and it proves to be a shattering message with little comfort in it. There will come in "a marvellous work" of God. Its imminence and extraordinary character is emphasized, in the Hebrew text, by the triple use of the same ominous word, backed up by other effective repetitions — How this Isaiah knew the power of language well-used! "I will make thy plagues wonderful," God had warned through Moses (Ex. 34:10). And now has come a time when this would be seen — a brutal and tyrannical invader being used to discipline a special people whom God had chosen out of regard for their forefathers. *They* turned this upside down (v.16), therefore so also would their God. Their scheming and politicking, "the wisdom of the wise," would perish in an irresistible holocaust of fury.

And all this would befall because they had chosen to let go the essence of truth and worship, as already revealed to them, and instead had concentrated on outward forms "taught by the *precept* of men" (cp. 1:11-15). Here LXX seems to have read an almost identical word *tohu*, chaos, everything upside down.

Guided by the searing reprobation of his Lord (Mt. 15:8), Paul was to make almost savage use of this prophetic invective as he wrote under the shadow of a yet more wonderful work of God in the first century.

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This second Woe (28:1; 29:1) concludes at verse 14. So it is appropriate to look again at the first half of Isaiah 29 to consider its Messianic reference.

The first five verses present a picture of Ariel as a city upon which God brings great distress. It is "a city where David dwelt" but there the Son of David no longer dwells. Instead he made a sorrowing denunciation of a Jerusalem deserving only the heaviest of divine judgments, "Thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round...and lay thee even with the ground..." (Lk. 19:43,44). Jesus echoed the LXX of Isaiah 29:3,4. And all readers know in what grim fashion that prophecy was fulfilled.

It was a judgment made inevitable by the obduracy of Jewish hearts. It was a very angry Jesus who lined up with Isaiah to castigate their perversion of inherited divine truth: "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy *of you*, saying, This people (not, My people) draweth near to me with their mouth (singular noun — unanimity!), and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me, But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mt. 15:8,9).

Paul also quoted this same Woe in a sorrowing lament about his people: "God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear — unto this day" (Rom. 11:8) — and, alas, unto *this* day in the twentieth century.

But Paul also got angry about this, and echoed the indignation of Isaiah: "For the preaching of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness...For it is written (in Isaiah 29:14), I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (1 Cor. 1:18,19). This was castigation not of Gentile philosophy but of hair-splitting rabbinic cleverness.

Yet Isaiah (in 29:5-8) has a powerful picture of the angelic destruction of the gentile armies ranged against Jerusalem to work the wrath of God against His people. This did not happen in A.D.70. Then why did it not? Was it not part of the same prophecy quoted against the Jews by Jesus and Paul?

The only worthwhile answer to this is that if only there had been repentance by the Jews in response to the preaching of the gospel, Jerusalem would have been saved. However, since the city held only a small remnant of the faithful (in contrast with the more substantial number associated with Hezekiah and his reformation), it could not be divinely protected as it was in B.C.701. So, instead, opportunity was provided for the Lord's faithful few to be warned beforehand and to flee to safety (Lk. 21:20,21).

### **These Last Days**

This raises the interesting question as to the fate of Jerusalem in the Last Days. Whereas Isaiah and Joel (2:32) are fairly specific that the holy city will be protected, Zechariah (14:2) foretells its capture and all the horrors of rapine and plunder. Are these to be seen as two separate occasions, the latter obviously preceding the other? Or is it possible that, as in 701 B.C. and A.D.70, the outcome of the Gentile attack will depend on the repentance of the city's inhabitants? In other words, it could be that Zechariah 14:2 (the only prophecy of its kind?) could be set aside if only the attitude of the people of Israel is right (for more on this, see Rev., p.259ff).

This is where Isaiah's trenchant words come in about the learned man who cannot read the book of God's revelation because it is sealed, and the ignorant man cannot attempt it because he is not educated (29:11,12).

Daniel was told that "the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end...none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand" (12:9,10). Let it be noted again that the angel's antithesis to "wise" is "wicked"!

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## **Chapter 29 (2)**

**29:15,16 "Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us? Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?"**

There can be little doubt that this section is aimed primarily at the court party who did not believe in God but who did believe in keeping their powder dry. It is times of extremity which show the quality of a man's faith, for then it is only the man to whom God is real who puts confidence in his Maker. Others more readily forget Him and seek to work out their own salvation.

This was the threadbare philosophy Isaiah was now set on exposing. He told them plainly and with scorn (and again in 30:1ff; 31:1ff) that their secret scheming to get an Egyptian treaty which would stave off the Assyrian threat was known to him, not through any secret spy but by revelation from his God.

Yet the attitude these typical politicians adopted was precisely that which at some time or another dominates every human being, even those who are ready to say platitudinously how wonderful Psalm 139 is.

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Of course these schemers did not even once put it into so many words: "Who seeth us? Who knoweth us?" Their religion had an all-seeing God as one of its most evident first principles, but *in practice* they behaved as though the God of Israel were no better than Dagon. "He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it" (Ps. 10:11).

'How perverse you are!' Isaiah exclaimed. And in truth they were a "froward generation, children in whom is no faith" (Dt. 32:20).

These men reckoned that they could fashion their own affairs and their own lives in whatever way *they* chose. It is the universal philosophy, for there is no human being who does not like to think of himself as a potter rather than as what he actually is — a mere lump of clay, to be shaped and fashioned by God.

"Shall the clay say to him that fashioned it, What makest thou? or shall thy work say, He hath no hands?" (45:9). Paul quotes these words and then expostulates: "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Rom. 9:20,21).

But nobody really believes this, least of all the politicians, least of all Jerusalem's politicians. The axe loves to boast itself against him that heweth therewith; the saw delights to magnify itself against him that pushes it to and fro (10:15).

**29:17-19 "Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest? And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel."**

You, with your hopelessly faulty judgements, who turn things upside down (v. 16), says Isaiah, are now to find that God will turn all your affairs upside down, and very speedily, too. Lebanon, wild rough country, a wilderness (32:15), He will turn into a fruitful field, and what has been esteemed a fruitful field, he will turn into a forest. (It is true that in one or two places Lebanon's cedars are used as a symbol of grandeur and dignity; e.g. 35:2. But that is not the emphasis here).

The simple meaning of the figure is that the part of the nation hitherto deemed uncultured and therefore unimportant (cp. 28.11) would become the most acceptable segment of God's people. Whereas those who deemed themselves to be the elite of the holy nation would find themselves written off as almost valueless.

This is how things were turning out in Judah. The priests and princes, the cream of the nation, were to be exposed as of little worth in the sight of God because of their self-indulgence and their faithless policies. But on the other hand the devout ordinary people, Isaiah's faithful remnant, many of them from the north bordering on Lebanon, were to give God pleasure as His "fruitful field." They would find safety in Jerusalem when the people of "quality", using their own resources and shrewd judgement, would flee from the threatened city straight into the arms of an exasperated enemy.

"In that day" of God's open activity, the book of God's prophetic wisdom would be "sealed" to these exalted ones, but the despised "deaf" and "blind" would hear its message, would read it for themselves with humble gladness. They — "the meek" of the Land — would "increase their joy in the Lord", not only observing His Passover but actually finding in it their own deliverance every bit as marvellous as Israel's in Egypt.

**29:20,21 "For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off: That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought."**

Here is more divine "turning of things upside down."

By contrast with the humble pious faithful ones, there is "the terrible one", the Assyrian aggressor (v.5; 25:3) against whom none can stand. He will be brought to nought. And there are Judah's national leaders who are ever on the alert for some new iniquitous scheme. They, seeking only their own safety, will be summarily cut off. These specially come in for reprobation, for they are the men who through their wilful mishandling of the Word of God cause others to sin (v.11,12,18). In the gate of the city where they are supposed to administer justice they denigrate the one who reproves their unprincipled ways (is this Isaiah himself?). Can they so stretch the righteous law of God as to reduce it to ineffectiveness, and think to get away with such hypocrisy? This was to be precisely the pattern of rabbinic practice in the days of Jesus.

**29:22-24 "Therefore thus saith the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel. They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine."**

The scribes blundered badly in the pointing of the Hebrew here, including one dot too many. Corrected, the text should read: "the Lord who redeemed Abraham, the God of the house of Jacob..."

Here Isaiah looks back to deliverances in the experience of both Abraham and Jacob comparable to what was now to be wrought by God for His faithful in Israel. There are hints in Genesis (10:9; 11:31; see "Abraham" H.A.W., pp.10,11) that God brought Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees to save him from persecution. And Jacob had to face the rough treatment of Laban in Syria. He also "lost" his favourite son, and also had the rest under threat in Egypt.

Now, in Isaiah's day, the great rounding up of captives by Sennacherib, to march them off to Babylon, and also the mass flight of others to Egypt to escape the invasion, were experiences which the providence of God would correct. From both far-off lands the wretched people would return with joy and thanksgiving. They would be in truth "the work of God's hands," given more than adequate reason to sanctify His name as the God of Abraham and the Holy One of Israel.

And the outcome of this astonishing unlooked-for deliverance would be that a great many others who had been indifferent to their high religious privileges would "come to understand" and would "learn doctrine."

### **The Last Days (v.15-24)**

There are many indications throughout Isaiah that the rough pattern of events in Hezekiah's reign is to be repeated in Israel's later history. In every chapter this approach should be consistently borne in mind.

Those who keep up to date with conditions in the state of Israel today are well aware of how much materialism and godlessness there is among the holy people (v-15). Shady political practices by party leaders who know better than God are widespread and very evident (v. 16).

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They "turn things upside down" with their cocksure assumptions that they can manoeuvre affairs to bring salvation to the nation without any need for dependence on the God of their fathers.

It was like that also in the generation which heard the preaching of the apostles So God turned the spiritual wilderness of the Gentile world into a fruitful field (v.17) responding to the Sun of Righteousness, and the fruitful field of Israel He turned into wilderness.

Deaf and blind Gentiles (v. 18) heard the Word of truth and read it for themselves. And so also, markedly, in these Last Days, Gentiles honour the prophet's message vastly more than do the people of the prophets. The imminent coming of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah is now a well-established belief of not just an obscure handful of the New Israel but of the millions who as yet fail to grasp a greater fulness of divine truth.

In the first century "the terrible one" was not "brought to nought" (v.20). But in modern times it is certain that Messiah and his angels will save Israel out of the final desperate crisis in their affairs. And those who in Israel today are bitter opponents of Messianic truth will experience all the tribulation which befell the fanatics of A.D.70. Today there is an incredible hostility among the ultra-orthodox in Israel to plain Bible truth (v.20,21). So catharsis must needs come.

But with it, for the sake of the Fathers of the race (v.22), there will come also an open deliverance from the third and last of three frightful overturnings. The last and worst deportation of Jewish captives will be reversed by divine mandate (Joel 3:1-7; Isaiah 27:12,13; 19:22-25 etc). It will be a return not only to the Land but also to the God of their fathers and the truth of His Messiah (v.23).

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## Chapter 30

**30:1-5 "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: That walk to 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! Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion. For his princes were at Zoan, and his ambassadors came to Hanes. They were all ashamed of a people that could not profit them, nor be an help nor profit, but a shame, and also a reproach."**

Here is yet more woe invoked upon the rulers, but for a somewhat different reason than heretofore.

These men are "rebellious children" because they flout the authority of Jehovah, the Father of the nation (Dt. 21:18; Is. 1:2,4,23; 30:9). It is not that they have acted rashly, without due thought or deliberation. There has been plenty of this, but with the counsel of heaven completely and deliberately excluded. Isaiah and his fellow prophets, all of them competent to urge a wise policy of faithfulness, have been persistently and of set purpose excluded from their anxious discussions. The Spirit of the Lord is unwelcome (29:15), His wisdom is treated as altogether unnecessary.

"They cover with a covering" might mean any of five things, for this Hebrew root is very versatile:

- a. As in AV.
- b. "Weave a web" (cp. 59:5,6)
- c. "Make a league, or treaty." This is LXX reading.
- d. "Pour out a drink offering", to show that their agreement is made in earnest.
- e. "make a molten image."

Although at first sight out of place, it is the last which is most recommended by Isaiah's usage and the political setting. Basically the verb means 'to pour out', and is used (in v.22; 40:19; 44:10) for the casting of a molten image (as in Ex. 32:4 also).

This suggests that as a tactful gesture the politicians sent along with their deputation a beautiful replica of one of the cherubim (a winged ox, as could be demonstrated), in this way encouraging Pharaoh to believe that these men of Jerusalem worshipped essentially the same god as he did — Hathor, the sacred cow of ancient Egyptian antiquity.

If this is indeed correct, then this God-less cabinet operating behind Hezekiah's back were essentially falling back on the very policy wicked Ahaz had pursued — making a friend of one of the great powers by a show of loyalty to its national religion.

Thus they "added sin to sin."

Isaiah had only withering contempt for this kind of political astuteness. Although he had been sedulously shut out of their counsels, he knew precisely what they sought to achieve, and how. 'Your deputation is even now on its way down to Egypt.' For God's people to depend on Egypt was always a going down (e.g. Gen. 12:10).

Why did they not instead "ask of my mouth", that is, of Isaiah who was Jehovah's abundantly accredited spokesman? What a contrast with this fawning attempt at friendship with Pharaoh (whose title would sound, to a good Hebrew, like 'Bad Mouth!'). The prophet's language echoes the rebuke of Israel's treaty with the Gibeonites without "asking counsel at the mouth of the Lord" (Josh. 9:14).

There is a specially interesting feature in this situation. There are indications that Sennacherib had his spies in Jerusalem, who kept him informed about conditions and developments there (see H.Gt. ch. 13). So when the deputation went off to Egypt, the Assyrian king soon knew about it, and with rough mockery (2 Kgs. 18:21-24) he derided the duplicity of this Jewish statesmanship.

Also, Isaiah poured scorn on those who sought to "strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh" (cp. 20:5). Why be such fools as to "trust in the shadow of Egypt"? In the time of Moses it was the shadow of the Lord's pillar of cloud that had been the protection of God's people. Then why not now? Had not Isaiah earlier urged this faith on his panic-stricken contemporaries? (4:5,6).

But it was not long after this time that Hezekiah, hitherto helpless because of his leprosy, now enjoyed a miraculous cure. Forthwith he went into the temple to beseech the further help of his God, and at the same time he sent members of his cabinet to seek guidance from Isaiah (2 Kgs. 19:1,2). What a contrast with the Political scheming and deceit that had been attempted hitherto!

In spite of all the efforts at secrecy, Isaiah knew what was going forward "His (Pharaoh's) princes are at Zoan (to meet your deputation), and his ambassadors are at Hanes (where the deliberations are to take place)". The irony of it, for Zoan was the Egyptian city which had

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witnessed the marvels and might of Jehovah on behalf of his bondslave people (Ps. 78:12). And Hanes was Tahpanhes which, more than a century later, witnessed the overthrow of Egyptian might by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 43:9,10). At this point LXX reads, with significant difference: "For the rulers of Tanis (Tahpanhes) are evil angels." Did the Hebrew text which LXX followed have an extra word alluding back to "the destroyer" who smote the Egyptian firstborn (Ex.12:23)? — Make a treaty with the men of Egypt and they will do you no more good than destroying angels at Passover did to the Egyptians!

These Egyptian negotiators would prove to be ashamed of having as a possible ally such a state as Judah, "a people ('am, Jews) that could not profit them", but who were only "a shame and a reproach." Hence when at last Sabaka, the Pharaoh did launch his campaign in Judaea it was simply to stave off the Assyrian threat to Egypt, not to attempt to save Jerusalem.

**30:6,7 "The burden of the beasts of the south: into the land of trouble and anguish, from whence come the young and old lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent, they will carry their riches upon the shoulders of young asses, and their treasures upon the bunches of camels, to a people that shall not profit them. For the Egyptian shall help in vain, and to no purpose: therefore have I cried concerning this, Their strength is to sit still."**

In his usual style, Isaiah goes in for double meanings here, in one phrase after another.

The "burden" is a prophetic message of woe, like the long series in ch. 13-23. It also refers to the long train of asses and camels which have set off for the Negeb, as though heading for Elath, for exportation to some southern or eastern land. But this is just part of the camouflage adopted by the princes who are actually sending their deputation, accompanied by many rich and rare gifts, to Egypt. An inscription of Sargon II says that in his time "the peoples of Palestine carried presents to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, unto a prince who did not save." Now it was in the hope that that country's massive resources would yet come to Judah's aid via Gaza and the coastal plain. The much more difficult alternative via Negeb and the central tracks of the Sinai peninsula was intended to mislead the Assyrian intelligence service. But the scheme was "blown" through Isaiah's open publication of what was afoot. And of course he made himself enemies by such prophetic activities as these!

The route now taken would mean much hardship for the entire caravan. Also the results of the journey would only be "trouble and anguish."

The wilderness had been like that for Israel when they wearily travelled it to their Land of Promise (Dt. 8:15). Then what could they expect as now they chose to reverse direction? "Fiery flying serpents" had brought misery to the people in that far-off time (Num. 21:6). Could they expect anything better now? Let them read the symbolism of that experience, especially since the same vivid language described God's angels of evil and affliction (6:2). So also would their messengers (v.4 LXX) be.

These Egyptians would prove to be "a people that shall not profit them." To seek help there was to lean on a broken reed.

The prophetic nickname for Egypt was Rahab, the boastful, the braggart, the lazy crocodile (51:9), who was to be "broken in pieces" at the time when God "scattered His enemies with His strong arm" (Ps. 89:10) — here the defeat of Pharaoh's great army (2 Kgs. 19:9) at El-tekeh and the utter destruction of the Assyrians at Jerusalem are curiously brought together. With what biting sarcasm does Isaiah declare: "Their (Egyptian) strength is to sit still!" Had not Moses forbidden God's people to return to Egypt? (Dt. 17:16).

**30:8-11 "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: That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD: Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits: Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us."**

There is to be no escape from the prophet's unpalatable witness. His "burden" is to be written in duplicate — first, on a tablet for these wily rogues at court to read that it might provide full justification of the prophet's veracity when his testimony was proved true by events soon to follow; also, there must be a copy preserved in the volume of Isaiah's writings, and here it is. It is as though Isaiah were insisting: There will be a threefold fulfilment of this burden (like Ezekiel's "overturn, overturn, over-turn") — now, in the latter day (AV mg), and after a long time ("for ever"); cp. the Apocalypse (Rev. 1:11) with its relevance to the first century and to much later days, even to the glories of the Messianic kingdom. Isaiah had confidence that his message would be fully vindicated (cp. 8:1,2,10; Dt. 18:20-22). More than this, he deemed his "burden" to have the same permanent value as Moses' law (Dt. 31:22-26). The third fulfilment suggested is underlined by a repetition (in v.14) of the imagery of Psalm 2.

These who now received the prophet's tablet of revelation were "a rebellious people" (Dt. 32:20), "lying children" whose word (to Assyrian and to Egyptian alike) was not to be trusted. They even hoped to deceive Jehovah the Father of their race.

So, to make his witness the more incisive, Isaiah wrote down also *their* words of reprobation of divine truth (cp. v.2; 28:12; and the attitude of their fathers at Sinai):

"No more of your visions from heaven! An end to your prophesying what you say are 'right things'. Instead, give us something more tolerable — 'smooth things', whether true or not (28:15b), something we can use to hoodwink these Egyptians. Otherwise, get out of our way, with all your prating about 'the way of righteousness' and Him whom you call 'the Holy One of Israel'. How much will holiness help us out of this political mess we are in?"

They talked in exactly the same way to Isaiah's colleagues (Mic. 2:6,11).

**30:12-14 "Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon: Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, 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: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pit."**

The response to all this scornful cynicism is forthright; and it comes from the Holy One whose very Name has been despised. His word (v. 10) has been contemptuously pushed aside. Instead, the mainstay of their policy has become high war taxation (as in 2 Kgs. 15:20) to pay for the lavish "persuader" sent to Pharaoh (v.6), and a deviousness devoid of any vestige of integrity. "And they stay thereon," that is, they are confident that such a crooked policy will work.

So, by two vivid figures of speech, Isaiah shows that its utter collapse will be both inevitable and tragic.

First, there is the picture of an ominous crack developing in a high city wall

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(Jerusalem's defences!) and running down to the very foundations so that a gradual bulge and then complete collapse are inevitable, leaving a yawning gap as an open invitation to the enemy to mount an attack there. "A bowing wall shall ye be, a tottering fence" (Ps. 62:3).

The resulting collapse, as the wall crumbles into ruin, suggests another figure — that of an earthenware jar which has become unclean by reason of its foul contents and is therefore fit only to be smashed to fragments (Lev. 15:12). Now there is no usefulness, neither for charcoal cooking nor for ladling a cup of cold water.

**30:15-17 "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: and ye would not. But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift. One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on a hill."**

Now the Holy One of Israel offers an alternative to the calamity just foretold. But it depends on repentance — "returning" to their God. "Be my true Israel, and be content to rest in Me." As in the time of Ahaz (7:4 s.w.), it can be only by this quietness and confidence in their God that they can experience and display a real strength (cp. Hos. 14:3).

Evidently Assyrian secret agents reported this prophetic counsel to their masters, for before the siege of Jerusalem began Rabshakeh went out of his way to counter the effect of Isaiah's exhortation, his raucous bullying of Hezekiah's deputation (36:4-5) actually uses Isaiah's phraseology, pouring scorn on any trust in Jehovah and also mocking the futility of the lean-on-Egypt policy of the political schemers.

Apart from the faithful remnant, Isaiah made no impression on the faithless men of influence. They "would not". Their attitude became "a denial of every lesson taught by the plagues of Egypt, the Passover and the Exodus" (Birks).

"No!", they said, "rather than what you say, we will flee upon horses (*al sus nanus*)" — they had their escape route already planned — "we will ride upon the swift" (cp. "make haste", 28:16).

Indeed! comments Isaiah sardonically. Then flee you shall; and your swift steeds shall be pursued by those more swift. Here is a firm prophetic assurance that the faithless would abandon Jerusalem just before the siege began (as also did the Arabian mercenaries; 21:15), and yet would fall into the hands of the enemy.

Moses had forbidden his people ever to put trust in horses imported from Egypt (Dt. 17:16). And any contemplated return to Egypt was likewise proscribed as a vote of no confidence in the God of their fathers (Dt. 28:68).

But Moses and Isaiah alike spoke in vain. These men would rather lean on an arm of flesh. Horses and chariots would surely achieve their salvation (31:1)

Had they forgotten that Assyrian cavalry and chariots had established an empire — and that within two generations?

Through Moses and Joshua the promise had been made to Israel that "five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight" (Lev. 26:8; Josh. 23:10). But their faithlessness would reverse drastically this expectation (Lev. 26:36,37; Dt. 28:25; 32:30): "At the rebuke of five shall ye (all) flee; till ye (the faithful remnant) be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain (Zion), and as an ensign (a pole) on a hill top." Here was a reminder of an earlier promise that "the root of David (Hezekiah himself) shall stand for an ensign of the

people" (11:10) — the seemingly dead pole would root itself firmly. This is precisely what happened to Hezekiah, and his experience became a prophecy to the nation.

**30:18,19 "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: 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."**

"Therefore" — because your sins require the chastisement of heaven (Kay) and because God can come to your aid only when there is repentance — the Lord will wait and appear to be totally inactive, but this seeming heedlessness is really to create an opportunity for gracious rescue. "The longsuffering of our Lord is salvation" (2 Pet. 3:15).

"Therefore will he be exalted that he may have mercy on you" reads somewhat strangely. It may be that in the Hebrew word for 'exalted' there is an example of the fairly common confusion between D and R (see Ps. 119:25,153). The alternative: "he will be silent" now gives an easy parallelism with the first half of the verse (cp. also Dt. 30:1-3). "The Lord shall...repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left" (Dt. 32:36).

This lovingkindness of God is not for all who belong to Israel. In itself that name is no qualification. The blessing is for "them that wait for him" — those who hang on in faith that their God will not let them down. These are in sharp contrast with the others who put their trust in horses and chariots and the might of Egypt. So this promise of succour is not even for all in Jerusalem, but for "the people that dwell *in Zion* at Jerusalem", that is, those whose faith is centred in the temple and their Jehovah who is worshipped there. "For God will save Zion, and will build (i.e. rebuild) the cities of Judah" (Ps. 69:35 — a psalm belonging to this period).

There comes in here a significant switch to singular pronouns (v. 19), with reference to Hezekiah, without whose fine example the faithful remnant would be all at sea.

"Thou shalt weep no more." The good king had cause enough for tears — the sorry state of his nation, and the doom pronounced upon himself: "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live." So he "wept sore" and "prayed unto the Lord." Healed forthwith by a cake of figs (No! by the irrepressible faith that was in him; 38:1 -3,21), he lost no time in going "into the house of the Lord, with clothes rent and covered with sackcloth" (even after 2 Kgs. 20:6), to intercede for his people and his Land (37:1,2,15-22), and to give thanks for the answer to his earlier prayer.

The rest of his reign was such a happy experience of personal and national health and prosperity that Isaiah's words were literally true: "thou shalt weep no more."

The ensuing verses go on to outline the three necessary conditions for this extraordinary outpouring of protection, healing, and blessing:

- a. Repentance (as in v. 15).
- b. The abolition of all idol-worship (v.22).
- c. Careful heed to the message of the prophets (v.20c,21).

**30:20,21 "And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: 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."**

Here is a prophecy of the people of Jerusalem being called on to endure siege conditions — very restricted supplies of food and water — precisely as had been more drastically foretold earlier (3:1). Yet they will never reach the point of starvation (33:16). In fact, v.23 goes on to make a deliberate contrast with such a prospect.

This limitation of supplies of food and drink came on Isaiah himself very specially, "the teacher removed into a corner" (the noun here can be read as singular or plural, but the verb is singular, and the allusion in Revelation 1:10 surely settles it that one teacher is referred to: the plural reading would mean the entire coterie of prophets Micah, Nahum, Joel, Obadiah, Habakkuk and others).

Evidently Isaiah had been put under restraint (house arrest?) because of his personal unpopularity with the princes, and the "subversive" character of his message (37:2; cp. 8:1 7). Micaiah had had a like experience, and for a like reason (1 Kgs. 22:27). And the situation was to repeat itself in Jeremiah's time (Jer. 37:16,17).

But of course it was not by decision of Hezekiah that this persecution came upon the prophet, but because of the animosity of princes and priests who had already exerted themselves to deride his message and influence.

Here now was assurance that the restriction was not to last. This loyal teacher from God would "not be removed into a corner any more." Vindicated at last by the healing of the king and the sweeping away of Assyrian menace, Isaiah would be an honoured teacher through to the end of Hezekiah's glorious fifteen years, even when his message again became unpopular (39:5-8). Hence the emphatic promise that "thine eyes shall see thy teacher, and thine ears shall *hear*." Isaiah had faithfully committed his inspired word to writing, but the teaching of the book had been set aside or lightly disregarded (28:11,12; 29:18), so the personal witness must be renewed.

There must be no turning to the right hand or to the left. The phrases describe trenchantly enough a tendency to go away from the right paths of the Lord, especially into ways of idolatry (Dt. 5:32; Josh. 1:7). But just now the trend was towards political idolatry — turning to the right to make an alliance with Egypt, or to the left, to placate the remorseless Assyrians.

"A voice behind thee," that of the prophet himself still standing staunchly, in the right path, would continue to rebuke and to keep conscience alive. (Could there be a more specific locative sense to "behind thee"?)

**30:22 "Ye shall defile also the covering of thy graven images of silver, and the ornament of thy molten images of gold: thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence."**

Hezekiah's reign had begun with a wholesome reformation and a fine orgy of idol-smashing (2 Chr. 31:1). But it is not to be expected that a complete clearance was made. Now, years later, one of the necessary conditions of the blessing of heaven was that he provide a demonstration of complete intolerance of any infractions of the Second Commandment.

Most idols were fashioned out of wood and then covered with silver or gold (40:19; Jer. 10:3,4). The word used here for, "cast away" actually means "scatter." It is that used to describe Moses' strewing of the golden calf on the waters of the stream from the smitten rock after the idol had been burnt and pulverised. The like process is indicated here also (cp. 2 Kgs. 23:6).

The contemptuous phrasing suggests — what was almost invariably the case —

that the worship of these false gods was essentially a sex-religion. "Get thee hence!"

**30:23,24 "Then shall he give the rain of thy seed, that thou shalt sow the ground withal; and bread of the increase of the earth, and it shall be fat and plenteous: in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures. The oxen likewise and the young asses that ear the ground shall eat clean provender, which hath been winnowed with the shovel and with the fan."**

"In that day" (which is always the day when God goes into action) one of the rewards of a faithful return to Him will be the blessings of extraordinary fruitfulness and prosperity — abundant rainfall (v.25; Lev. 26:4), excellent growing conditions, and such crops as will mean food fit for humans now being fed in abundance to the animals. When the Assyrians were at the gate, this remarkable promise was expanded to assure the superabundant harvest appropriate to a Year of Jubilee (2 Kgs. 19:29-31). A land ravaged from end to end by destructive invaders would find itself marvellously provided for by the compassion of a caring God.

But there are hints here also of an allegorical meaning. "Doth God take care for oxen?" (1 Cor. 9:9). And are young asses employed to ear, that is, plough (Latin: *arare*) the ground? And would any farmer take the trouble to winnow out chaff from the provender fed to his beasts? So, via special blessing on land and animals, God promises a new era of spiritual richness for His people.

**30:25 "And there shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers and streams of waters in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall."**

The promise of ample rain and unusual fruitfulness (v.23) is expanded here. Even the bare hillsides, normally arid and desolate, will burgeon with growth.

But it is only reference to the cataclysmic destruction of the Assyrian camp which harmonizes the stark contrast in this passage. It was to be a night of great carnage, with all the might of the enemy reduced to ruin, and especially the siege-towers, already prepared but not yet in place (37:33) would be smashed up (see on 33:18). These were astonishing developments to foretell before they happened.

**30:26 "Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound."**

Literality is impossible here. Nor does Isaiah himself encourage any attempt at it, for earlier he has spoken of the time of Israel's humiliation as "the moon confounded, and the sun ashamed" (24:23). And later, concerning the Messianic kingdom filled with comfort and blessing for his people: "*Thy* sun shall no more go down, neither shall *thy* moon withdraw itself" (60:20). And the present context points to a like meaning: "in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his People, and healeth the stroke of their wound."

But there are various overtones in this language. The sevenfold intensification of light may be meant to suggest the happy divine reversal of the sevenfold wrath of God against His people, as foretold in Leviticus 26:18,21,24,28. And since the word here for "sun" is not *shemesh* but *chamah*, the sun's intense heat, a word very often used for the fury of the Lord (e.g. 34:2; 59:18; 63:3,5,6), there might even be a suggestion of God's use of Israel in judgment against recalcitrant Gentiles (60:12; Ps. 149:9).

Again, there is some evidence for a rabbinic view that the light of a full moon is

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only one seventh of the light of the sun, in which case there is suggested here a week of Passover full moon. It was at Passover when the stroke of the Lord removed the Assyrian threat. And the sevenfold intensification of the sun's light would also point to the forty-ninth Year of Jubilee, which is certainly part of the present context.

Again, is it inappropriate to draw attention to the fact that the only two "fenced cities" not destroyed by Sennacherib were Libnah (Hebrew for moon) and Jerusalem, the "sun" of the nation (consider Ps. 150:1)? In any case, there is here the undeniable idea of Israel being associated with the Glory of the Lord, as certainly happened in the remarkable theophany of deliverance just referred to.

"I kill, and I make alive: I wound, and I heal" (Dt. 32:39). Never was there, in all Israel's history, a more signal demonstration of the truth of these words.

**30:27,28 "Behold, the name of the LORD cometh from far, burning with his anger, and the burden thereof is heavy: his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire: And his breath, as an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity: and there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err."**

The intimations of an imminent theophany bringing overpowering destruction become more and more specific as the occasion draws nearer (cp. 29:5-8). It is called "the name of the Lord" with allusion to the deliverance God brought to His people in the time of Moses (Ex. 3:13,15; 6:3). He is Jehovah, the God who made covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He who is and was and is to come, who promised and guided in the past, who is active in the desperate situation of the present, and who will bring all His purposes with His people to complete fulfilment. Nor is it artificial to see allusion here to the great deliverance from Egypt, for Isaiah's mind is almost obsessed with the comparison between that occasion, never to be lost from the nation's memory, and the divine rescue which divine inspiration taught him to expect in his own time; e.g. 4:5,6; 10:24-26; 11:15,16; 49:9,10 —these are only a few examples out of a long catalogue that could be compiled.

"The name of the Lord cometh from far" is a strange expression. Its strangeness has led most commentators to give it the meaning of "from remote time," but Isaiah's six other usages of this Hebrew expression plainly refer to remote distance. Here, then, is support for the idea that the angelic judgment on the Assyrian army came in a mighty whirlwind from the Red Sea. "His lips — his breath (Acts 2:2) — full of indignation" suggests thunder; "his tongue a devouring fire" — lightning; "as an overflowing stream" describes a tremendous downpour filling every wadi with a mighty torrent (LXX: like water sweeping in a torrent bed); and RV: "in thick rising smoke" (AV: the burden thereof is heavy) suggests the frightening eye of the storm, like a pillar of cloud and fire. Again, the word for "midst" is really "causing a division," as happened between Israelites and Egyptians at the crossing of the Red Sea. The destructive effect of a whirlwind can be very localised. Presumably this is how the wreck of the Assyrian camp is to be accounted for, whilst the faithful in Jerusalem went unharmed. Perhaps the figure of the sieve has the same idea of a separation between those appointed to destruction and those to be preserved.

But "a bridle in the jaws of the *people*" uses the normal word for Israel, and "bridle" suggests the plan of the faithless to make a fast escape from the beleaguered city: "We will flee upon horses...we will ride upon the swift" (30:16). Yet such a policy would only "cause them to err."

**30:29 "Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the LORD, to the mighty One of Israel."**

This passage, even if without any parallel, would be decisive as a prophecy of the Assyrian destruction taking place at Passover:

- a. "A holy solemnity"; i.e. one of the great feasts.
- b. "In the night"; Passover stands alone in this respect: Ex. 12:42.
- c. "Gladness of heart" (*simchath lebab*). To this day the Hebrew phrase describes a feast of the Lord.
- d. The word for "pipe" is derived from the verb to "slay", a connection which makes no sense whatever except as a reminiscence of the slaying of the firstborn and of the Egyptian charioteers.
- e. "Ye shall have a song" might perhaps refer to Ex. 15, but more probably to Ps. 114-118 the Paschal Hallel, and both of them replete with allusions to Passover deliverance.
- f. "The rock of Israel" (RV) reads readily of the altar of burnt-offering, "the precious corner stone...the stone of stumbling" (see on 8:14), The blood of all the Passover lambs was poured out at the base of this altar.
- g. Isaiah 31:5; 37:36; 26:20,4; 29:1; Ps. 44:1,22, (a Hezekiah psalm) — more Passover allusions.

**30:30-33 "And the LORD shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall shew the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest and hailstones. For through the voice of the LORD shall the Assyrian be beaten down, which smote with a rod. And in every place where the grounded staff shall pass, which the LORD shall lay upon him, it shall be with tabrets and harps: and in battles of shaking will he fight with it. For Tophet is ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared; he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it."**

In a mighty climax of language the theophany of destruction against the Assyrians is described in more detail. "The glory of his voice" is the thunder of the storm (Ps. 29:4 etc; Jn. 12:28,29; Ex. 19:16; 20:18; contrast Is. 37:23). And with this, lightning on a massive scale, as in Psalm 83:13,14 which also describes whirlwind. "Scattering and tempest" are cloud-burst (Delitsch) and a heavy destroying rain. A storm of hail is mentioned repeatedly; e.g. 28:2; 32:19. Hail and fire were elements of the Egyptian deliverance (Ex. 9:18-26). And all these phenomena are brought together in Ps. 77:15-20, another eloquent Hezekiah psalm linking the deliverance from Egypt with the more recent rescue.

As Moses' rod, held out over Egypt and over the waters of the Red Sea brought judgment, so also now the Assyrian (Ashur, actually) is to be "beaten down with a rod of smiting." Each time this appointed staff (staff of doom; RVm) in the hands of Isaiah now passes to and fro, there will be battles of shaking (s.w. 19:16), that is, earthquake, as He (the Lord) fights "in her" (Jerusalem). "The breath of the Lord" (cp. "blast"; 37:7) will be "kindled in *her* (Heb.);" "*her* pile will be fire and much wood." (9:5; Ps. 46:9). Here is strong emphasis that the destruction is to be at Jerusalem and for Jerusalem's sake. Constantly there is promise of a repetition of the early Passover theophany in Egypt (Ex. 14:21; 15:8).

"From yesterday (i.e. Isaiah's earlier prophecies) Tophet (=fireplace) is ordained." The valley round the south-west corner of Jerusalem may have been

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already the place of burning of the city's rubbish, in which case the multitudinous human bodies and animal carcasses were perhaps dragged thither (by surviving Assyrians taken prisoner?), there to be destroyed, thus saving the city from stench and plague.

But there is here also a clever play on words. The king (*melech*) is also Moloch who in the decadent times of Ahaz had been honoured by having royal children passed through the fire (2 Kgs. 16:3) there in Tophet. And the word "prepared" is that which describes Jachin, the great brazen pillar where a new king stood to be anointed in the presence of God and the people (2 Kgs. 11 ;4; 23:3).

Thus is presented a strongly ironic picture of Jehovah presenting in Tophet the Assyrian god Ashur, a mere idol of wood and metal, to be passed through the fire to Moloch! In this way is Ashur 'dedicated' to rule over the people of Israel — by a fiery consecration which consumes him utterly!

### The Last Days

Isaiah 30 is quite explicitly about "the end time": "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" (v.8).

But how the emphasis varies!

There is one picture after another of a wayward Israel determined to work out its own salvation, and with little fear of God, or of trembling for its own inadequacies (v.1). Thus, in these days more than ever, they still "add sin to sin" — the rejection of the claims of Christ is added to a long-lasting rejection of God and His law.

Specially, there is castigation of a ready dependance on political manoeuvring. Today, as then (v. 2-5) a treaty with Egypt will solve their biggest headaches. The fools! Haven't they wit to see that there is no real intention to be firm friends with Israel? Any attempt at this is bound to collapse in ruins. Not for nothing does the Bible prophecy speak of Egypt as one of Israel's outstanding enemies in the last days (Jl. 3:19; Dt. 28:68; Is. 19:18-20).

Yet Israel has blithely given Sinai back to Egypt, and has got virtually nothing in return. It is not just the princes of Zoan who are fools. Even as politicians the Knesset are a poor lot, as they will know when they find that "the strength of Egypt is to sit still" (v.7).

Religiously this people of Israel has little to recommend it to the care of the angels: "a rebellious people, lying children, who know not the law of the Lord" (v.9). They neither know nor want to know. To those who can tell them they are bland and pleasant until the Word of God is in the mouth of those who are the New Israel, and then: "Prophesy not unto us right things...prophesy deceits...Cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us" (v.10).

Instead there is a strange mixture of liberal attitudes with their very opposite — a policy of "oppression and perverseness." One hears disturbing stories about the treatment of the Arab minority (v.12).

Be warned! says Isaiah; there will come a sudden collapse, like the disintegration of a wall which looks as though it could stand for centuries, or like the smashing of a potter's vessel (v.13,14) into lots of useless fragments (the only thing to be done with a temple jar that has been declared unclean; Lev. 15:12).

Only in returning to their God is there any hope of rest (v.15). This has been the lesson of many an experience in their past history, but there is no will to learn. "And ye would not." A great accumulation of prophetic warnings make that truth as plain as brightest daylight that there can be no Messiah for Israel until first there is a becoming repentance. (See T.E. ch. 2).

There is now some sign of this, thank God, but only on a meagre scale. Even among the New Israel there is reluctance to recognize this truth or to show compliance.

Instead, little Israel — "the world's fourth super-power"! — continues to cultivate the arts of war: "We will ride upon the swift" and thereby make no friends nor assurance of safety (v.16). One day there will come national disintegration: "One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one" (v.17). And yet there is a promise that Jerusalem will survive, as it did in the matchless days of Hezekiah (v.17). But there can come no salvation except there be first "the voice of thy cry", the lament and plea of repentant Jewish hearts, for always, and very very patiently, God looks and waits for this (v.18,19).

At last the time of adversity and affliction (v. 20) will change when heed is given to God-sent teachers hitherto disregarded. Willingness to walk in the right way (v.21), an utterly new feature in Israel's national life, will lead on to vigorous rejection of the evils which God so completely abhors (v.22).

And the entire nation will move into the gracious blessings and comforts of a Year of Jubilee (v.23-25), the glorious Messianic Age long foreshadowed. Once and for all God will "bind up the breach of his people, and heal the stroke of their wound" (v. 26).

On the other hand, for those who hated the chosen people with deep, bitter, and intensifying hatred, and should have known better, there will be a mighty theophany of judgment. The last attempt to "lead Israel off, a bridle in their jaws" (v.28), will come to nought.

The deliverance, greater by far than that under Moses, will again come at Passover (v.29); and a devastation, greater by far than happened at the Red Sea, will bear final witness that "he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye." Tophet, with more than one horror fulfilment to its 'credit' will become a permanent museum (66:24) outmatching Yad Vashem. The lesson taught Sennacherib and his Ashur was nothing compared to what this will be.

## Chapter 31

**31:1-3 "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD! Yet he also is wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back his words: but will arise against the house of the evildoers, and against the help of them that work iniquity. Now 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."**

A very plain and straightforward passage, repeating the censure of 30:2-7. This set purpose of Jerusalem's politicians to defeat Assyrian invasion with a multitude of Egyptian chariots had evidently become an obsession. The intention was, however, known to Sennacherib's intelligence service and treated with derision (36:6-9). The Holy One of Israel treats it in the same way.

It is not to be believed that Hezekiah, man of faith, was behind such a policy. If

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he had forgotten the Law's command to the kings of Judah, Isaiah would have reminded him (Dt. 17:16). And did not his coronation psalm declare: "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God" (Ps. 20:7)?

If these princes of Judah had read their Bible, if they had celebrated Passover in the right spirit, would it not have been ground into their minds that all the military might of Egyptian chariotry can do nothing either against or for the people of Jehovah when the Holy One of Israel lifts up himself?

Yet the temptation to rely on Egypt must have been great. One ancient historian states that at one time between Memphis and Thebes there were a hundred stables, each with two hundred horses.

Against this, the memory of the crossing of the Red Sea lost its effect on faithless minds. It was easy to forget that the God of Israel too has His chariots of spirit, not flesh — the cherubim of glory (Ez. 1; Zech. 6:1-8; and especially Dt. 20:1).'

There is strong irony in the reminder that "Jehovah also is strong...and will not call back his words." This last phrase may refer to the ban (in Dt. 17:16) on any reliance on Egyptian chariots — such a prohibition still stands. An alternative is to read the words as meaning that, whereas on not a few occasions there has come (because of human change of heart) a modification in divine decision, regarding this principle of reliance on Egypt (or on the modern equivalent of Egypt) no change of mind on God's part is ever possible (see, for example, Ez. 17:15).

The collision, between the Egyptian and Assyrian forces took place at El-tekeh, the outcome being (according to Sennacherib's account) a massive overthrow of the Egyptian multitude. It involved the capture of many highly-placed officers in Pharaoh's army.

**31:4,5 "For thus hath the LORD spoken unto me, Like as the lion and the young lion roaring on his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, he will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so shall the LORD of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof. As birds flying, so will the LORD of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing over he will preserve it."**

Here is another of Isaiah's explicit declarations of divine inspiration of his prophecies. But how did the Lord speak to him? In his initiation it was through an angel (6:6,7). But his phrase: "the valley of vision" suggests another medium.

Here he has two very vivid figures of speech which may have been visions in the first instance, and which were then interpreted for him.

The first is of a lion which has a lamb (a Passover lamb?) under his paw and which he is determined to keep for himself in spite of the efforts of shepherds ringing him round and eager to have the sheep for themselves. It is a picture of mount Zion surrounded by hostile nations, determined to gain possession of the hill of God, but He as a lion fends them off with His roar and His strength. Is not Zion called Ari-el, the Lion of God, the name of the One who dwells there?

"So shall the Lord of hosts (of angels; 37:36) come down to fight upon (not, for) mount Zion".

The figure changes, and needs no explanation. As a mother bird flutters over its young, so will Jehovah defend Jerusalem.

The specially important detail here is the use of the word "passing over." Here it clearly does not mean "pass by" (an idea often wrongly read into Ex. 12:23), but rather, "hovering over in protection." It is the rare verb (*pasach*) from which comes

"Passover" (*pesach*). In this context it is another clear reference to Passover as the time when God's deliverance of Jerusalem took place, a repeat on an even more impressive scale, of God's rescue of Israel from Egypt by an angelic stroke of It is time to bring together the various allusions in Isaiah and Hezekiah psalms and elsewhere, to Passover as the time of year when Sennacherib's army was destroyed:

- a. This passage (31:5) explicitly.
- b. 30:29: "a song in the night when a holy solemnity is kept." See details in the commentary there.
- c. 26:20: "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment until the indignation be overpast...the earth shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain" (more slain than can be buried). All this is Passover language.
- d. 26:20,21: "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment until the indignation be overpast...the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain" (more slain than can be buried). Passover language again.
- e. 29:1: "add ye year to year, let them kill sacrifices." The new year began in Passover month, and of course it was then especially when sacrifices — the Passover lambs — were slain in such numbers. The context of this passage is certainly the Assyrian denouement.
- f. 52:12: "Ye shall not go out with haste, nor go with flight: for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rearward." The entire passage is about Passover with specific reference to Israel's experience when coming out of Egypt and about deliverance from the Assyrians. Note particularly verse 4.
- g. 37:36: "Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians..." And the next verse: "and Sennacherib departed..." uses the word from which "Nisan" is derived. The same word comes again in 38:12 about the healing of Hezekiah's sickness, which happened at the same time.
- h. Psalm 102:13: "The time to favour her: yea, the set time is come," Here the Hebrew for "set time" is a word which always refers to a feast of the Lord. In its Hezekiah reference this can only be Passover. The same verse has: "Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion." (There is, of course, Messianic reference also.)
- i. Isaiah 36:10 (the words of Rabshakeh, the renegade Jew — see H.Gt.):  

"and am I now come up without Jehovah against this land to *destroy* it? *Jehovah* said unto me, Go up against this land and *destroy* it." Here the word "destroy" is the same as in Ex. 12:23. Rabshakeh knew about the Passover observance, and represented himself as God's destroying angel commissioned to operate as in the first Passover.
- j. Joel 2:23 should read: "He hath given you (the children of Zion) a teacher of righteousness (why ever did AV read it so differently?) and the Lord will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain (in the autumn) and latter rain in the first month (in Nisan, just before Passover)." The context certainly concerns the Second Coming.

**31:6,7 "Turn ye unto him from whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted. For in that day every man shall cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which your own hands have made unto you for a sin."**

Passages like this make it more and more certain that whilst the zeal of Hezekiah had brought about a substantial repentance among his people, the nation as a whole still held with strong inclination to the corruptions initiated in the time of Ahaz. But the atmosphere had changed so much from that evil era that now they "deepened revolt", that is, their apostasy had had to go underground (see 29:15 for the same idea).

However, "in that day" of God's open and violent action there would not only be a massive judgment against the cruel confident enemy but also such a scarifying effect on these secret apostates as to drive them to despise and jettison their contemptible images (2:20; 30:22; Dt. 9:21), just as hitherto they had thrust away the word of the Lord (s.w. 8:6; 30:12).

It needs to be recognized clearly that this turning away from a false way of life was not to be the necessary pre-condition for the deliverance which was now repeatedly being promised by the prophet. That was assured in any case. But its impact was to be shattering on the unworthy among the citizens of Jerusalem also (cp. 33:14).

**31:8,9 "Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, not of a mighty man; and the sword, not of a mean man, shall devour him: but he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be discomfited. And he shall pass over to his strong hold for fear, and his princes shall be afraid of the ensign, saith the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem."**

The modernists are quite dogmatic that the two preceding verses (6,7) are out of place or are interpolations, because — they say — with them out of the way this chapter runs on as a straight declaration of judgment on the Assyrians. Why is it that they overlook the importance of that mighty theophany as a dramatic lesson also for the benefit of the wayward majority of the population of Jerusalem? It was a double purpose act of God.

There is no mistaking the plain intention of the Almighty, as now set out here, to destroy the might of Assyria at Jerusalem and to scare out of their wits those who might survive.

The stroke will be applied by a sword wielded by no one "born of man" (Kay's incisive translation). The enemy will "flee from the sword" (of Jehovah — not specified), and his crack troops ("his young men") who survive will be "put to task work," restoring the desolations they have so callously created. There is an impressive contrast: Here a king flees and his soldiers have to labour in bondage. But in the next verse (32:1), king Hezekiah reigns in righteousness, and princes (his new cabinet) rule in judgement.

The sword of the Lord is a constantly repeated idea in both history and prophecy — against false Balaam (Num. 22:23), against the Godless Canaanites (Josh. 5:13), against callous invading Midianites (Jud. 7:20), against all the heterogeneous enemies of Israel in the last days (Jer. 25:16,27; Ez. 38:21; Is. 34:6; 66:16).

Literally, the very awkward Hebrew phrase reads: "and his ensign from the face of the sword (of Jehovah)." This needs to be linked with the previous phrase: "his rock shall pass away." There is also a double contrasting allusion to the great victory of Israel over Amalek at the smitten rock, a victory only assured because the hands of Moses were held up to heaven. This was the ensign which put courage and power into the troops led by Joshua. So the place was called Jehovah-nissi

(Ex. 17:15. s.w.) There is an immediate allusion to this in 32:2: "as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." "For their rock (i.e. the god they worship) is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges" - so declared Moses (Dt. 32:31). And so it transpired when "his (the Assyrian's) rock passed away." Later Isaiah has a superbly scornful picture of the gods of the invaders being salvaged from the carnage outside Jerusalem; loaded on a cart, they depend for their survival on the "weary beast" which draws them away from the devastating glory of the God of Israel (47:1-7). And the boastful princes who command Sennacherib's troops are either so many corpses lying around (37:36) or they flee in terror at the sight and power of the Glory of the Lord "whose fire is in Zion, and his furnace (the pillar of fire, as at the first Passover) is in Jerusalem."

### The Last Days

As with the beginning of chapter 30, so also in these opening verses there is anticipation of a feverish effort to make friends with Egypt and ensure its support. That treaty with Egypt has been made, and has already proved worthless and in time will be seen to be an even poorer investment.

The 700 B.C. trust in horses and chariots has its close counterpart today in Israel's dedication to the most up-to-date of modern armaments. And over against that is the nation's undeniable failure to put trust in the God of their fathers. Israeli politicians especially have no aspiration at all to emulate the faith of Abraham, or of Hezekiah.

Politically, but not at all geographically, a case can be made for seeing the United States as the modern equivalent of the Egypt of Isaiah's day. If this is valid, then there is special significance in the words: "He that helpeth and he that is holpen shall fall down, and they all shall fall down together" (v.3).

This faithlessness of modern Israel will yet find its rebuke, for "he (Jehovah) is wise, and will bring evil...against the house of evildoers" (v.2).

Nevertheless, Jerusalem is God's city, and He will not suffer any multitude of nations to wrest it from Him. "The Lord of hosts (of angels; Mt. 24:31) will come down to fight upon mount Zion" (v.4). That phrase "come down" is the language of theophany (cp. 64:1; Ex. 19:20; Gen. 11:5; 18:21), but in the last days there will be an impressive literality about it.

And also about verse 5, with its clear allusion to Passover! Several of the passages listed in the earlier commentary on verse 5 obviously have a reference to the end time; Daniel describes the end of the age with a word (*mo'ed*) which very frequently, indeed nearly always, refers to one of the great feasts of the Lord (8:19; 12:7). Nor can it be accident that the mysterious repeated "three and a half years", if measured from the Feast of Trumpets, finds its conclusion at Passover. Also, a remarkable passage in Joe! foretells "a teacher of righteousness" and links him with "the latter rain in the first month (Passover)" (2:23).

The figure of "birds flying...and hovering over" Jerusalem (v.5) was turned by Jesus into the simile of "a hen gathering her chickens under her wings" (Mt. 23:37) — there must be a link there, for the figure comes nowhere else in all the Bible. Jesus made his big efforts on behalf of Jerusalem at four successive Passovers — "and they would not." Again, in A.D.70, the divine persuasion came at Passover, for the siege began immediately after the feast. Is there not a further pointer here to a final Passover intervention — when there are more distinct signs of repentance in God's people? This factor is the necessary prelude to any experience of divine deliverance: "Turn ye unto him from whom the children of Israel have deeply

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revolted" (v.6).

When that change of disposition comes, there will be such a spirit of revulsion against all the crude materialism and self-indulgence (v.7) so familiar in Israel today that it will be like seeing a nation new-born.

This repentance will be in the first place the cause, and afterwards on a wider scale the consequence, of the sudden and violent divine intervention to save Israel.

The vindictive and confident enemies round about will turn and flee from the Land because there they experience the majesty of the Glory of the Lord (v.8,9), and can only cower away from it, leaving their multitudinous dead in a war-stricken countryside.

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## Chapter 32

**32:1,2 "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."**

Here is another of the dramatic switches of tone and idea so characteristic of Isaiah (cp.10:34-11:1; 34:11-14,-35:1; 29:16,17; 30:17,18). The allusions to "king...princes...rock" carry over from the previous verses; but there is a fine transition from judgment and fear to godliness and tranquility.

Who is this king? "Hezekiah or the Messiah may be intended," says the Soncino Bible. The correct answer is: both, the one being (as right through this prophecy) the prototype of the other.

And, in that setting, the princes are Hezekiah's cabinet, appointed on his recovery from sickness — so different in character from the scheming politicians who sent their ambassadors to Zoan (34:4).

In more senses than one, good Hezekiah became a hiding place from the wind (God's Spirit of judgment). In his suffering "the Lord laid on him the iniquity of all" his people (53:6); he was a superb prototype of a suffering Messiah. But also in his personal example and leadership: "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles. *And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah*" (2 Chr. 32:7,8).

Here was one who proved himself to be "a covert from the tempest" of the wrath of God, so that the holy city did not share in the mighty expression of judgment which was already foretold. It would come so near as to paralyse with fright the ungodly in Israel (33:14), and yet the experience of devastation which shattered the Assyrian pride brought no ruin on Jerusalem (30:30; 29:5,6).

Instead of a rush of mighty waters (*zarem*), Zion, the "dry place", would know the placidity of streams of water, as at Siloam. "There is a river the streams (s.w.) whereof make glad the city of God" (Ps. 46:4). Is it possible that at the time of the Lord's hurricane men actually cowered in their fright in the conduit lately driven through the rock from the Virgin's Fountain?

The people in Jerusalem were to be reminded of how their forefathers in the wilderness "a weary land" had water from a smitten rock the "rock of glory"

(Heb) which also sheltered them from the fierce heat of the sun and from the animosity of Amalekite enemies — cp. the earlier allusion — (in 31:8 Hebrew text) to the "ensign, banner" (Ex. 17:6,15) of the enemy.

**32:3-8 "And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerer shall be ready to speak plainly. The vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful. For the vile person will speak villainy, and his heart will work iniquity, to practice hypocrisy, and to utter error against the LORD, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail. The instruments also of the churl are evil: he deviseth wicked devices to destroy the poor with lying words, even when the needy speaketh right. But the liberal deviseth liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand."**

When the student of prophecy encounters a passage like this one, full of abstract terms, it is important to remember that the prophets were not given to moralising in an abstract fashion (which is the way nearly all the commentators take this paragraph). Rather, it is necessary here to look for *specific* reference such as is appropriate to this Isaiah context.

Already several indications have been noted of corrupt administration in Hezekiah's kingdom during the critical period when his sickness compelled him to withdraw from government (29:4; 22:15ff etc). With the king's miraculous recovery there came, of course, a dramatic change in the quality of the men now handling the reins of authority. This has already been intimated in verse 1.

And now, in the repetition of the word "liberal" there comes a further suggestion of transformation in the character of the administration, for the word *nadib* has a basic meaning of "the wholesome goodhearted use of power." Its cognate word *nadab* nearly always describes those who are willing-hearted towards God and His temple service. Hence "liberal" (*nadib*) means a high-souled ruler or prince — a *noble*, in both senses of the word.

The present paragraph, then is not to be read in general terms in praise of good wholesome men and decrying the value of those who show a mean or selfish spirit. It is to be understood as a prophecy of an imminent dramatic change for the better in the quality of the administration of Hezekiah's kingdom.

"Eyes...ears...heart (that is, mind)...and tongue" (v.3,4) of those well-placed to influence the life of the nation for good will be uplifted. The earlier prophetic censures (6:10; 29:10) will no longer be necessary. Those who had been mocked by the sophisticated men of Jerusalem (28:9-11) as quite inadequate for the public affairs of the nation would come to the fore.

And, conversely, vile and churlish men who had gloried in the adulation formerly accorded to them because in the seats of power, would now be seen for what they truly were — not noble or bountiful, but self-seekers and hypocrites, men who, whatever their profession, were essentially, "against the Lord" and oppressors of the truly devout, the meek of the earth.

The word for "vile" (*nabal*) is well exemplified by its reference to Nabal, the rough, sensual, utterly self-centred boor who scorned David, the Lord's anointed (1 Sam. 25).

But there are indications of contrast of a different kind — that of Hezekiah's beneficent rule over against 'the evil tricks of the trickster' (v.7, Wade) who "devised wicked devices, to destroy the poor with lying words." Such phrases are

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used about the Assyrian invader in a diversity of passages (e.g. Nah. 1:11; is. 54:16; 13:5). The cunning of Rabshakeh and his skilful perversion of facts in his propaganda war match very well the scornful tirade now used against him as well as against those inside the city who would not have hesitated to collaborate selfishly had they been able.

However, the operation of selfish political scheming, both inside the city and outside its walls, was soon to be swept away, and instead "the noble ruler (Hezekiah) will devise noble policies, and by these noble intentions shall he rise up (Heb.)", that is, from his sick bed.

**32:9-11 "Rise up, ye women that are at ease; hear my voice, ye careless daughters; give ear unto my speech. Many days and years shall ye be troubled, ye careless women: for the vintage shall fail, the gathering shall not come. Tremble, ye women that are at ease; be troubled, ye careless ones: strip you, and make you bare, and gird sackcloth upon your loins."**

The sequence here suggests a connection, and maybe comparison, with an earlier section of Isaiah. In 3:1-5 there is sustained censure of the princes and rulers of Judah. This is followed (3:16-24) with an exposure of the godless vanities of women, probably of the women associated with the temple service. Here, in chapter 32, in verses 3-8, comes a repudiation of the faithless men who hitherto had exercised control over the nation's policies. And now, in verses 9-11, the women, well satisfied with their self-indulgent way of life, are warned of the dramatic change in life-style that is to befall them. This would certainly come about when their fine country houses, choicely sited outside Jerusalem, were overrun and plundered by the Assyrians.

The phrase "many days and years" is misleading. Literally, it is "days upon a year", with reference to the Feast of Tabernacles (seven days, in the beginning of the civil year — hence "the vintage shall fail"?), or to Passover and Unleavened Bread (seven days at the beginning of the religious year).

The phrases: "Rise up...hear my voice...give ear unto my speech" suggest the need to rise up in order to give careful heed to a divine revelation (see Jud. 3:20). The words echo the prophet's introduction to his graphic parable in 28:23-29. This suggests that the present apostrophe to the women may have a marked parabolic intention (in verse 11 the first verb is masculine plural, and the other verbs are masculine singular). But if figurative, what meaning? "The despair of grammarians" (Cambridge Bible). Development on such lines is not easy.

**32:12-14 "They shall lament for the teats, for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine. Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briars; yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city: Because the palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and towers shall be for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks;"**

King James' men assumed that verse 12 runs on from verse 11, but in fact the rest of the verse vetoes this; and so also does the word "lament", for it is masculine in form.

Instead, the Hebrew word for "breasts", when re-pointed, reads "fields", and this (according to the rest of the verse) is clearly correct. The whole of this passage is about the desolation which the Assyrians would inflict everywhere or, at the least, intend with savage glee, concerning Jerusalem.

"Thorns and briars", the curse of Eden (Gen. 3:18) would come — did come — on the paradise of "the land of my people", and also on "the houses of joy", that is,

the swanky residences of the aristocracy.

The picture of a similar desolation of itself was only prospective — what the Assyrian plunderers intended that they would actually bring about. In fact, it did not happen. But it was no human power that intervened to stave off the Assyrian horror. They certainly meant the "palaces" (the House of the Sanctuary, according to the Targum) to become forsaken; and the fort of Ophel (Heb.), "the stronghold of the daughter of Zion" (s.w. Mic. 4:8) and the towers with which Jotham had strengthened the fortifications (2 Chr. 27:3,4) were meant to be "dens for ever." Doubtless this would soon seem to be inevitable, but Isaiah qualifies all this significantly with his "until" in the next verse.

"A joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks" was doubtless the kind of desolation those invaders had already spread through many a countryside, and they meant to do the same in Judah also. And they did, but not "for ever".

That reference to "wild asses" doubtless has also a symbolic meaning. For Ishmael, forefather of the wild Bedouin tribes, was "as a wild ass among men" (Gen. 16:12 RV); and whenever those Ishmaelite wanderers saw an opportunity for forage or plunder in a countryside where normally strength kept them excluded, they were prompt to take advantage of the weakness of their Jewish brethren.

**32:15-19 "Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest. Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places; When it shall hail, coming down on the forest; and the city shall be low in a low place."**

This "until" introduces a dramatic change of tone in the prophecy. Here now is a charming picture of the new era in store for God's people when all their troubles have been swept away. The great rains, such as came in fertilizing abundance in the promised Year of Jubilee, are used as a figure of "the Spirit poured upon us from on high" (cp. 44:3). Contemporary Joel has the same figure, associated by him specially with Passover and explicitly interpreted as a token of a promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Jl. 2:23,28). And since the New Testament use of this Scripture fits both the first century Pentecost and the one yet to come, it seems not unlikely that the great revival in Hezekiah's day was a prototype of both, even though the historical record does not describe explicitly a gift of the Spirit on the enthusiastic worshippers of those days.

The rest of this Isaiah passage is loaded with abstract terms — "righteousness... peace...quietness" — yet it needs to be remembered that the prophets had little interest in abstract ideas. They were concerned with concrete situations, practical experiences. So whilst some of this phraseology is a clear anticipation of the blessings of the unique Year of Jubilee in Hezekiah's reign, the real meaning has to do with God's people, a wilderness, about to be transformed into a fruitful field by the exhilarating example of their king and the startling salvation to be brought so unexpectedly by the angel of the Lord.

In the Land itself what was normally deemed to be a fruitful field would come to be reckoned as no better than the unkempt wildness of a forest compared with the

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a transformation did not come about in Hezekiah's time, even though with the splendid lead from Isaiah and his fellow-prophets there was every opportunity for it. Instead, one has to wait for the day of Messiah for this fulness of fulfilment (cp. the phrase "for ever", in v.17).

It is the judgement and the righteousness of good king Hezekiah which Isaiah extols. The peace and quietness foretold are to be the work and effect of *his* righteousness. Those last fifteen years of that chequered reign must have been an extraordinarily fine era.

And with the removal of all threats of further invasion, God's people would "dwell in a peaceable habitation (33:20) and in sure dwellings and in quiet resting places."

But verse 19 presents a sharp contrast (and there is little doubt that it belongs to the preceding verses, for no amount of adroit manoeuvring can link it intelligently with verse 20). The RV reading helps considerably here: "the city (i.e. Jerusalem) shall be utterly laid low." This, with the mention of hailstorm, suggests that even the holy city would not escape from the devastation brought by the storm of divine wrath on the Assyrian encampments round about. And of course it would be appropriate to the situation, for in spite of king and prophets there was no lack of unfaithfulness in Hezekiah's subjects. They needed to be scared into a more worthy recognition of the awe-inspiring authority and power of the God of their fathers.

**32:20 "Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass."**

The vision swings back to its lovely picture of a peaceful, settled, well-ordered society. The Land is cleared of Assyrians. The people are back at their normal occupations. The special blessing of God in their Jubilee Year — "opening the windows of heaven" (Lev. 25:21) — encourages assiduous cultivation. And because of the special exigencies of the national situation, the full observance of normal Mosaic precept was set aside. The farmer tills his soil with ox and ass harnessed together (cp. Dt. 22:10). National recovery from the invasion goes forward at a phenomenal rate.

### The Last Days

It is easy to see that this entire chapter has much relevance to the 20th Century as well as to Hezekiah's far-off days.

The one who has risen up (v.8 Heb.) and who now "reigns in righteousness" is a Melchizedek king-priest, for he is "first king of righteousness, and after that also king of Salem, which is, king of peace" (v.17; Heb. 7:2). He is "a rock of glory" (Mt. 16:18; note the context), pouring forth waters of truth and healing, and also giving rest under his shadow to those that are weary (4:6; 25:4,5). He is a king who bears the covenant name of God (33:22); and in that day Isaiah will "see the king, the Lord of hosts" (6:5), and will not shrink away unclean.

But first there will come the hail of the wrath of God against a generation which outmatches the evil of Sodom (Rev. 8:7). Yet even at such a time there will be shelter and protection for the faithful remnant (v.2; 26:20,21; Rev. 7:16,17 RV).

He upon whom the Lord laid the iniquity of us all (53:6) will likewise save his people from the outpouring of retribution against a world of sinners.

With the king there will also be "princes who rule in judgment" (Mt. 20:28; Rev. 20:4). They too will overshadow God's people with blessing and healing (s.w. Acts 5:15).

But the vile and the churlish, whose hypocritical prototypes felt the lash of the the poor with lying words" (v.5-7).

By contrast with these, those who are the Lord's own, will be given seeing eyes and hearing ears. These, deemed by the world to be "rash" and "stammerers" will understand the knowledge of God and will speak it forth plainly (v.3,4) to peoples now more ready to give heed. This fine millennial activity will be all the more effective because of "the Spirit poured

upon us from on high," precisely as Joel also has foretold (Jl. 2:28,23). It is an enrichment that begins at Passover, "the first month" (cp. Ez. 36:26,27; 39:29).

The lovely pictures in this chapter of a land and people enjoying tranquillity and assurance tell of an even better Jubilee in which, both literally and spiritually, the wilderness becomes a fruitful field (v. 15; 35:1,2). And in that fruitful field the ox and the ass labour at the good work together — Jew and Gentile will be one in the service of their Creator, and the ancient Law which was originally designed to keep them separate (Dt. 22:10) will be abrogated for ever in a new society where righteousness, quietness and assurance endure "for ever" (v.17).

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## Chapter 33

**33:1 "Woe to thee that spoilest, and thou wast not spoiled; and dealest treacherously, and they dealt not treacherously with thee! When thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; and when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee."**

Chapters 28-33 are usually referred to as the Six Woes of Isaiah, but a review of their contents makes very evident their lack of homogeneity — in two respects:

- a. The first five (28:1; 29:1,15; 30:1; 31:1) are all addressed to the unworthy in Jerusalem; but 33:1 is plainly a denunciation of Assyrian treachery.
- b. The Woes do not concern themselves only with judgment on those whom they first address. Each section is made up of quite a diversity of fragmentary prophecies — against Assyrians, against politicians of Jerusalem, against Egypt, against the faithlessness and godless ways of God's people; and also there are superb prophecies about the Messianic king and the blessings of his reign.

In these chapters it is specially evident that much of Isaiah's writing is made up of short fragmentary sections put together without concern for continuity or for chronological sequence. This is a feature of Isaiah's work which has largely gone neglected, leaving the work of many commentators an incoherent shambles.

Here, in 33:1, the spoiler who is spoiled (s.w. Ps. 137:8, a Sennacherib psalm, as Thirtle has shown in "OT. Problems") is certainly the Assyrian invader. The contortions of the modernists are always something to marvel at, but a record in absurdity was surely achieved by Cheyne when he insisted that Isaiah 53 was written in the Persian period, 350 years later, by a writer who put himself in imagination in the time of Hezekiah and tried to write as Isaiah would have written!!

In one of his inscriptions Sennacherib boasted that he was "a keeper of treaties", yet the witness of Isaiah (21:2; 24:16; and especially here) is that duplicity was the norm of his political behaviour. Even the payment of massive tribute (2 Kgs. 18:16) made no difference to his aggressive empire-building. The Hebrew word for "deal treacherously" is associated with another for "garment". The deceiver covers up his true intentions.

"They dealt not treacherously with thee." The early negotiations by the princes of Judah may have been made in good faith. Later their simultaneous attempts at

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political agreement with both Assyrian and Egyptian crumbled in ruin.

But now, Isaiah asserts with all confidence, "when thou shalt cease to spoil (after the capture and destruction of Lachish), thou shalt be spoiled." Contemporary Joel 2 has sustained a picture of the irresistible Assyrian invasion as comparable to the inroads of a ruinous swarm of locusts. With grim irony Isaiah now proceeds to use the same figure about the plundering of the Assyrian camp outside Jerusalem.

**33:2 "O LORD, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee: be thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble."**

"Waiting for the Lord" is quite one of the most poignant ideas in all Isaiah's prophecies. It embodies a picture of a faithful minority who look with eager and almost pathetic expectancy for a divine intervention which will save them and their Land from a desperate situation from which they have no power to extricate themselves: "We have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord: we have waited for him, we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation" (25:9) "We have waited for thee, O Lord: the desire of our soul is to thy name (i.e. for the fulfilment of thy purpose)" (26:8). "Since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee (except thee), what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him" (64:4). But this waiting for the Lord to go into action is a two-sided business: "Blessed are all they that wait for him", but also (in the same verse) "the Lord waits, that he may be gracious unto you" (30:18) — in other words, the faithful remnant are kept waiting because there are others also for whom the Lord waits and goes on waiting because there is not yet the godly response that he looks for. It is the same paradox as in Peter's teaching about the Second Coming: "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy way of life and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God...we look for new heavens and earth...seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless. And *account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation*" (2 Pet. 3:11-15), that is, you are to interpret God's long delay as an opportunity to ensure salvation — for yourselves? for others who hesitate? Both Old and New Testaments have many eloquent passages on this theme of "waiting".

The emphasis in the present passage on "every morning" is specially appropriate to the difficult circumstances of the time, for "morning by morning it (the Assyrian scourge) will pass over, by day and by night" so that "it becomes a vexation only to understand the report" (28:19).

The strange switch of possessive pronouns: "be thou their arm...our salvation also", is no real difficulty. In the first, the nation as a whole is considered all of it in need of heaven's rescue operation. But it will be specially "our salvation" for the faithful few who have known and have looked with the confidence of faith for the eagerly desired deliverance.

**33:3,4 "At the noise of the tumult the people fled; at the lifting up of thyself the nations were scattered. And your spoil shall be gathered like the gathering of the caterpillar: as the running to and fro of locusts shall he run upon them."**

The golden rule of Old Testament expositors, that it is rarely safe to interpret your Hebrew tenses with dogmatism, finds illustration here in the past tenses of verse 3 followed by futures (if they are such) in verse 4. The dramatic phrases read as though they are a description of events as they happened. But the passage could be a vivid snapshot recorded in later, more leisured, times; or it could be (as so much else in this group of chapters surely is) an actual prophecy of the exciting experiences in store when Sennacherib's army was destroyed.

"The noise of the tumult" describes the overpowering majesty of the theophany and storms (as in 28:15; 29:5-7; 30:30). Elsewhere these words picture a lashing rain (1 Kgs. 18:41), and the fearful threat of Sennacherib's conglomerate army assembled against Jerusalem (Is. 13:4; see commentary on this). "The lifting up of thyself" (s.w. Ps. 118:16, a Hezekiah psalm) certainly means the indignant action of the Lord of hosts against the enemies of His people (118:10).

The "people" who flee are the faithless rulers in Jerusalem, who, without confidence in their God, seek safety in flight from the approach of the enemy (30:16; 22:3). The word for "people" refers, literally hundreds of times, to the people of Israel.

The more important aspect of this crisis is that the "nations (*goyim*, Gentiles) were scattered." If the AV reading can be insisted on (and this is Isaiah's more common usage), there is further indication here of the Assyrian army being substantially reinforced by allies and mercenaries.

The passage seems to echo the words of Moses when the ark set forward: "Rise up, O Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered" (Num. 10:35). It describes the Shekinah Glory going into action.

Joel 2 has sustained and vivid anticipation of the northern invader (these brutal Assyrians) going irresistibly through the Land plundering and ravaging everywhere (2:1-11; cp. Is. 10:14; 17:5). Now Isaiah picks up the same powerful figure of speech — but the tables are turned, for his locusts are the inhabitants of Jerusalem rushing out of the city to plunder the devastated camp of the enemy. Even "the lame take the prey" (v.23c). These locusts "run to and fro", in a way that natural locusts never do; it is a picture of eager delighted citizens making one trip after another to the enemy camp to see what they can salvage. "Shall he run upon them" is, more literally: "is the running (of the people) into it (the wreck of the hostile army)".

**33:5,6 "The LORD is exalted; for he dwelleth on high: he hath filled Zion with judgment and righteousness. And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the LORD is his treasure."**

Another of Isaiah's quick switches of theme. Yet they are all interpreted, a fact which is only discernible when set against the Hezekiah background. Also, once again, there is a sudden accumulation of apparently abstract ideas. Yet, in truth, the verses embody an anticipation of a very real practical situation in the experience of king and nation. As in 32:1-8 what is described here is the sudden change to wholesome government and godliness which came with the dramatic recovery of Hezekiah and his sacking of the princes who, during his sickness had appropriated to themselves such a worthless faithless regency (see 1:21).

The new regime is essentially an act of God: "The Lord is exalted, he dwelleth on high." He has "lifted up himself" (v.3b; Num. 10:35) and has gone into action against His enemies within and without. The result: a godly administration described in Messianic terms which deliberately echo the Messianic prophecy of chapter 11: "judgment, righteousness, wisdom, knowledge, stability (faithfulness), salvation, the fear of the Lord" (v.2-5).

But the real "treasure" of the Lord, the "plunder" that He gains from this transformed situation, is "the fear of the Lord" — a much greater gain than the ransacking of the Assyrian camp could produce (and contrast the treasure which had been earlier handed over to the Assyrians; (2 Kgs. 18:14-16).

**33:7-9 "Behold, their valiant ones shall cry without: the ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly."**

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**The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth: he hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the cities, he regardeth no man. The earth mourneth and languisheth: Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down: Sharon is like a wilderness; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits."**

The main ideas here are easy enough. But one or two details provide problems.

There is a picture of "the ambassadors of peace", who have been to the Assyrian camp loaded with a placatory tribute, (2 Kgs. 18:16; cp. Is. 36:3) now returning in gloom and distress at the complete failure of their mission. The Assyrian intention to smash all opposition from men who were weaklings (*enoshim*; v.8d) and to devastate the Land from end to end has not been affected in the smallest detail. (It is just possible that the reference is to the ambassadors who had been sent off to Egypt (30:4; 31:1) and who were now returned reporting a fruitless errand. But the context (v.8,9) seems strongly in favour of the other reading).

The treaty with Sennacherib, which was to prove such a life-saver (28:15) has been contemptuously torn up by "the treacherous dealers" (21:2; 33:1), the fenced cities which were to have been an enduring barrier to the invasion had all cravenly capitulated (Hab. 1:10).

All commerce and movement about the country had come to an end (there seems to be a quote from Deborah's description of the Canaanite oppression in her day: Jud. 5:6).

The whole Land (*eretz*) was reduced to misery and dereliction (24:4). Its most luxurious and fruitful areas were devastated by army foragers and troops living off the land. Trees were stripped of their fruit, and much high timber of Lebanon was ruthlessly felled to provide siege engines (37:24).

One phrase: "their valiant ones shall cry without (the city)" is largely translator's guess work. With a very slight adjustment it becomes "the lions of God" (cp. 29:1), and in this context the words are most intelligible as an allusion to the impressive lions which adorned the royal throne in Jerusalem (1 Kgs. 10:19,20), these being fairly obvious symbols of the king's counsellors flanking his royal presence. Read thus, there is an intelligible parallelism with "ambassadors of peace."

**33:10-12 "Now will I rise, saith the LORD; now will I be exalted; now will I lift up myself. Ye shall conceive chaff, ye shall bring forth stubble: your breath, as fire, shall devour you. And the people shall be as the burnings of lime: as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire."**

"Now...now...now..." when the crisis of His people has become so acute, Jehovah who never slumbers or sleeps goes into action in drastic fashion. This is what "I will rise...I will be exalted...I will lift up myself" certainly means (cp. v.5; 5:16; 30:18; Ps. 118:16 — a Hezekiah psalm — 59:19; 26:11; Mic. 5:9).

It may be that Isaiah's language reflects knowledge of an Assyrian plan to fire the gates of Jerusalem by piling chaff and stubble against them. Sennacherib may have known of the plans of the defenders (36:16), but the prophet was no whit behind in understanding beforehand, the tactics of the Assyrians. This "blast" of the enemy would be anticipated by a mightier "blast" from the destroying angel of the Lord (37:7).

There is even intimation here beforehand of how the people (*amim*, Israel) would dispose of the great piles of corpses sprawled in a gruesome circle round the city — "by the burnings of lime" and "burned by fire" (a sardonic contrast with Ps. 80:16, another commemoration of this great crisis).

**33:13-16 "Hear, ye that are far off, what I have done; and, ye that are near, acknowledge my might."**

**The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure."**

The fact that verse 14 describes the stunning effect on the people of Jerusalem of the mighty theophany already foretold a score of times suggests that "ye that are near" are God's people in the city and the Land, whilst "ye that are far off" apostrophizes those who had already been taken away in their thousands into captivity. But there are other possible readings. Dt. 13:7 suggests application of both phrases to Gentiles, both near and far. And this certainly happened (2 Chr. 32:23). Again, the "near" may be God's own people, and those "far off" the Gentiles (57:19?).

It is all too easy to read the story of the destruction of Sennacherib's army as though it left Jerusalem untouched. But the effect on the city of a quite uniquely destructive "scattering and tempest and hailstones" must have done a fair amount of damage within the strong-built city and would certainly frighten the ungodly amongst its inhabitants out of their wits. But just as the Israelites were safe on Passover night and unscared because well-prepared in their minds beforehand, so also now at this Passover, the faithful remnant, taking heed to Isaiah's repeated warnings, had no need for panic, no matter how awestruck they might be.

There were "sinners" and "hypocrites" enough in Zion, as the earlier chapters of denunciation (e.g. 1,3,6) very plainly show. So the same language of terror is employed here as is used in Psalm 48:6 to describe the panic in the Assyrian camp. The "devouring fire" and "everlasting burnings" with which the divine judgment was manifest (30:27-33; 31:9) provoked the same reaction in these Jewish sinners as a like theophany had done in the hearts of their forefathers at Sinai (Ex. 20:18,19; Dt. 4:24; Num. 17:12,13; Heb. 12:29).

So again, in Zion this time, sinners cowered away from the Glory of the Lord. Was there a selective judgment among them, as happened when the ark was brought to Zion (2 Sam. 6:3-7; Ps. 24:3,4) and at the time of David's numbering of the people (2 Sam. 24:16-25; Ps. 15:1 ff)? Here, six samples are given of the social righteousness God looked for in His people. The fact that these have to be bluntly insisted on shows how deeply the corruptions of an earlier generation had taken root. Among most of the people of Jerusalem Hezekiah's great reformation of some fourteen years earlier had been only skin deep (1:15-23; 3:13-15; 4:4; 5:23; 10:1f).

On the other hand, the man of faith could rest tranquil and assured amidst all the frightful roar of the divine storm and fire. As Moses dwelt "on high" in the very presence of the Shekinah Glory (Ex. 33:19-23), so also these who were close to their God would experience His even closer manifestation and yet have no fear. Not for them, literally, Moses' "high cave in strong rock" (LXX), but certainly they would know a comparable protection — and exhilaration!

And as Israel, facing wilderness hardships, were openly assured of daily bread and adequate water of refreshing, so also in the siege which all could see to be inevitable there need be no fear of the rigours of starvation (v.16).

**33:17-19 "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.**

**Thine heart shall meditate terror. Where is the scribe? where is the receiver? where is he that counted the towers? Thou shalt not see a fierce people, a people of a deeper speech than thou canst perceive; of a stammering tongue, that thou canst not understand."**

"The king in his beauty" might refer to a vision of the Shekinah Glory (the word not infrequently has that meaning, and the word for "see" normally means a vision); but perhaps even more appropriate is the reference to king Hezekiah, making a marked contrast with his deformity by sickness (38:1) when there was no beauty in him that people would desire him (53:2). Also, when the king went into the divine presence to intercede for the safety of his people, he was seen with clothes rent and covered in sackcloth (37:1). Yet in the days of his recovery he was "fairer than the children of men" (Ps. 45:2).

The promise of enjoyment of "a Land of far distances" (cp. v.20) makes a happy contrast with a ravaged Land of Promise in Assyrian hands and with Jewish survivors hemmed in and besieged. Instead, there is to be an "*increase* of government and peace" (9:7), and the whole "Land full of knowledge of the Lord" (11:9). The people will rejoice that "thou (the Lord) hast removed far (i.e. extended) all the boundaries of the Land" (26:15b).

What a contrast with Moses who saw the Land from end to end but did not personally enjoy it (Dt. 34:1)! And what a contrast, differently, with Shebna who meant to be set on high (22:16; contrast v.16a here) but instead was to be cast forth into a distant land (22:18).

Here, now, is assurance of removal of all terror and misery. The frightening theophany of the mighty God of Israel will itself pass away, leaving a much relieved and thankful people in Jerusalem, but also piles of corpses and a rout of thoroughly terrified Assyrian warriors, who for the rest of their lives would "meditate (talk about) the terror" they had experienced.

Where now is the haughty scribe writing out the exorbitant terms of the treaty to be signed by Hezekiah's deputation? Where now the "receiver" (cognate with 'shekel'), the official who took charge of the massive tribute brought out of the temple treasury? Where now the arrogant general, making a survey of all the siege towers he had had prepared at the expense of much depredation of the land's fine timber (33:9; 37:24; 2 Kgs. 19:23). These towers were to fall (30:25), given over to good civilian uses; and by contrast, the besieged would soon "walk about Zion, and go round about her, telling the (unharmd) towers thereof, and marking well her bulwarks" (Ps. 48:12,13; certainly a Hezekiah psalm).

The Assyrian threat would soon be swept away completely. "Thou shalt not see (i.e. any longer) a fierce people" —just as their forefathers had been promised and experienced the complete removal (at Passover!) of the Egyptian tyranny (Ex. 14:13). (But why does Isaiah use to describe the Assyrian the word '*am* normally reserved for Israel? Because at this critical period all Assyrian might would be brought into subjection to the angel of the God of Israel?) And (how like Ps. 114:1!) the rough speech of Rabshakeh and unintelligible tongue of his warriors would be heard no more.

**33:20-23 "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. But there the glorious LORD will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby. For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king;**

**Thy tacklings are loosed; they could not well strengthen their mast, they could not spread the sail: then is the prey of a great spoil divided; the lame take the prey."**

It is a contrasting picture with that of a cocksure Assyrian brought to nought and also with the "sinners of Zion" paralysed with fear by the shock of an experience of divine Glory such as only the pure in heart can sustain. These last will relax in a Jerusalem of "quiet habitation" (32:18). They will thankfully "walk about Zion, and go around her, telling her towers, marking well her bulwarks, considering her palaces" (Ps. 48:12,13).

This assurance of blessing *seen* with their own eyes, is a constant repetition (v.17-19; 29:18; 32:3; 35:5; 42:18). Yet this Hebrew word for "see" (*chazah*) normally means 'to see in vision'; in other words, it is important that the godly man should discern the deeper reality behind the experience of superficial redemption by act of God. An even greater than Hezekiah is here; and a more holy city than Zion, saved from the Assyrian threat, is to be perceived. It is to be seen as a tabernacle, a tent of meeting for the holy solemnities, which although apparently frail and impermanent outlasts all the efforts of the might of a man to dismantle or wreck it. What a contrast with the shattered camp of the enemy, broken and derelict. Again, as happened with Gideon's Midianites (Jud. 7:13; Hab. 3:7), the organized panoply of men was to be brought to nought.

But the same figure of a flimsy tent was appropriated also by Hezekiah to describe his own frailty in the time of his sickness (38:12). So the present picture of a tabernacle not taken down suggests also the double meaning of not only a city preserved but also a godly king restored and vindicated.

There follows a slightly scornful contrast with the pride and self-reliance of the more prosperous powers. "The glorious Lord will be unto us instead of broad rivers and streams." Jerusalem turns out to be better off than Egypt with its Nile (contrast 19:6) or Nineveh with its Mesopotamian rivers or Tyre confident of its sea defence. The Judge and Lawgiver and King and Saviour of Jerusalem (a strange paradox that He should be both Judge *and* Saviour!) has no need of "galleys with oars" or "gallant ships". His Glory, unknown and uncomprehended by these stronger powers, is the only panoply of protection His people need. Jerusalem has Immanuel and the quiet waters of Shiloah (8:6-8), a river of a besieged place that cannot be dried up by the enemy (37:25), an ark of safety which has ridden in complete security the vast inundation which lately swept against it (54:9,11).

What a contrast with the proud galley of Assyria which could not "*strengthen* (*hazak*) its mast" because it had no Hezekiah (s.w.). It could not spread a sail or fly a flag, an ensign (s.w.). The divine hurricane which desolated the military might of Assyria also broke Tyre's ships of Tarshish with its east wind (2:16; Ps. 48:7). The naval resources of Phoenicia, put at the service of Sennacherib, found all their nautical skill a pathetic futility.

And then the figure changes to the stark incredible fact of a gleeful plundering of the Assyrian camp: "the blind divide a great spoil, the lame take the prey." When David first sought Jebus as capital of his new kingdom, the jibe thrown at him was that except he take away their blind and lame he had no hope of success. And now history was, in a manner, repeating itself — the blind and the lame in Zion were not only impregnable, they also cheerfully foraged about amongst the military disorder of a shattered encampment (2 Sam. 5:8; see 35:5,6).

It is useful to notice the alternation of ideas in this paragraph.

v.21: The Lord's city has no need of an impressive pride of shipping.

v.22: For it, the Lord himself is all-sufficient.

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v.23a: The fine Assyrian ship is unseaworthy and helpless.

v.23b: It is at the mercy of wreckers.

**33:24 "And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity."**

"Inhabitant" may be a collective noun for all the population of Jerusalem, but more probably this singular describes Hezekiah, the sick king, who is now healed of his leprosy. And it is for his sake that the Lord has forgiven the people — He has "laid on him the iniquity of us all" (53:4; see commentary on that chapter). The firm condemnation which had been pronounced earlier (22:14) is cancelled, but not because of any worth or high merit in those now forgiven, but because of their leader and king.

### The Last Days

The entire pattern of events in Hezekiah's day will reproduce itself in the time of Israel's final salvation.

The treachery of Sennacherib (v.1) will yet be matched by Arab skullduggery. These enemies who, for all their numbers and immense military resources, are no match for the efficiency of Israel, tried the methods of deceit in 1974, and came near to pulling off success. The next time success will seem to be complete. The Egyptian treaty will be found to be worthless. And PLO willingness, at last, to recognize the State of Israel and to negotiate will all at once prove to be a smoke screen for a worse phase of villany.

The "valiant ones" and "ambassadors of peace" on whom the thin political hopes of Israel have depended will prove to be utterly futile. The entire nation will give itself over to hopelessness (except for the faithful remnant, the saving remnant of the seven thousand that at last realise the futility of bowing the knee to the modern Baal). The Land will be ravaged from end to end, the cities despoiled (v.7,8). All hope of human aid will have fled. In high glee the Arabs will fire the forest and desolate the kibbutzim, letting in the wilderness (v.9).

Salvation (v.2) will come from the Lord's Messiah only because, again at last, there will be a willingness to turn to Him in a time of the direst trouble (Mt. 23:39). Then, in the morning of a glorious new day the startling completeness of God's salvation will be appreciated.

Out of this tumult (v.3) will emerge also the completeness of the overthrow of Israel's dedicated enemies, so that over a wide Arab area all the resources of limitless petro-dollars (in every Arab territory, but not at all in Israel) will be at the service of a small bankrupt state (v.4). "Silver and gold, cattle and goods" will suddenly be theirs in abundance.

There will come a positively startling transformation from the corruption and paltry party manoeuvring in Israel's political caucus to a completely new administration, headed by Messiah himself and those who are now exalted to reign in this nucleus of the kingdom of God in "judgment and righteousness, wisdom and knowledge" (v.5-6; 11:2,5). Revelation 20:4,5 seems to imply a preliminary resurrection of a limited number of the Lord's chosen men like the patriarchs and apostles — who in their day and generation were plainly promised their everlasting inheritance and a special share of their Lord's royal dignity. No need for judgment of such, but certainly need for judgment by such as Messiah's personal helpers.

But the divine intervention through the might of the Messiah will be a shattering experience for "the hypocrites...the sinners of Zion." As their forefathers were terrified at the presence of the Lord of hosts on mount Sinai, so now these who have hitherto been so godless, at Jerusalem (v. 14). How can these unworthy

members of a Chosen Race survive the explosion of divine wrath which is now cleansing the Land of bloodthirsty enemies (v.14)? Only by a drastic change of character appropriate to those who "dwell with God's devouring fire." The man who ascends into the hill of the Lord must show himself to be such as the Lord approves (v.15).

For those who are reckoned among the Lord's faithful remnant in the midst of so many faithless there will be more than adequate protection (v.16), but only after an initial period of bitter persecution such as other Scriptures speak of in frightening terms (e.g. Rev. 11:7-12; 13:7).

After an interim period of utter hopelessness "the Lord will lift up himself" (v.10), and the fiery blast which was intended to finish for all time the hated Race will be turned against their implacable enemy: "as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire" (v.11,12). The proud ships of Tarshish and the galleons of Nineveh and Egypt will be reduced to a drifting shambles (v.23; Ps. 48:7). The enemy, with his uncouth and hateful speech, will be swept out of the Land (v.19). Those who had gleefully assessed the value of the plunder and made plans for a final elimination of the last survivors will themselves come to a sudden end (v.18). The fatuous futility of human wisdom and contrivance will all at once become evident to all the world (1 Cor. 1:7,19,20=Is. 29:14; 33:18; 44:25b).

And in miraculously quick time all will be tranquillity (v.21). Jerusalem will become, and for all time, "a quiet habitation" (except when loud with the praise of Jehovah), "a tabernacle that shall not be taken down" (v.20). And its Prince who once was smitten with the sins of his people (v.24; 52:13,14) will be seen in all his glory in the midst of his now willing subjects who dwell there, with all their iniquity forgiven (v.24). They, who in the days when they were spiritually blind and lame had taunted "David" with his inability to make them his subjects (2 Sam. 5:8), will now be healed of their infirmities, and on their Messiah's behalf they will gather a great Gentile spoil.

What Isaiah saw as a vision (v.20 Heb.) will become simple factual truth.

## Chapter 34

**34:1 "Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it."**

Just as the ten Burdens are followed by the "little Apocalypse" of chapters 24-27, so now the five Woes have another little Apocalypse in the chapters 34,35, the first of these chapters being a doom of violent character and purple language, whilst the latter is quite one of the most alluring and charming pictures ever written about the Messianic kingdom.

This introduction, so much like Psalm 49:1, has an easy and effective ABBA formation:

- A. Come near, ye nations.
- B. Hearken, ye people.
- B. Let the Land hear, and the fulness thereof.
- A. The world, and all things that come forth of it. The third item here quotes Psalm 24:1, as though saying: The King of Glory is coming in.

It is very easy to misunderstand the reference to "ye nations." This is not a comprehensive apostrophe to all nations of the world, but to all nations round about Israel. This usage is by no means uncommon; e.g. 29:7,8; 17:12,13; 14:26; 2 Chr. 9:23; 32:23; 1 Chr. 19:17; 18:11; Ps. 118:10; Jer. 27:7; Joel 3:2; Obad. 15.

**34:2-4 "For the indignation of the LORD is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter. Their slain also shall be cast out, and their stink shall come up out of their carcasses, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood. And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree."**

This divine wrath is being pronounced against the invaders of Israel. No explicit reason for this indignation of the Lord is specified, but is plainly implied (a) in the phrase: "their slain *also* shall be cast out," i.e. as Israel's slain have been; (b) in the symbolism of "the host of heaven," so often a figure of Israel (Gen. 37:9,10-Jer. 31:35,36; Dan. 8:10; Rev. 6:14), and the vine and fig tree (5:1-7; Ps. 80:8; Jer. 24:1ff; Jl. 1:7,12).

The picture of the land round Jerusalem (v.3) full of stinking corpses and running with blood is very gruesome, but also must have been near to literal truth when Sennacherib's army of Assyrians and confederate Arab nations (Ps. 83:2-8; 2 Chr. 32:22) was "delivered to the slaughter."

**34:5,6 "For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment. The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, and with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams: for the LORD hath a sacrifice in Bozrah and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea."**

The sensational character of the figurative language in this prophecy intensifies as it proceeds. The fury of the Lord is directed specially against Edom because where there should be national friendship and brotherly loyalty and affection, there is instead treachery, bitter hatred, and gloating over Judah's sorry plight. This comes out specially in contemporary Obadiah 1-14. And here is the explanation for the sweeping judgment pronounced later on, against Edom (63:1-6), and also to a milder extent against Moab (25:10).

In spite of divine injunctions to cultivate good relations with Edom (Dt. 2:4-8; 23:7-8) — commandments which must have had a strong influence in Israel, even if not obeyed fully — from earliest days there was ill-will between Israel and Edom (Esau). Jacob partially succeeded in placating the vengeful wrath of Esau (Gen. 27:41) by means of lavish gifts and by relinquishing to him the inheritance which should have been shared after the death of Isaac (Gen. 36:6). But Israel's later attempts at friendliness were fruitless (Num. 20:14-21). In the time of David what might have been a desperate crisis in the reign of the new king was averted by brilliant God-blessed victories over Edom (Ps. 60: title; 2 Sam. 8:13,14). When, thanks to the fecklessness of Ahaz, Judah was in a period of political decline, the Edomites took aggressive advantage of the situation. And, again, in the reign of Hezekiah they gave enthusiastic support to the irresistible Assyrian invasion and were utterly callous in their treatment of desperate defenceless men of Judah (Obad. 10-16; Ps. 137:7).

Here Isaiah threatens divine retribution of a dramatic character. "My sword" means the angel wielding the sword of the Lord, as in Gen. 3:24. It is a striking contrast with the blessing now cancelled out, which Isaac had pronounced on his firstborn: "By thy sword thou shalt live" (Gen. 27:40). Now, by the sword of an angel of judgment, beside himself with righteous indignation, Esau would die. He who pursued his brother Judah with the sword (Am. 1:11) would himself be pursued with a mightier sword. Instead of blessing (Gen. 27:38) there would be the

curse, the ban of ruthless and complete extermination (Obad. 5).

The blessing of Isaac had promised: "Thy dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth"(Gen. 27:39), But now, the sword of the Lord, filled with fury, is to be made fat with a mighty holocaust of sacrifices — a wholesale slaughter of flocks and herds which could not be driven off as plunder. "The kidneys of rams" are mentioned as the specially delectable part of peace-offerings to the Lord (Lev. 3:4). These are "a sacrifice unto the Lord" (LXX), a token of appeasement of the violence of divine wrath.

All this, it may be inferred, came to pass when the Assyrian threat against Judah no longer existed, and Hezekiah, now on the crest of a wave of unexampled prosperity, was able to organize a strong punitive expedition against these traitorous disloyal Edomites (63:1-6; 1 Chr. 4:39-43). The cowardice of the Arab mercenaries at a crucial time was not forgotten (see commentary on 21:15).

Bozrah is a double-meaning name, signifying both "grape gathering" and "fortified city." There is sustained play on the first of these in Isaiah 63:1,2,3,6 and Obadiah 5. The second meaning suggests identification of Bozrah with Petra (Obad. 3).

**34:7,8 "And the unicorns shall come down with them, and the bullocks with the bulls; and their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust made fat with fatness. For it is the day of the LORD'S vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion."**

The commentators come to grief on the identification of these unicorns, their best guess being an allusion to an extinct type of wild-ox. The best Biblical hint is in Ps. 22:21: "From the lion's mouth, save me; from the horns of the unicorns, thou hast heard me." This context, and its reference to the crucifixion, suggests allusion to the cherubim of glory in the sanctuary of the Lord. (It was an answered prayer — the veil of the temple was rent in two). Lion and ox were certainly two of the cherubim faces. So also in Ps. 92:10: "My horn shalt thou anoint like an unicorn." There were certainly horns, and probably figures of cherubim, on the altar of incense (where they were anointed with sacrificial blood; Lev. 4:7) and on the altar of burnt-offering; and certainly there were cherubim on the base of the seven-branched candlestick (cp. also Num. 23:22).

In support of this interpretation, the phrase "come down" can be seen as an idiomatic allusion to a theophany; cp. "The Lord came down on mount Sinai" (Ex. 19:20), and: "Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence" (Is. 64:1).

Also, "come down with them, even the bullocks with the bulls" probably indicates again co-operation of Ephraim with Judah in this punitive expedition against Edom, for the bull is the symbol of the tribe of Joseph (Dt. 33:17).

"Their (Edom's) land shall be drunk with blood" appears to be a deliberate contrast with Obadiah 16: "As ye have drunk upon my holy mountain," celebrating a certain conquest of Jerusalem which instead turned into ghastly defeat and a horror of destruction. This "day of the Lord's vengeance" is again so described in the later prophecy which celebrates its achievement.

"The controversy of Zion" means, of course, the struggle for Jerusalem and its temple. Obadiah's equivalent phrase is: "Thy violence against thy brother Jacob" (v. 10).

That prophet adds another picturesque detail in the course of his denunciation: "In the day that the strangers carried away captive his (Judah's) forces...and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou (Edom) wast as one of them" (v.11). It is a picture of the confederate leaders

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throwing dice to decide which section of Jerusalem each of them would have for plunder when captured (cp. Jl. 3:3). Instead, as it turned out, it was their camp that was plundered (33:4).

**34:9,10 "And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever."**

The language becomes more and more violent. It is clearly based on the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19). "Brimstone and fire...out of heaven...the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace (Jl. 2:30: palm trees of smoke)" (Gen. 19:24,28; and compare Dt. 29:23 — about Israel!). And Jeremiah (49:17) leaning heavily on Isaiah for *his* picture of judgment on Edom makes that link explicit, naturally enough, for Edom was the nearest inhabited territory to that ancient desolation. Isaiah says the same about Babylon-Assyria (13:19), perhaps because these allies shared in the outpouring of divine wrath just outside Jerusalem.

Significantly the same language is employed in Moses' prophecy of judgment on Israel's unfaithfulness. But the difference is that, whereas here there are no less than four phrases emphasizing the everlastingness of this desolation of Edom, no such irreversibility is spoken concerning Israel. Instead, Isaiah 35 promises an unbelievable recovery.

The final threat here: "None shall pass through for ever and ever," makes a sardonic contrast with Israel's first historic contact with Edom (Num. 20:21ff), when the chosen people politely sought peaceful passage through Edom and were more than willing to pay well for any help afforded them. But no! They were not allowed to pass through!

In Isaiah's time nothing quite as horrendous as is described here ever took place. Doubtless the burning of cities and crops brought a desolation from which recovery was exceedingly slow. But this experience would be, at best (at its worst) only a prototype of the Last Day judgment which is yet to come on Arab enemies of God's people.

**34:11-15 "But the cormorant and the bittern shall possess it; the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it: and he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness. They shall call the nobles thereof to the kingdom, but none shall be there, and all her princes shall be nothing. And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be an habitation of dragons, and a court for owls. The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest. There shall the great owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: there shall the vultures also be gathered, every one with her mate."**

Whilst one part of Edom is given over to burning and desolation another part becomes the preserve of all kinds of wild and horrific creatures. The point is: there is no civilization or ordered life of any kind. "The line of confusion (*tohu*) and the plummet of emptiness (*bohu*)" ensure the same care and exactness with which God prepared for His creation in the beginning (Gen. 1:2), He will now set about ordering the permanent disorder of Edom (cp. the

temporary overthrow of Israel — the same language; Am. 7:7-9); but contrast the encouraging promise of recovery and rebuilding in the Land where God's people are to be blessedly secure: 63:4). "Her nobles will have nothing there to be called a kingdom, all her princes will vanish away" (NIV). What a contrast with the early days, when a sequence of twelve proud "dukes" ruled confidently in Edom (Gen. 36:40-42,31) long "before there reigned any king over the children of Israel." Instead, now Edom's territory is given over to twelve kinds of frightening wild creatures (v.11,14,15) — the devil's own nature reserve. The thorns and thistles angrily encouraged by God in what had been His vineyard (5:6) now become a permanent inheritance of Esau's blasted land.

There seems to be no certainty possible about the exact translation of the Hebrew terms describing the wild heirs of Esau's land. Commentaries and versions vary enormously among themselves. "Tohu...bohu" seem to describe their best endeavours. But the over-all idea is unmistakable. Whereas in Zion's new order God Himself finds a resting place in the man that is of a contrite spirit, who trembles at His word, the creatures who find rest in Edom are ghoulish and repulsive, a lasting memorial to the character of those who once dwelt there.

**34:16,17 "Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them. And he hath cast the lot for them, and his hand hath divided it unto them by line: they shall possess it for ever, from generation to generation shall they dwell therein."**

Skinner, in Cambridge Bible, a scholar not exactly outstanding for his confidence in the inspiration of the Old Testament makes this astonishing comment: "The expression 'the book of Jehovah' appears to point to the existence of a prophetic canon; and the opening exhortation ("Seek ye...") presumes a habit of searching for evidence of the fulfilment of prophecy." How right, for once!

W.A. Wordsworth quotes phrases from the inscription found in Hezekiah's conduit: "a man to meet his mate...the voice of a man calling to his mate...a man towards his mate;" cp. here: "none shall want her mate." And he comments that prophecy and fulfilment are like that, going to meet each other, and meeting exactly.

The rest of that verse should surely read: "for my (Isaiah's) mouth He hath commanded (that is, the prophecy is certainly God-inspired), and His (the Lord's) Spirit (i.e. an angel) he hath gathered them" (cp. 48:16). "And he (the angel of the Lord) hath cast the lot for them (to decide what territory shall be permanently assigned to them), and his hand hath divided it unto them by line" (precisely as parts of Canaan were allocated to the tribes of Israel in ancient days; Num. 26:55).

The emphasis of verse 10 is repeated: "for ever...from generation to generation." In the primary fulfilment the desolation was considerable but not perpetual, for again in Jeremiah's time (49:7ff) (and in Malachi's? 1:4) the old animosity was resumed. But the twentieth century is to see the full, inexorable, and lasting fulfilment of these grim words.

### **The Last Days**

Joel is very explicit that in the Messianic age "Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land" (3:19).

Isaiah 34 is an expansion of this brief but grim expectation. Whereas the primary fulfilment is inferred from hints about the contemporary hostility of Edom, the ghastly fulfilment that is yet

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to come is guaranteed by the emphatic character of the language and by the use made of it in the New Testament. And in this twentieth century it is all too easy to see that the extreme vigour of the prophecy is justified by the extreme character of the offence, now building up to a crisis, against God's people.

The *tohu...bohu* language (Gen. 1:2=34:11) pointedly suggests the bringing in of a New Creation. But, first, that which is unworthy of Messiah's use is to be stamped as fit only to be discarded.

In the time of Israel's desolation, now impending, there will be unquenchable Arab glee that at last the ancient resolve to "slay my brother Jacob" (Gen. 27:41) has been brought to achievement.

It has already been shown that "all nations" means "all nations around Israel." The combined armies of these Arab states will find themselves helpless against a power such as no army can cope with — and this because they have already "rolled together as a scroll" the heavens of Israel and all the host of them. The identical language is used with precisely this meaning in the Sixth Seal (Rev. 6:14), where through several verses every phrase has an obvious reference to Israel. The allusions in the same sentence to vine and fig tree require a like reference.

When Gentile enemies lay violent hands on the people of Abraham, they invite catastrophic judgment. This, precisely, will be the experience of Arab nations who now seek to out-Hitler Hitler. They are now inevitably "the people of my curse." "The controversy of Zion," which has dominated the Middle East ever since World War I, now comes to an end. Problem solved! The cherubim of glory, manifesting the four standards of Israel, "come down" to ensure Israel's final deliverance.

The most obvious outcome of this remarkable divine intervention will be the utter devastation of Esau's land for all time. The language of its wasteness is remarkably like that of Sodom and Gomorrah. How will this come about? It is tempting to assume that Israeli nuclear bombs will be used against an Arab oilfield so as to set going the mightiest conflagration the world has ever known. Sodom and Gomorrah over again, only worse. But how is one to reconcile this with the hint of cherubim of glory and divine action? There is a remarkable catena of prophecies which foretell that God will impose His final judgment on the nations by the simple device of allowing full rein to human devilry: Ez. 38:21; Is. 24:19; 9:14 (=Jud. 7:22); Hag. 2:22; Zech. 14:13; Jl. 3:11,12.

Thereafter Edom is one intense incurable desolation — "night and day...for ever ...from generation to generation...for ever and ever."

It is a judgment which comes on "Babylon" (13:19-22; 14:23; Rev. 18:2; 19:3) — but on Edom world without end.

Later Isaiah presents this contrast: "They shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations." But this is Israel's future, not Edom's.

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## Chapter 35

What a crossroads of Holy Scripture this chapter is!

First, the entire picture is undoubtedly a designed contrast with the dereliction and curse on Edom, in chapter 34:

- a. The wilderness and the solitary place and the desert which Israel has become, now takes on unexampled fruitfulness and glory.
- b. The glory of the Lord (v.2) contrasts with the cherubim of judgment (34:7).
- c. Instead of the indignation of the Lord (34:2), "your God will come...and save you."
- d. In Edom there is pitch, brimstone, and smoke — but in God's Land "the parched ground becomes a pool, and thirsty land springs of water" (v.7)
- e. "In the habitation of dragons (34:13), grass with reeds and rushes" (v.7).
- f. For ever and ever none pass through Edom (34:10), but here is a route for wayfaring men, and it is a way of holiness (v.7,8).
- g. There shall be "no lion nor any ravenous beast" (v.9), nor any "wild beast of the desert" (34:14).
- h. Edom's nobles shall be men without a kingdom (34:12), but the redeemed of the Lord shall come to Zion with everlasting joy upon their heads (v.10).
- i. "Your God with a recompense" (35:4); cp. Edom's recompense for "the controversy of Zion" (34:8). There are also copious verbal links with chapter 40, thus clearly establishing that the two halves of Isaiah belong to one another, with the Hezekiah history (36-39) as a natural bridge between them.

**Chapter 35**

**Chapter 40**

1,6b	wilderness, desert	3	
2c	The glory of the Lord	5a.	
4a	Say to them of a fearful heart, Be strong	1,2	Comfort ye.
4b	Behold your God	9d	
8a	A highway	3.	
10	is quoted entire in	51:11	
10b	Come to Zion	9a	Good tidings for Zion
6b	Streams in the desert.	43:19	
3	Strengthen ye the weak hands...Your God shall come	31.	They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.
5.	The blind and the deaf	42:18	
3a	Strengthen ye ( <i>hazaq</i> , the name of Hezekiah)	41:9	Thou whom I have taken ( <i>hazaq</i> ).
9	The redeemed ( ga'al)	41:14	my redeemed (s.w.)

There is also a sequence of eloquent allusions to Israel's wilderness journey — for reasons which will soon become obvious.

**Chapter 35**

1.	Wilderness, desert.	Wilderness journey
2.	See the glory of the Lord	Ex. 14:13; 16:7.
4.	Fear not.	Joshua; Dt 31:7.
8.	A highway.	Num. 20:17.
9.	he redeemed.	The same term often used of Israel saved out of Egypt.
10.		Quoted in 51:9,10,11 with specific reference to Israel leaving Egypt and in the wilderness.

Also, the language takes on greater fulness when it is read as an expansion of the

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lavish God-given blessings of the Year of Jubilee promised to Hezekiah (2 Kgs. 19:29) at the most critical moment of his reign. There is the picture of the desert blossoming abundantly, through the glory of the Lord (v.1,2). Abundant rainfall means exceptionally good growth, even without special tillage (v.6,7). And the redeemed — captives taken away by the Assyrians, and now set free by captors made fearful by what happened at Jerusalem — these now come home unhindered (v.8-10). Their sorrow and sighing flee away. Scarcely able to believe their good fortune, they return home full of unquenchable gladness.

In the New Testament an unexpected sequence of parallels comes to light with the Emmaus encounter of two disconsolate disciples with their risen Lord (Lk. 24)

8. "And he shall be with them, walking in the way (see RVm), and fools shall not wander any longer." Cp. "O fools and slow of heart to believe..."
4. "Say to them that are of a fearful heart. Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come *raised up* (the Hebrew word only needs re-pointing to give this reading), even your God rewarded; he will come and save you."
5. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped." First, the Lord opened their eyes and ears to the meaning of Scripture, and then to recognition of his own person and voice.
6. "Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing."
3. "Confirm the feeble knees." The Hebrew word for "confirm" sounds almost exactly like Emmaus. Accident?
10. "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away!" What a picture of the two disciples returning to Jerusalem to tell the story!

After this it is almost to be expected that somewhere or other in the New Testament the same idea would be taken up. And it is. Hebrews 12:11ff is a passage with a steady series of allusions back to Isaiah 35:

### Is. 35 Heb. 12

3	12	Lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees.
1,2	11	The peaceable fruit of righteousness (?)
6	13	The lame
8	13	The way
8	14	Holiness
2	14	See (the glory of) the Lord
10	22	Mount Zion
8	15	Unclean (Gk. Defiled).
34:6	16	Esau.
34:10	29	Not quenched night or day.

And the reason for this particular Old Testament Scripture being made such copious use of in Hebrews 12, is easy to see. Isaiah 34,35 begin with an Arabian wilderness and end with ineffable joy in Zion; and readers of Hebrews 12 who have strayed from the true Zion and are again captives under the Law, given in Arabia, are led back to Zion and its new covenant.

Yet there can be no manner of doubt that the greater fulfilment of this Isaiah prophecy belongs to the future. The language takes on an impressive heart-warming fulness when it is

read, in a half-literal half-figurative fashion, as an anticipation of the blessedness of the Messianic age. It is a picture not to be resisted. Who would wish to resist it?

The consideration also has to be faced: If this short section of Isaiah's writing has so many different facets, is it not to be expected that the rest of his prophecy is shot through with the same diverse characteristics? How much of Isaiah's meaning is being lost because those who read or study it lack the insight to make progress? However, one day "the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped."

**35:1,2 "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God."**

In the opening words here, "shall gladden them" and "the desert shall rejoice" two words occur, both very often used for being glad in the Lord, because of what he has so unexpectedly achieved for His people. And whereas "the glory of Lebanon and the excellency of Carmel and Sharon" had been given over to the heedless destructiveness of boastful Assyrians (33:9; 37:24), *now* these shall be "given unto *her*", the perquisites of a redeemed Jerusalem. And in the phrasing, there is the implication of exceptional growth during the "Year of Jubilee." It may even be true that the radiation associated with the passing of the heavenly glory through the Land would also quicken the growth of trees and vegetation to a remarkable extent.

In the wilderness ancient Israel had seen the glory of the Lord in the giving of manna (Ex. 16:7,10). The returned captives would see it also in "the excellency of our God", that is, the beauty which He imparted to the Land in pools and springs of water (v.7).

**35:3-6a "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing:"**

From the healing of the Land, Isaiah turns to the healing of the people. There is hardly a phrase which does not carry more than one meaning — the mending of bodies and of minds.

Hands and knees both do their finest work in prayer to God. When faith falters, both are weak and feeble.

"A fearful heart" really describes the same characteristics in other terms, for "fearful" is really "hasty" (as in 32:4), those who in time of crisis jump to wrong conclusions about the inactivity of God. In Isaiah's own time, the faith of the faithful remnant was stretched to the limit.

The prophet's antidote is his repeated exhortation: "Be strong; fear not!" (7:4; 8:12; 10:24). And in 2 Chr. 32:7 Hezekiah learned the lesson from him, and passed it on to those among the people who were disposed to heed his word.

"Behold, your God will come with vengeance...and recompense" (Jl. 3:4; Dt. 32:35). Again, a double meaning. Not only was there to be an active intervention to "come and save you" by the dramatic manifestation of divine Glory and a mighty destruction in the Assyrian camp, but

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also "your mighty one (king Hezekiah himself, no less) will come raised up (from a bed of incurable sickness)", and for his sake — a man of unique faith bearing in himself the sins of the people — there would be a quite unforeseen salvation.

In an earlier lugubrious burden of woe Isaiah had pronounced on the people a judicial blindness and deafness — not literal affliction, of course, but a total atrophy of power to discern spiritual truth: "make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes: lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears" (6:10). But — with what gladness! — he now has to go back on this in a message of immeasurable charm and assurance: "The eyes of the blind opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, and the lame man leaping as an hart, the tongue of the dumb singing." An earlier passage makes plain that something more than the healing of physical disability is intended: "In that day shall the deaf hear *the words of the Book*...the meek also shall increase *their joy in the Lord*" (29:18,19). So also 50:5: "The Lord God hath opened mine ear, *and I was not rebellious*". So also the lame who "go halt (with uneven gait) between two opinions" (1 Kgs. 18:21), seeking to serve the true God and yet pay respect to "Baal" (as is done by many in the New Israel). These now "leap as an hart" to enter with undivided soul into the temple of the Lord (Acts 3:8). And "the tongue of the dumb", hitherto tied by other considerations of timidity or self-interest, now bursts forth readily into the loud praise of God.

That great deliverance from the Assyrian threat, a salvation so sudden and marvellous as to be past believing (Ps. 126:1-3) must have achieved for many of the half-hearted and indecisive in Israel, what the earlier vigorous enthusiasm of Hezekiah's reformation could not bring about.

**35:6b,7 "For in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes."**

The picture of God-given Jubilee blessing on the Land (v.1) is now continued. Waters, streams, pools, springs are everywhere in abundance (43:19,20; 48:21; 49:10). It must have been a remarkable year of frequent and copious rainfall, so that with little effort on men's part there was abundant fruitfulness (Lev. 25:21). For the freed captives (Lev. 25:10), streaming back from Babylon, the hardships of the way were made easy by the ready availability of food and water. As Israel in the wilderness had the smitten rock to save them from the horrors of thirst, so now this later generation saw "waters break out...in the desert" — the verb means "cleave (the rock or the ground)."

And what is described here as "the parched ground" is really an allusion to the heart-breaking deceit of a desert mirage, falsely luring the traveller on to the satisfying comfort of an oasis that is not there. The promised help of a countless Egyptian army, routed by the Assyrians at El-tekeh, had been such a mirage. And "the habitations of dragons" (jackals actually, an apt figure of Assyrian marauders) were become places of lush plenty and comfort.

**35:8,9 "And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The Way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there:"**

The theme switches back to the Lord's faithful remnant, and particularly to those who are to return home from what had seemed a hopeless captivity. Of course they

would not have to cross rough country, for there were arterial roads in this Assyrian empire. All empire builders have to have good supply roads. But now this route followed by returning captives was not a highway of conquest and rapine but a way of holiness, for this is a people happy to re-consecrate themselves to the God of their fathers: "Make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (40:3), that is, for these redeemed people to return to their God (cp. Ps. 84:5,6). The odd isolated phrase: "and a way," must surely be written off as a dittograph undeservedly preserved. The Hebrew text certainly reads as though that is its character.

The "unclean" who do not share the highway with these ransomed ones are the Assyrian warriors, such as were left of them. There is no longer a disposition for these jack-booted men of war to march out to the Levant to bully and oppress small nations. "From henceforth there shall no more come unto thee the uncircumcised (Egyptians) and the unclean (Assyrians)" (52:1).

"Fools shall not go to and fro on it". These fools are Egyptians (s.w. 19:11), presumably captured officers. But they do not gain release, for no god of Egypt had stamped his fear on Assyrian minds as did Jehovah.

Nor is there any Assyrian lion (cp. the figures outside Nineveh's temples and palaces) or other ravenous beast of the allied nations who had gladly augmented Sennacherib's army going against Jerusalem.

Instead, this high road is for "the wayfaring men" (LXX: the dispersed) who are soon to be seen finding their way back to their Holy City. These had been whipped away into the wretchedness of captivity before ever that fateful Passover came on, when an angel of the Lord with a blast of divine power desolated the proud Assyrian camp. But did not the Law of Moses decree that for a man in a journey a late Passover could be observed (Num. 9:10)? And to sanctify these, "he (their Lord) shall be with them, walking in the way" (RVm), just as He was with Moses and Israel in their long trek from Egyptian bondage to the Land of Promise.

**35:10 "And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."**

This verse is reproduced in 51:11, with only one letter difference but without any change of meaning. Here is an interesting problem regarding the copying of the text.

These ransomed ones (*padah*) have been redeemed (*ga'al*) by the Lord because they are, so to speak, His kinsfolk — Israel is His firstborn. Their joy and gladness is past describing. But in what sense do they have songs and everlasting joy *on their heads*? It can be argued that this is the figure of the anointing of the high priest (Lev. 8:7; Ps. 133:2), he on behalf of all the rest. But does this idea of consecrated priesthood harmonize with that of captives returning from a foreign land? For this reason there is some attractiveness about the reading (perfectly valid): "songs and everlasting joy because of their Head," with reference to good king Hezekiah upon whom God had laid the sin of all the nation. But now he is recovered, and (in a different sense) the vast multitude of captives are also recovered — and the Land is recovered out of the grip of the enemy, and its fertility also is marvellously recovered through the blessing of the Year of Jubilee.

### **New Testament fulfilment**

The detailed links which have already been catalogued between Isaiah 35 and (a) the Emmaus disciples and their experience of the risen Lord; and (b) an eloquent Paragraph in Hebrews 12, should be sufficient to emphasize strongly enough that

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the early church read this comforting prophecy with reference to their present experience of the blessings of the gospel. Two other examples serve to underline this important truth.

John the Baptist, perplexed that there was no open sign that Jesus was either "the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world" or the expected Messiah with a fan of judgment, sent messengers to beg that his doubts be resolved. Jesus responded with a display of dazzling Messianic miracles, and bade John's men report back to their leader. It must have been immediately obvious to John, that in every detail Jesus was alluding to the text of his beloved Isaiah, and specially to Isaiah 35:

The blind receive their sight.  
The lame walk.  
The lepers are cleansed.

The deaf hear.  
The dead are raised up.  
To the poor the gospel is preached.

Blessed is he who shall not be caused to  
stumble by me.

And note:  
Art thou he that should come?

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened.  
The lame man shall leap as an hart.  
The unclean (from leprosy, the sin disease)  
shall not pass over.  
(Cp. ch.53: Messiah described as a leper.)  
The ears of the deaf unstopped.  
Your God will come, raised up.  
Joy and gladness; sorrow and sighing flee  
away.  
Confirm the stumbling knees. (A stone of  
stumbling; 8:14 — the rejected altar; also: the  
young men shall stumble, but those that wait  
upon the Lord...40:30).

Your God will come...with a recompense; he  
will come and save you.

The healing of the lame man (Acts 3) affords another clear instance of the meaning of Isaiah 35 in the gospel era: he is described as "walking and leaping and praising God" (v.8). Here each separate expression looks back to Isaiah 35.

In harmony with these palpable New Testament allusions it is possible now to see how "strengthen ye the weak hands" is designedly illustrated by the Lord's healing of the man with the withered hand (Lk. 6:6).

Similarly, the "opening of the eyes of the blind," already recalled by the way in which Emmaus disciples had their eyes opened to the presence of their Lord, and the apostles in Jerusalem had the eyes of their understanding of Holy Scripture opened, so also (Lk. 24:31,45). Very appropriately Jesus used the same prophetic figure when sending Paul forth to bring spiritual sight to blind Gentiles (Acts 26:18).

Water is hardly to be expected in a desert highway, but this blessing, promised by Isaiah, became the experience of the Ethiopian eunuch as, by Philip's help, he went on the Way, both literally and also spiritually through the prophecy of Isaiah: "See, water! What doth hinder me to be baptized?" — and thereafter he went on his way rejoicing "with songs and everlasting joy because of his Head."

Nothing is so satisfying as this gospel. Here is no habitation of dragons or of jackals or of lions. Those who faithfully travel this highway to Zion are never heard to complain that "there is a lion in the way", for instead they have heard a reassuring voice bid them "Be strong; fear not."

There remains one further exercise in interpretation of this amazing prophecy, and that is its application in yet greater fulness, both figuratively and literally, to the loveliness and blessedness of Messiah's kingdom. Here the ideas are both familiar and straightforward. There is no more mirage. The parched ground becomes a pool, in truth and righteousness.

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**ISAIAH**  
**PART THREE**

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## 40 (1). History and Prophecy

Nowadays the student who reads Isaiah 40-66 as from the pen of Isaiah stamps himself as one who is out of touch with the "assured results" of modern Biblical scholarship. So be it! This study of Deutero-Isaiah comes from the pen of one who with the passing of years becomes more and more satisfied that only by reading this prophecy against the background of the reign of Hezekiah is it possible to make sense of its phraseology.

The opening words of comfort to Jerusalem and the declaration of warfare accomplished, both fit beautifully the period of relief, blessing and prosperity which ensued after the destruction of Sennacherib's army. (There was *no* warfare round Jerusalem during the seventy years of Babylonian captivity! If these words were written in the days of Cyrus, they are irrelevant.)

"Double for all her sins" is language appropriate to the days of Hezekiah — doubly so if there is here also allusion to the double blessing (Lev. 25:18-22) of the Year of Jubilee appointed as a sign to both king and people, in the time of their distress (2 Kgs. 19:29,30).

The proclamation of a wilderness highway, with the crooked made straight and the rough places plain, likewise gears up with this jubilee, for it was a time of freedom for slaves and captives (Lev. 25:10). After the Assyrian debacle at Jerusalem those 200,000 Israelites taken off to Babylon and Assyria by Sennacherib (Taylor Prism) were packed off back home — too hot a potato to hold! Thus Hezekiah's reign witnessed deliverance from bondage and a wilderness journey comparable to the deliverance God gave under Moses (and hence the copious allusions throughout Isaiah to Israel in Egypt and the wilderness).

In the destruction of the invincible Assyrian army, "the glory of the Lord was revealed", and all flesh withered as grass and faded as the flower of the field. The prophet told these good tidings to Zion, and Hezekiah, the Arm of the Lord, ruled for Him and fed his flock like a shepherd in the time of their distress.

At a time when Israel lamented that: "my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God," there was given proof past argument that "the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary."

That night "the nations (in the Assyrian alliance) became as a drop in a bucket, and were counted as the small dust of the balance...princes were brought to nought, and judges of the earth made as vanity...The Lord blew upon them and they withered, and the whirlwind took them away as stubble."

That campaign was not just a struggle of Hezekiah against the tyranny of Nineveh; it was a contest between the claims of Ashur and Jehovah to be the True God. Sennacherib had thrown down the gauntlet not only before Hezekiah but also before Hezekiah's God, and from that moment his Judaeen campaign was destined to ignominious failure. The folly of the man who "seeks a cunning workman to Prepare a graven image" was scornfully exposed by "Him that sitteth upon the circle of the earth — and that spreadeth out the heavens as a tent to dwell in."

## 40 (2). "Comfort ye" (v.1-8).

All four gospels emphasize that John the Baptist's mission was the fulfilment — a fulfilment? — of the opening section of Isaiah 40. John himself declared explicitly: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness". Therefore he was. It just will not do to say, in the modern fashionable jargon, that John *saw himself* as a fulfilment of the Isaiah prophecy. Behind all such declarations is the insinuation that John knew no better than to say this of himself, or that his religious idealism led him to think of his mission in this way. How John himself would have blasted such an attitude to the OT.!

More detailed examination reveals the superb appropriateness of this prophecy to the work of John and Jesus. And since John was the greatest of the prophets (Mt. 11:11), it is to be expected that not only Messiah but also his forerunner should find a place in the word of prophecy.

### "Repent ye!"

There is a superb double meaning about this opening phrase of John's prophetic message. "Comfort ye" also means "Repent ye." In general, the different forms of the same Hebrew verb are used to mean "comfort" (Niphal) and "repent" (*Piel*), but there is no consistency about this usage. Ultimately context has to be the decider; and here it is difficult to be sure.

In the rest of Isaiah's message the emphasis is on "comfort": "The Lord shall comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her *wilderness* (40:3) like Eden, and her *desert* like the garden of the Lord" (51:3; note the remarkable similarities with 40:6,21,22 in v. 12,13); cp. also the loveliness of the message of comfort in 49:13.

The truth is that the greatest real *comfort* a man can reach is through his own intense uninhibited *repentance*, for thus, and only thus, can he be at peace with his own conscience. And thus, and only thus, can he know the assurance of sins forgiven.

Nations and individuals alike have to learn this wholesome principle of acceptance and blessing. The only alternative is to stifle conscience with a chloroform pad of hypocrisy.

### John the Baptist

Appropriately, then, John came to his people with his ringing call to repentance — "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Here again there is ambiguity. Did he mean: "your opportunity of the kingdom is now within your grasp" (as in Lk. 10:9,11)? or was he declaring: "here is your Messiah: Behold your God"? (v.9). Though, indeed, the most natural meaning of the words is: The kingdom is about to be established.

John proclaimed his message in the wilderness and the desert (40:3; Mt. 3:1), yet the good news was for the ears of the people of "Jerusalem and the cities of Judah" (40:9); and they heard it, because "there went out unto him Jerusalem and all Judaea" (Mt. 3:5).

So this man of austerity "spoke to the heart" (40:2 RVm) of his hearers. One of his great themes was: "warfare accomplished, iniquity pardoned." Here again are key phrases with double meaning. for the "warfare" he bade cease may have been

struggle against invaders or imperial overlords\*. Warfare was also the Torah's term for priestly service in the sanctuary (Num. 8:24-26mg).

Here, then, Jewish legalists were being bidden cease their dependence on works of law and the blood of bulls and goats. The LXX reads: "Comfort ye, my people. Speak, ye *priests*, to the heart of Jerusalem." But the priests were the least ready of all the nation to apply this exhortation. So the responsibility was taken up instead by John the Baptist, himself a priest, and the son of a priest. He bade men cease their dependence on their own self-made righteousness, and instead find a new life serving God's Messiah, knowing the blessing of "iniquity pardoned" without the elaborate observance of ritual and legalism.

Here is yet another phrase with double meaning: "her punishment is accepted" (RVm). A long and eloquent passage in Lev. 26 sets out God's terms for Israel's re-acceptance: "*If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers...then will I remember my covenant...and I will remember the Land...*" (Lev. 26:40-42).

### **No national repentance**

This is *repentance*, the necessary prelude to acceptance and blessing. So, that repeated "Comfort ye" is also an insistent "Repent ye". When punishment is accepted as a just retribution for sin, then iniquity is pardoned (cp. Ps. 32:1-5). And the fact that God destroyed temple and city in A.D. 70 is plain proof that John's mission failed (Lk. 7:30; Mt. 17:12). Such repentance as his appeal evoked was a mere flash in the pan, brief in duration, poor in quality. Everything written about John's ministry goes to establish such a conclusion.

Jerusalem "received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." That unusual Hebrew word for "double" refers to the breastplate of *judgment*, a pouch or pocket made by doubling a square of material and then attaching it suitably to the ephod of the high priest. In this pocket were Urim and Thummim, the holy lots by which God gave decision of guilt or innocence. Hitherto Jerusalem had only known God's adverse pronouncement: "Guilty". But now John brought the happy prospect of iniquity pardoned and righteousness imputed through the One whom he announced to the nation.

But Israel must show itself appreciative of such blessings. Due preparation for Messiah's coming must be made, and that drastically. In their spiritual wilderness let them make a straight smooth road for his royal advent — dark narrow wadis filled in, mountain obstructions ruthlessly bulldozed out of the way; instead of a narrow twisting boulder-strewn track let there be a highway, broad, level, smooth and handsome.

So John called the entire nation to repentance — the common people, sunk in the sordid triviality of their small affairs; the publicans, bondslaves of Rome and money; the harlots, the bondslaves of men and money; the rebels, with a delusive freedom as their target and the dogs of war at their heels; the powerful Sadducees, thinking only of wealth and more power; and even the Pharisees, preening themselves on their reputation for sanctity. All of these came to John, fascinated by his primitive way of life, his hoarse voice, his vivid eloquence, his peremptory message, his sublime self-confidence, and his phenomenal humility.

And for all, whatever their standing, he had only one word: "Repent ye, repent ye,

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\* "Be content with your wages" (Lk. 3:14) was almost certainly spoken to men who were being recruited for Barabbas's insurrection.

my people, saith your God." Let them turn right round. Let them abandon their way of self, and instead diligently seek God's ways. Repent! — start thinking differently.

This they all must do, for "all flesh is grass." Fresh, attractive, bedecked with flowers — but in a few days, cast into the oven of summer's heat, it is shrivelled, dry and dead, useless now except to proclaim an eloquent unheeded lesson about the frailty of "flesh."

In the message John thundered out, unrelenting, untiring, the Spirit of the Lord was blowing into the life of the nation, even as the hot wind swept across the hillside and shrivelled the grass. And like the grass they all must die in order to live a new and better life before God.

Even the Messiah whom John announced must know this experience. A man of Israel like themselves, in him too, "flesh" must die, so that "the Word of our God might rise up for ever."

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## 40 (3). Good Tidings to Zion (v.9-11)

The prophets of the Lord — Isaiah, John the Baptist, the Elijah prophet of the Last Days — had been bidden (40:6) proclaim the message that before the Lord "all flesh is grass." Coupled with such a theme of apparent hopelessness is the most cheering of all good tidings — the coming of the Messiah: "Behold your God."

But in Isaiah's own day there was no Messiah. It was the Shekinah Glory of God which brought salvation in the hour of need. The might of Assyria was destroyed outside beleaguered Jerusalem in a night.

Here, truly, was "good news" to bring to Jerusalem and to Zion's high mountain and the temple there. There can be little doubt that verse 9 should read: "O thou that bringest good tidings to Zion...O thou that bringest good tidings to Jerusalem...". The Hebrew text can be read either way; but Isaiah 62:11, with its double allusion to 40:9,10 is decisive.

### A prophetess?

A more serious problem is the feminine form of the words here. The commentators airily dismiss this as an idiom for the Lord's faithful viewed collectively. They cite "thou inhabitress of Zion" (12:6). But it is they who are to be comforted by the message. So, more likely, the one in Isaiah's day who spoke this good word was Isaiah's own wife, "the prophetess" (8:3; and cp. 5:1) — a word which must mean that she too shared heaven's inspiration. Is there any connection between this possibility and the remarkable number of references in "Second" Isaiah to such feminine topics as women and marriage and babies?

In the circumstances to which the prophecy at first alludes, there was need to exhort: "Be not afraid;" for, with these cruel and invincible Assyrian warriors at the gate, who could hold from trembling, least of all the women? The king passed on this good word to his people: "Be strong (*hizku*: be a Hezekiah!) and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria" (2 Chr. 32:7 and also v.8).

The assurance was for the "cities of Judah" as well — those "forty and six fenced cities" which (so Sennacherib boasted in his inscription) had been taken and destroyed. Now there is no need for fear. The waste places are to be built (61:4).

### **In Isaiah's day**

Salvation came not only in an overpowering display of heavenly might, but also in a man of God's choice and approval who shepherded the flock of God in their distress: "Behold, the Lord God will come in a Strong One (the Hebrew is almost 'in Hezekiah!'), and his arm shall rule for him."

The "reward" and "work" (Heb: recompense for service given) now assigned to this godly man was a nation given back to him as good as risen from the dead, so submerged had it been by a tide of terror and desolation. Now, again, they were Hezekiah's flock, at his bidding, to be nurtured and brought back to the providence and comfort of God. "The Lord saved Hezekiah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem...and guided them (s.w. "gently lead") on every side" (2 Chr. 32:22).

That stirring history was the foundation of this part of the prophecy. Possibly written after the events had taken place, it really looked forward to greater fulfilment through the One whom Hezekiah so splendidly foreshadowed.

### **John the forerunner**

There is no intimation that John the Baptist ever took his great appeal to Jerusalem and its mount Zion. But certainly men of all classes there heard his good tidings, for "there went out to him Jerusalem and all Judaea" (Mt. 3:5).

"The first shall say to Zion, Behold, behold them: and I will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings" (41:27).

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth salvation (Jesus!); that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! (the kingdom of God is at hand)" (52:7; and see again 62:11).

John was indeed a worthy herald, saying: "Behold, your God! This is Immanuel."

But Isaiah's word for "bring good tidings" also means "flesh" — and John said that also: "All flesh is grass," the bad news of the kingdom, which all men must believe before the Good News can mean anything at all to them.

But the gospel he proclaimed (Mk. 1:1-4) was filled out, both in word and in practice, by Jesus who took literally the exhortation: "Get thee up into the high mountain." This is given pointed mention in the gospels: "He set his face stedfastly to go to Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:51). "When his brethren were gone up, then went he also up to the feast...In the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood, and cried, saying..." (Jn. 7:10,37).

### **The Arm of the Lord**

Then, if only the leaders of the people had wanted to recognize the fact, the Lord God was coming to them in a Strong One (Ps. 80:17), that He, the Arm of the Lord, might rule the flock for Him. Before he was born, the virgin Mary's song of rejoicing had interpreted this very Scripture as a prophecy of Christ: "He (Jehovah) hath shewed strength with his Arm" (Lk. 1:51).

Messiah as the Arm of the Lord is a recurring theme in Isaiah — seven times as a bringer of Jesus-salvation (33:2; 40:10,11; 51:5,9; 52:10; 53:1) and once wielding the rod of judgment (30:30).

"Behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him." Both key words here refer to recompense for effort made or work done (cp. 49:4). With Jesus, as with his great forefather

Jacob, the fruits of his labour were seen in a flock of sheep, his own possession.

### The Good Shepherd

How tenderly this Good Shepherd gives himself to this next phase of his labour! No flock, not even the flock of Moses (63:11) ever had such care. LXX is superb here: "Like a shepherd he shall shepherd his shepherding." Gospels and Acts teem with gracious examples of this, e.g. "My lamb, arise" (Mk. 5:41). "He leadeth me beside the still waters" (Ps. 23:2) — the word here is the same: "he shall *gently lead* those that are with young" (and also in Isaiah 49:10; 51:18). It is the same concern which Jacob showed for the flock which was his "reward" and "recompense" after long years of hard service (Gen. 33:13).

For "gently lead", LXX has "comfort" (*parakaleo*). Then did Jesus have this prophecy in mind when, after the promise of the Comforter, he spoke of the little community of faithful ones as like a woman coming near to childbirth ("those that are with young") and finding her sorrow and travail changed to joy because a Man is born into the world (Jn. 16:21)?

Like Master, like servant. Jesus the Good Shepherd must have worthy men to help "feed the flock" (1 Pet. 5:2). So, to match the triple emphasis in Is. 40:11, he thrice bade Peter: "Feed my sheep" (Jn. 21:15-17).

That three-fold command was not at all intended to rub in Peter's triple denial (a pathetic exposition, this) but was meant to underline the spiritual obligation which lies on all good shepherds to fulfil Isaiah's prophecy of the preaching of the gospel.

This prophecy is not yet filled-full, even with its emphasis on these gracious gospel truths. Any scribe instructed into the kingdom of God can readily perceive that. And the Lord's own exposition settles the point: "*Behold*, I come quickly: and *my reward is with me*" (Rev. 22:12 = Is. 40:10 LXX). Then "the Lamb...shall be their shepherd, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters" (Rev. 7:17).

### Future fulfilment

Then, once again — and this time in a far greater sense — "the Glory of the Lord will be revealed;" again, the compelling voice of an Elijah prophet, a second John the Baptist, shall cry: "Behold, your God." But not only he. Rather remarkably LXX turns some of Isaiah's imperatives into plurals: "Lift up thy voice with strength; lift ye it up; be not ye afraid." Who are these in the Last Days, who have to be heralds along with the Elijah-prophet? They are readily identifiable by their current fear to "lift up their voice"! But why should there be any fear? Because of persecution? Because they fear to be let down by non-fulfilment of the prophecy? (in other words, lacking faith in their message!)

Such a paltry attitude ill becomes the Lord's people. "Behold, the Lord God *will* come in a Strong One."

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## 40 (4). The Mighty One of Israel (v.12-17).

The prophets of the Lord — Isaiah, John the Baptist, Jesus, the second Elijah prophet — have wonderful and comforting news for His New Israel. Their repentance will, without fail, bring them the comfort and leading of Messiah, the Good Shepherd.

Now comes the assurance that the God who promises this has the power to do it. The One whose might and wisdom framed the existing creation has not exhausted His resources. So faith in a promised New Creation is not misplaced.

### The creatures of God

He measures the waters in a cupped hand, and what matter if He, like Gideon's men, lose most of it in the process? But to think of it! — the mighty oceans of the world, with their titanic storms and their unplumbed depths, are like a mere mouthful to drink from the hollow hand of so great a God!

The casual span of His hand measures out the vast millions of light years to the remotest corners of His universe. It is a theme the prophet is to come back to with delight before he is through (v.22,26). But the same span measures also the breastplate of judgment worn by God's High Priest (Ex. 28:16 s.w.). There in his bosom (v.16) he carries the symbol of God's Israel. And the breastplate is doubled, not only for practical purposes (to carry the Urim and Thummim), but also to teach that God's elect come from Gentiles as well as from Israel.

Jeremiah similarly links together these aspects of God's creation. "If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, then will I cast off all the seed of Israel" (31:37).

A third illustration: "Who hath comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure?" The great dust storms of the far-stretching plains, the overpowering waste of the vast desert sands, the thousands of miles of sandy beaches by the ocean — all these God, by an easy scoop of that mighty Hand, can gather together in a measure.

But again, the dust of the earth suggests the seed of Abraham, whom men cannot number (that is, cannot redeem; Ex. 30:12): "As the sand of the sea cannot be measured (by man), so will I multiply the seed of David my Servant" (Jer. 33:22).

Isaiah's characteristic double meanings come in here, leaving the student awestruck with the possibilities in God's revelation: "Who hath comprehended the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7) in a Captain?" or even: "Who hath nourished the dust of the earth on the third day?"

And now a fourth reminder of the awesome power of God: "Who hath weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?" In all nature, few things in God's creation are so effective in impressing on mere man his smallness and helplessness. This is specially true for those who have attempted climbing expeditions among the towering crags. Yet though "the mountains depart, and the hills be removed, God's kingdom shall not depart, nor His covenant of peace be removed." The mightiest things in God's world are not so sure as His eternal purposes.

### Challenges to faith

There follows a catalogue of seven more assurances, again couched in the form

of rhetorical questions. But whereas the four questions already posed answer "Who hath...?" with an indisputable "God has...!", now the leading "Who hath...?" (v.13) is answered with an equally emphatic, seven-fold "Nobody has!"

"Who has meted out* (RVm) the Spirit of the Lord?"	Nobody!
"Who, being his counsellor**, hath taught him?"	Nobody!
"With whom took he counsel?"	Nobody!
"Who instructed him?"	Nobody!
"Who taught him the path of judgment?"	Nobody!
"Who taught him knowledge?"	Nobody!
"Who shewed him the way of understanding?"	Nobody!

The first of these seven is specially impressive in its application to the Lord Jesus: "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God, for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him" (Jn. 3:34). And so also the last two in the sequence: "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" (Jn. 7:15).

Compared with the vastness of this knowledge and might, the nations of the world and all their concerns are an inconspicuous triviality.

They are "as a drop of a bucket", that unimportant drop which drains back into the bottom when the rest is poured away.

"As the small dust of the balance", also, which the seller of spices contemptuously gets rid of with a quick puff from his pursed lips.

"He taketh up (more likely: He casts forth) the isles as a very little thing (RVm as the fine dust)". That spatter of islands looking so settled and peaceful in the sunset, so solid and unbudgeable in a raging storm, are no more than specks of dust that settle on a table-top.

All the nations before him are as nothing...less than nothing, and vanity." Here is the true worth of human nature, seen in proper perspective. All man's power and cleverness, yes, and his goodness too — are of no consequence whatever. Indeed, they are "vanity" — the Hebrew word is *tohu*, translated "without form" in Gen. 1:2. Here in a word the prophet puts his finger on the root of all this world's trouble — the nations are a creation in disorder, needing (as in Genesis) the Spirit of God moving on the face of the waters which now cast up mire and dirt, that there might be a New Creation pronounced "very good" by its Maker.

In such a context, verse 16 is not out of place: "And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn (on God's altar), nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering." In other words, by giving themselves to dedicated religious exercises neither Israel nor the nations of the world can gain for themselves a better status than the contempt in which God presently holds them. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." If human nature is to be redeemed, re-created, it will assuredly not be done by giving back to God all the mighty cedars which He has grown and all the cattle which He has raised upon a thousand hills. "All flesh is grass." Only God can alter that.

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\* RVm. This is right, same word as in v. 12 (contrast Pr. 16:2; s.w. again).

\*\* Here AVm is correct: "the man of his counsel" — a detail which would have been used with enthusiasm by those who hold to the pre-existence of Christ, if the answer were not obviously what it is.

## 40 (5). God and god (v.18-26).

The second half of Isaiah 40 should surely have been a chapter to itself, for it has a simple and very effective structure:

- A. How the idol is created (v. 19-20)
  - B. God's power to destroy (v.21-24)
- A. What God creates (v.25-27)
  - B. God's power to make immortal (v.28-31).

Here the opening paragraph is the first of a sequence of diatribes in this part of Isaiah against the futility of idol-worship (cp. 44:9-20; 46:1-7). These withering censures were familiar to Jeremiah, who in later days wove together the sarcasms of Isaiah 40-46 into one sustained derisive exposure of all who seek to make God in their own image (Jer. 10:1 -16). The Isaiah chapters must have preceded Jer. 10 — a most inconvenient fact for those who put Deutero-Isaiah into the Babylonian captivity!

"To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?" Man was made in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26). But the Fall turned man at his best into the likeness of his sinful and condemned forefather (Gen. 5:3). So until God has made a Man truly in His own likeness — God with us — there can be no answer to the prophet's apostrophe.

### Idols and idol-makers

So Isaiah turned with contempt to survey the pathetic quality of human ideas of God-likeness: "The graven image, a workman melteth it, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold (it has no inner glory of its own), and casteth for it silver chains (to hinder the depredations of thieves!)"

At this point, two verses from the next chapter come in with remarkable fitness: "They (the workman and the goldsmith) helped each one his neighbour; and said to his brother, Be of good courage, So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smiteth the anvil, saying of the soldering (i.e. of the finished job), He is good (cp. Ps. 136:1). And he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved (toppling over, like Dagon before the glory of the Lord; 1 Sam. 5:4)".

"He who profits from the oblation (the priest making fat profits from the piety of the benighted worshipper) chooseth a tree that will not rot" — or so he hopes; but indeed there is no such tree, for even the Tree of Life withered and died in due time, when its ground was cursed (Gen. 3:17,22).

### The Creator

What a wholesome contrast in the words that follow! The piling up of rhetorical questions makes its point as nothing else could:

- "Have ye not known?
  - Have ye not heard?
- Hath it not been told you from the beginning?
  - Have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth?"

There is no missing the allusions here to the familiar Genesis account of creation.

These allusions continue through verse after verse: "That stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain" (v.22). "Vanity" (v.23) is the Hebrew word *tohu* which describes the earth as "without form". "Who hath created these things?" (v.26) harnesses the familiar word *bara'* of Gen. 1:1. "The Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not" (v.28) supplies adequate commentary on Gen. 2:2; "God rested from all his work which he had made." And in v.31 more than one phrase harks back to the description of the cherubim which became Adam's tokens of hope when shut out of Eden (Gen. 3:24). Consider also the creation echoes in earlier verses: "the grass of the field" (v.6), "the waters...heaven...the dust of the earth" (v.12), "the Spirit of the Lord" (v.13).

The apostrophe: "Have ye not known? Have ye not heard?" can have been addressed only to Israel. And this knowledge of the God of Power behind Creation was theirs from earliest days. What an immense advantage they had over the superstitious pagans around them whose priests fed them grotesque concoctions of debasing fable!

But the God of Power is so great that he "sits (dwells) upon the circle of the earth" (i.e. the vault of heaven spread out over the earth; this is the picture in Ez. 1:26 and Ex. 24:10). "He stretches out heaven as a gauze" (RVm, "as a curtain"; Ps. 104:2) — as though the heavenly expanse were only "as a tent to dwell in", until the blessed day when He has a Temple on earth as His lasting abode (Rev. 21:4; 22:3).

### The smallness of men

By contrast with the immensity of this Being whose glory is above the heavens and Who humbles Himself to behold the heavens as well as the earth (Ps. 113:4,6), the men He has made are but grasshoppers. Israel came to the borders of the Land of Promise, hostile and envious, but overawed and dispirited at the prospect before them: "we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (Num. 13:33). And men at their mightiest are like that before the might of God!

He "brings princes of the earth to nothing" and "judges of the earth" are reduced to a disorderly rabble (*tohu*). These words look back to the horrific destruction of the Assyrian army before Jerusalem: "He blows upon them, and they wither, and the whirlwind takes them away as stubble."

Again and again this is the type of language men of God harness, all so inadequately, to that titanic occasion. "Behold, I will send a blast upon him" (37:7) — the Spirit of the Lord blowing so that men wither as grass and fade as flowers (40:7). "God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like the whirling dust before the storm" (17:13).

"The Lord shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall show the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones. For through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be beaten down, which smote with a rod" (30:31; cp. Ps. 83:13-15).

All of these words are also like a prophecy of how God will deal with His enemies in the Last Days. "Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown; yea, their stock shall not take root in the ground." But Messiah's will. The "tender plant", the Lord's "root out of a dry ground," the "shoot out of the stem of Jesse" — *he* shall prosper. And so also "the trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord," who shall glorify Him.

Against this background of powerful thought, the divine challenge is renewed: "To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One." Here the emphasis is not only on might but also on Holiness. "The Holy One of Israel" is the title Isaiah never tired of using. \* It goes back to the overpowering vision of holiness which he saw in the Sanctuary of the Lord (ch.6). If the cleverness and might of man is dwarfed by the majesty of God, then how much more does His holiness shame mortal man, unclean and sinful!

### The Heavenly Host

Then "lift up thine eyes on high, and behold! Who hath created these? Who bringeth out their host by number?" He counts that countless army (contrast Gen. 15:5). The mighty multitude that leaves man speechless with awe gives him implicit obedience. No wonder Hezekiah exhorted his people: "Be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him" (2 Chr. 32:7).

God calls all His great host by name. Not one is lacking. \*\* "He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names" (Ps. 147:4). But also, "he gathereth the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds" (v.2,3).

But Isaiah also would fain have his reader see further meaning behind his inspiration. Abraham was promised not only a seed as the sand of the sea but also as the stars of the heaven (Gen. 22:17). Here is not only Abraham's natural earthly seed but also a heavenly, spiritual multitude of descendants. These are "Jacob" and "Israel" (v.27). And any man who lifts up his eyes on high not only to see but also to perceive, qualifies for inclusion in the latter.

But alas, the sons of Jacob chose, against the explicit warning of their great prophet, to "lift up their eyes unto heaven...even all the host of heaven" and were drawn away to "worship and serve them which God hath divided to all the nations under the whole heaven" (Dt. 4:19). For the time being God will put up with Gentile worship of His works, whilst ignorant of Himself. But not so Israel.

With the coming of the gospel, all this is changed. God now commands *all* men everywhere to repent. Isaiah will, one day, live to see this happen.

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\* 15 times in "Proto-" and 16 times in "Deutero-"! A remarkable coincidence if these are not the same writer.

\*\* LXX: "Not one thing escapes His notice."

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## 40 (6). "They that wait upon the Lord" (v.27-31)

This last splendid section of Isaiah 40 raises a problem which runs through ten chapters: Are the frequent allusions to Jacob and Israel to be read with reference to the nation or to Hezekiah their king? to the New Israel, the elect, or to the Messiah who redeems them?

A simple clear-cut answer to these questions is not easy. A review of about fifteen places where these names come together in Isaiah 40-49 suggests that sometimes one meaning, sometimes the other, is intended. Indeed there is occasionally a rapid switch from one to the other — as in 49:3-6; "Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified," this is the

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Messiah (Jn. 12:23; 14:13; 17:5; Phil. 2:7,11,16), and therefore Hezekiah also, his prototype. But then: "Saith the Lord, that formed me from the womb to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered...It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel..."

Each case will have to be treated on its merits. And in some instances it will be found that either meaning, or both, will yield a valuable truth.

This first occurrence is a fair illustration: "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?"

Few men have found themselves up against the problem of evil more than Hezekiah did. Following a vicious, worthless father, he gave himself to the Lord with unquenchable zeal. The temple service was restored, the people were called to Jerusalem to renew observance of the Passover, in time of invasion there was a fine unwavering dependence on the God of Israel.

Yet naught but calamity befell. One after another, the nation's fortresses fell into the hands of the Assyrians. With satanic cruelty two hundred thousand captives were driven off to Nineveh and Babylon. Only Jerusalem was left, besieged and helpless. And Hezekiah himself was laid low with a vile incurable disease.

What had he done to deserve all this? Why should he, who had so zealously sought God's kingdom and God's righteousness, find himself swept away in a torrent of troubles? Was his way really hidden from the Lord? had God forgotten to be gracious?

The prophet's explanation of this tangle of "inconsistency" was a reminder that faith, even uncomprehending faith, in the great Creator of all is never misplaced: "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?"

God has not forgotten, neither is He deaf, nor is He tired. Therefore, Hezekiah, hang on regardless. This is God's world, and He knows what He is doing.

But *you* don't, for "there is no searching of his understanding." So why should you either expect or even hope to make sense of His purposes? The One who "metes out heaven with a span, who comprehends the dust of the earth in a measure, who weighs mountains in scales, and hills in a balance" — what likelihood is there that yourself, less than "the small dust of the balance", will ever be able to keep in step with that mighty Mind? Can the beast being offered in sacrifice at God's altar understand, much less appreciate, the praise of God sung in a psalm of David by the temple choir? can a dog follow his master's manipulation of a laser beam?

This very point, made in Isaiah's words, becomes the climax of Paul's great argument in Romans 9,10,11 about the place of Israel in God's purpose. Beloved for the fathers' sakes, cast off because of stubborn unbelief, hard hearts made harder, their high spiritual privileges taken over by outsiders, and yet — destined to a glorious future!

"O, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments (Is. 40:28), and his ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33).

At the time Paul wrote those words, many a devout Jew, both hostile and unbelieving, was puzzled and bewildered by the shape events were taking in Jewry. Paul's commentary was: "God knows what He is doing. We are too small to understand His ways. But they are sure to work out right for all men of faith. Faith — faith in God's great purpose in Christ — this is the answer. In Christ all things will fall into place.

And so it was in the days of Hezekiah. The faith and self-dedication of that fine man brought a marvellous deliverance both to himself and to all his people.

Isaiah's reassurance to the puzzled suffering king has proved equally heartwarming to many of his spiritual heirs:

"He giveth power to the faint (to those who acknowledge themselves to be such!) and to them that have no might\* he increaseth strength."

Human power and might are of no avail: "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord (i.e. looking for aid and salvation from him) shall renew their strength."

There follows a stirring triple expansion of this assurance in terms which all evoke a mental picture of the cherubim of glory:

"They shall *mount up with wings as eagles*" (Ps. 103:5).

They shall *run*, and not be weary\*\*. They shall *walk*, and not faint.\*\*

At first sight this sequence appears to be a diminuendo — fly, run, walk. But it isn't really.

"Mount up as eagles" suggests immortality.

"Run" is Paul's word for the preaching of the gospel to the nations (2 Th. 3:1 RV; Phil. 2:16; Ps. 147:15).

"Walk with me in white...in the midst of the candlesticks" (Rev. 2:1; 3:4) suggests high privilege in the kingdom, and powers of supervision.

Other scriptures continue this sequence.

Equal to the angels, they shall "*stand* in the presence of God" (Lk. 1:19; Rev. 5:6).

Exalted in Christ, they shall "*sit* with him in his throne" (Rev. 3:21).

All of these experiences make appropriate blessing for "the man that *walketh* not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor *standeth* in the way of sinners, nor *sitteth* in the seat of the scornful" (Ps. 1:1).

Hezekiah may have been the first to receive these matchless words, but he was by no means the last. The assurance they impart to flagging faith has been effective in the life of many a perplexed and struggling man of God.

And so it is, to this day.

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\* A double-meaning word! *Aliter*: "them that have no iniquity".

\*\* Note how these words "weary, faint" run through v.28-31.

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## 41 (1). The man from the east (v.1-9)

"Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the people...come near; then let them speak: let us come near to judgment" (42:1). In this part of Isaiah, one of the main themes is the contention between the God of Israel and the gods of the Gentile nations. An apostrophe of this kind recurs over and over again (e.g. 41:21-29; 44:8-20; 43:8-12; 45:20-25).

### Sennacherib

The background to it is the bold and raucous challenge thrown down by Sennacherib and his

emissaries before the beleaguered citizens of Jerusalem. It was more than a military challenge. The power of the God of Israel was being insistently and insolently defied (2 Kgs. 18:22,30,32-35; 19:4,10-13,16-19, 22-24,27,28,34,37). The memory of the mission of Jonah still rankled in many Assyrian minds, and now with what intense satisfaction did Sennacherib confidently declare: "Yet forty days and Jerusalem shall be overthrown" (Jon. 3:4).

Through Isaiah there came a faith-strengthening riposte to this sustained campaign of blasphemy (37:6,7). Yet a little while, and Jehovah would be vindicated.

The present section of the prophecy neatly and forcefully insists that Sennacherib's rampage and its cataclysmic conclusion were all entirely at the behest of Jehovah, not of the gods of Nineveh. From beginning to end, all was in His hand.

"Who hath raised up one from the east, whom he calleth in righteousness (RV) to his foot (as a servant; cp. 1 Sam. 25:42mg)? he giveth him rule over kings; he giveth them as the dust to his sword, as the stubble to his bow" (41:2RV).

This mighty warrior called to do God's work, is Sennacherib, "the ravenous bird from the east, the man from a far country that executeth my counsel" (46:11). It is the repetition of a staggering view of Israel's history which is constantly expounded by Isaiah — that God is in control; all events, even the direst evils, are framed by His wisdom and providence:

"Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the kings of Assyria, and all his glory" (8:7). "Ho, Assyrian, the rod of mine anger...I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge...Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few" (10:5-7).

Thus God directs and harnesses the ambition of evil men. Here, rather than in Assyrian prowess, is the explanation of the whirlwind success of that first (and last!) campaign against Judaea and its forty and six "fenced cities." "He pursued them, and passed on safely\*"; even by the way he had not gone (hitherto) with his feet".\*\*

### God's honour vindicated

The outcome of these frightening events was awe-inspiring in a completely unexpected way — the devastation of the Assyrian camp, the end of terror for Israel, and the glorifying of their God by amazed nations round about: "Many brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that he was magnified in the sight of all the nations from thenceforth" (2 Chr. 32:23).

Naturally! What king would not wish to be on good terms with a neighbour who could send the mighty monarch of Assyria scurrying back to Nineveh like a whipped cur?

In Isaiah's words, "the isles saw, and feared; the ends of the earth trembled, they drew near, and came" (v.5)\*\*\*. This is the meaning of verse 1 also: "Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the peoples renew their strength (by reliance on the God of Israel; cp. 40:31)."

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\* There could be here a characteristic play on words by Isaiah, hinting at: "passed on to Salem."

\*\* Here, the last phrase could read: "by (this) way — into Salem? — he will not come."

\*\*\* If verses 6,7 do belong in this place, then in very effective contrast they make a jibe at the futility of the gods of Nineveh.

### God's servant

The one who stands high in God's esteem above all these nations is called "Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend" (v.8). The reference here is not to the nation, but to Hezekiah, their leader, without whom the nation would have been lost: "Thou whom I have hezekiahed from the ends of the Land, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant, I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away" (v.9).

That final assurance, expressed both positively and negatively, was very necessary, for Hezekiah passed through the valley of the shadow, almost reaching the point of despair where he felt that all his loyalty to Jehovah counted for nothing. Yet how wonderfully did events prove ultimately the truth of that assurance: "I have not cast thee away."

### Echoes of Genesis

The allusion to "Abraham my friend" triggers off another line of investigation in this prophecy.

One phrase after another takes the mind back to the experience of Abraham when the Promised Land was invaded by kings from Babylon and Assyria, and Abraham's own kith and kin were carried off as captives, only to be redeemed through a lightning God-guided campaign which sent the invaders back home crestfallen, whilst the friend of God returned to honour the Lord at Jerusalem and enjoy His blessing there (Gen. 14).

Now, by contrast, the prophet's message, like so many of his Hebrew phrases, runs to another and very different meaning. "The man raised up in righteousness from the east" is Abraham himself. There is verbal allusion to "nations...kings... pursuit" (Gen. 14:1,15,14). The Hebrew phrase for "passed safely" (v.3) might well echo the meeting of Abram the *Hebrew* with the priestly king of *Salem*\* (Gen. 14:13,18). Thus, in very subtle fashion, is implied also the restoration of the 200,000 captives taken by Sennacherib, the blessing of God's high priest, and the renewed worship of God, as happened in Abram's experience. Should it not also be inferred that, as Abraham harried and pursued the retreating invaders to the very limits of the Land, so also Hezekiah's men did to the shattered remnants of the invader's army, their prisoners being used as hostages, for the redemption of their brethren in Assyrian bondage?

And now another phrase takes on a fresh meaning: "Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning?"

Immediately before that astonishing encounter, God promised the Land to Abraham in perpetuity (Gen. 13:14-17). Immediately after it, He promised him a multitudinous seed (Gen. 15:5,6), "calling the generations from the beginning".

So also with Hezekiah. It would seem that for the rest of his reign, Hezekiah did actually rule undisturbed over the Land promised to Abraham. And the Davidic promise of an unending line, fulfilment of which seemed to be much in jeopardy in Hezekiah's time, was also assured through the great events of that period.

### Messiah foreshadowed

This is, however, only the beginning of the ramifications of this prophecy. The

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\* Cp. v.2. RVm: "whom Righteousness meeteth."

very fact that Hezekiah foreshadows the Messiah in so many respects makes it almost inevitable that a prophecy written about him should also be true of the Christ to come.\*

There is NT. support for this conclusion. Those phrases: "the seed of Abraham... whom I have taken hold of (RV) from the ends of the earth..." are echoed in Heb. 2:16: "For verily not of angels doth he take hold, but he taketh hold\*\* of the seed of Abraham."

Yet there is a change of subject, as a paraphrase readily brings out. In Isaiah, God "takes hold of" (saves) Hezekiah (and Messiah), because he is the seed of Abraham His friend. In Hebrews, the Messiah "takes hold of" the stricken seed of Abraham. Is the NT. writer misapplying the passage?

Perhaps the primary reference to Hezekiah helps here. In saving that good and great leader, God also saved the people of whom he was the representative and spiritual mainstay. God did not save Assyrians or Egyptians for Hezekiah's sake. Nor does He save those who do not belong to Christ. Those redeemed are not only "partakers of flesh and blood" (Heb. 2:14), are not only "subject to bondage" (the phrase looks back to that multitude of Jewish captives freed from Assyrian slavery), but are also "his brethren" (Heb. 2:17).

This redemption in Christ has been the one great purpose of God from the very first, "calling the generations from the beginning; I the Lord, the first One, and with the last ones; I am He." It is a purpose involving not only faithful men of Israel but also (as in Hezekiah's day) Gentiles afar off who tremble at the majesty and lovingkindness of Jehovah: "The isles see, and fear; the ends of the earth tremble, draw near, and come." "The peoples renew their (spiritual) strength" by "waiting on the Lord" (40:31).

More than this, the day is coming when the spiritual defeat of the Enemy will be consummated in a physical discomfiture. As Hezekiah's subjects, apparently lost for ever, were brought back from the land of the Enemy, so it will be in the day when "gates of brass" and "bars of iron" give way before the authority of Christ. And as all human power marshalled against the city of God was driven off, battered and beaten, so it will yet be in days to come.

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\* Perhaps that statement should be written the other way round: The prophecy is about Messiah, but is conveniently framed out of Hezekiah's experience.

\*\* The Greek verb here is not precisely the same as Is. 41:9 LXX, perhaps because of the change of reference.

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## 41 (2). "I will uphold thee" (v.10-20)

One constantly recurring problem in this part of Isaiah is the question: Were these words prophecies about Hezekiah in the first instance, looking past him to the greater fulfilment in Messiah? Or, were these chapters a series of prophecies starting from the *known* experiences of Hezekiah and using them as a basis for Messianic inspiration of a much higher order?

This is an issue not easy to resolve. Perhaps it doesn't matter much provided the multiple-purpose character of these prophecies is well recognized. Reference to the nation of Israel (and to the New Israel also) is certainly involved (see the plurals in v.17,20), but it is clear that heaven's blessings come on the people, only because of the Man of Righteousness who is their highly-esteemed representative before God.

### Allusions to Moses

The allusiveness of this passage switches from Abraham (v.2-9) to Moses and the deliverance he brought to Israel.

"Fear not...Be not dismayed" (v.10) was spoken not only to Abraham, but also to Israel at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:13), and when they stood on the borders of the Land of Promise; (Dt. 31:6,8 addressed the same exhortation to the people and also to their new leader Joshua-Jesus).

"I am with thee" (v. 10) not only picks out Hezekiah as the prototype of Immanuel, but also repeats the angel's assurance to Moses (Ex. 4:12).

"I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (v. 10) echoes the experience of Moses when Joshua-Jesus led Israel's struggle for survival against Amalek (Ex. 17:12).

"They that strive with thee shall perish" denounces the fate of Pharaoh's army (Ex. 14:13) upon other comparable enemies of God's people.

The promise of "a pool of water" and "springs of water" (v.18) is only one of many allusions to the smitten rock in the wilderness (Ex. 17:6; Is. 30:25; 32:2; 35:6,7; 43:19; 44:3; 48:21; 49:10; 55:1; contrast also the nation in the time of their apostasy; Is. 5:13).

### First fulfilment

The moderns make the confident assumption that this "Isaiah" prophecy was written at the end of the Babylonian captivity, being apparently blind to the marvellous inappropriateness of the language to such a time. For example, "thou worm Jacob...thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them...they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought" (v. 12,14,15). What meaning could these promises have in the struggling times of Ezra? But reference to the great deliverance from Sennacherib could hardly be easier (cp.29:5,6; 17:13).

So also the reassurance: "I the Lord thy God will hezekiah thy right hand\*" (v. 13).

The exhortation: "Fear not...be not dismayed...I will uphold thee" (v. 10) is precisely that with which Hezekiah in his turn sought to strengthen the spirit of the threatened men of Jerusalem (2 Chr. 32:7).

"Thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff" (v. 15); e.g. Zion was a threshing floor (2 Sam. 24:18), and had itself suffered a severe threshing (Is. 21:10; 28:28).

The promise of lush growth (v. 19) in God's Land, which had been reduced to wilderness by the ravaging invader, harmonizes excellently with Isaiah's inspired promise of twin years of prosperity and abundance to make God's Jubilee of deliverance (2 Kgs. 19:29-31). The cedar, myrtle, and the rest, which made such phenomenal growth, were "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord" (61:3) in a time when Israel depended entirely on God for all that grew (Lev. 25:21), whilst they turned resolutely to the re-building of devastated homes (61:4).

Those years were evidently blessed with a specially lavish rainfall, so that, without any effort on their part, the ground brought forth plentifully for the survivors of invasion. More than this, the multitude of captives sent home from Nineveh and Babylon by

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\* "The right hand of my righteousness" (v.10); cp. Ps. 48:10 (a Hezekiah psalm).

their awed and frightened conquerors were refreshed on their weary journey homeward by "rivers in high places...fountains in the midst of valleys...springs of water" (v. 18; and cp. Ps. 107:35, another Hezekiah psalm). It was God's providence for His redeemed people, as for their forefathers when they faced the rigours of the wilderness of Sinai (cp. especially 49:10 and context).

### Messiah again

Impressive as these correspondences with Hezekiah's day are, the real importance of the prophecy centres in Christ. He is "the man of thy right hand...the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself" (Ps. 80:17, yet another Hezekiah psalm!). This language of psalm and prophecy expresses a very delightful Father-and-child relationship.

At a time when "men of strife...men of contention...men of war" (see AVm in v. 11,12) range themselves against this Servant of Jehovah, there appears an angel from heaven strengthening him (Lk. 22:43; LXX s.w.; Heb: making him like Hezekiah), with the staunch words: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee (thou art Immanuel), be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (v. 10).

Therefore, "fear not, worm Jacob" (v.14). There can be no manner of doubt that this strange expression was designed to recall the prophecy in Ps. 22 of Messiah's sufferings: "But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people" (22:6).

But the "worm Jacob" became Israel, the man of faith whom God vindicated and blessed. The caterpillar-worm becomes the lovely gracious butterfly, a new and heavenly creature. This coccus worm also provides the royal scarlet, but it dies in the process.

Through this man, His Servant, the Holy One of Israel becomes also the redeemer (v. 14) of the "mortal men"\* of Israel. But in the Law of Moses the responsibility and privilege of redemption lay with one who was near of kin (the word "redeemer" means that). So, implied in this lovely passage is the divine truth that the Holy One makes Himself next-of-kin to the "worm Jacob" whom He strengthens and to the "mortal men of Israel" whom He saves out of bondage.

### The Baptist's message

John the Baptist valued this Scripture as a prophecy of the Messiah. Its phrases were superbly woven into his teaching, and their origin recognized with chagrin by the learned men who joined the throng of listeners.

<b>Isaiah 41.</b>	<b>Luke 3.</b>
8. The seed of Abraham my friend.	8. Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father.
15. Make the hills as chaff.	17. The chaff he will burn.
16. Thou shalt fan them.	17. Whose fan is in his hand.
18. The wilderness a pool of water.	4,16. A voice in the wilderness. I indeed baptise you with water.
19. I plant in the wilderness (trees of God).	9. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.
42:1 Mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth. I have put my spirit upon him.	22. My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. The Holy Spirit descended upon him.

(Other details in chapter 9).

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\* The Hebrew word is cognate with the word for "death".

Nor is this all. Luke's account of the healing of the bent woman in the synagogue is rounded off with a near-quotation from Is. 41:11 LXX: "and all his *adversaries* were *ashamed*" (cp. v. 11 here) — this after the restoring of "a daughter of Abraham," one who was "the seed of Abraham, my friend" (Lk. 13:16,17).

### Gospel message

The Targum (in part, rightly) interprets the promised water as divine teaching (cp. Jn. 7:37-39). The valleys of blessing are what Ezekiel describes as full of dry bones! (same word in 37:1,2). And "the Holy One of Israel hath created it" (v.20); Heb. *bara* points to a New Creation.

Apply all this language to the gospel preaching of Christ, and there emerges an impressive figurative picture of both blessing and judgment. In this respect, the gospel was two-edged (v.15 Heb. = Rev. 1:16). Those who deem themselves to be as big and imposing as mountains (as mount Zion) are beaten small. But the gracious message for those who heed and want it is delightfully emphasized with a play on words:

"The poor (*ani*) and needy seek water, and there is none (*'ayin*); I (*ani*) the Lord will answer (*'anah*) them" (v.17).

And thus, with a change of figure, dry forbidding country is transformed into fertile loveliness, and the trees of righteousness spring up to praise the Lord...the shittah tree which framed His Tabernacle in the wilderness (Ex. 25:5), the cedar, fir, and oil-tree, which adorned His temple (1 Kgs. 6:15,16,23,31), the myrtle which graced His Feast of tabernacles (Neh. 8:15), and the pine and the box tree (plane and cypress?) will one day glorify His New Jerusalem (Is. 60:13). Yet, all that has happened hitherto in the work of Christ is only the prelude to greater blessing, for the Lord is the First and with the last ones.

As the Assyrian was swept into oblivion, so he will be once again: "All that were angered against thee shall be ashamed and confounded; they shall be as nothing, they...shall perish." He who was a mere "worm" shall "thresh" and "fan" the adversaries, and "the whirlwind (of the Lord) shall scatter them."

In that day those who thirst after righteousness shall be satisfied. "The (spiritual) wilderness shall become a pool of water." In nature and in the life of the spirit there will be a lush growth such as this cursed world cannot know.

And men will "SEE, and KNOW, and CONSIDER, and UNDERSTAND that the Holy One of Israel (Jn. 6:69RV) hath created it."

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## 41 (3). On trial (v.21-29)

The court case between the God of Israel and the idols of the pagan nations now comes to a second hearing:

"Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob" (41:21). The prophet chose first a masculine noun, and then a feminine, as though to intimate that gods and goddesses alike are all arraigned for judgment.

There is here also a typical Isaiah juggle with words: "Bring forth the tree of your deaths," with possible allusion to the inane choosing of timber from which to fashion the idol (see 40:20), and in contrast with the flourishing trees of righteousness (41:19) which God himself fashions.

"Let them bring forth, and declare unto us (to God and to Israel, who are his witnesses; 43:8-10) what shall happen: declare ye the former things...and...the latter end of them...things for to come" (v.22).

This is the challenge which rings out time and again in this part of the prophecy (e.g. 42:9; 44:7,8). If the gods really are in control of the world, then they know what they intend to do with it, so let them say beforehand what their purpose is, so that fulfilment may vouch for their truth and authority.

### The "Former" and the "Latter"

But what "former" and "latter" things did Isaiah have in mind?

Did he mean: Give us an account of Creation, how everything came into being, and tell us also of a wonderful New Creation when all things, now awry, shall be ordered aright? This is certainly one of the great themes of this prophecy. And what a challenge it would be to ask that the Genesis story be set alongside the ferocious and childish fantasies of Assyrian and Babylonian tradition.

Or was Abraham still in mind, with the early promise of the Land (Gen. 13:14-17), and the later promise of a multitudinous Messianic seed (Gen. 15:5; 22:17,18)?

Or was it the shaping of Israel's history, both in the past and in the remote glorious future?

Or, was there allusion to recent vivid experience? — the foretelling of an irresistible, utterly successful, Assyrian invasion (8:7; 10:6,7), followed by a sudden awe-inspiring devastation of the invader's forces (14:24,25; 1 7:13,14).

The appeal was specially for an announcement beforehand of impressive divine action: "Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods." A god incapable of this, is a not-god. "Yea, do good, or do evil" — do *something*, instead of sitting there, a silent still useless block of wood or metal.

It was an appeal Jeremiah was to echo with caustic contempt: "Upright as a palm tree, they speak not: they must needs be borne because they cannot go. Be not afraid of *them*; for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good" (10:5).

Isaiah was determined that his main point should go right home in the simplest minds: "Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work (achievement) that of the serpent" (v.24; see AVm) — an allusion probably to Moses' brazen serpent to which Israel had given superstitious worship, but now smashed to bits by Hezekiah's reforming zeal (2 Kgs. 18:4).

All such idols were an abomination in the sight of the Lord, and the worshipper as

well: "an abomination is he that chooseth you (idols)".

The tone of contempt intensifies: "There is none (of these idols) that sheweth, yea, none that declareth, yea, none that heareth your words (of petition)...Behold, they are all vanity; their works are nothing: their molten images are wind and confusion (*tohu*; Gen. 1:2)"

### "One from the North"

By contrast, it is easy to see that the God of Israel is at work: "I have raised up one from the north, and he is come: from the rising of the sun one that calleth on my name (or, that is called by my name): and he shall come upon princes as mortar, and as the potter treadeth the clay".

There are few more difficult verses in the entire prophecy than this. It has been expounded with reference to Abraham, Jacob, Sennacherib, Cyrus, Hezekiah, and the Messiah. But Jacob never did trample princes; Sennacherib was a bitter enemy of Jehovah and blasphemed His Name; any prophecy about Cyrus is irrelevant unless "Isaiah" was a Babylonian captive; Abraham was too completely in past history to furnish a convincing example of how Jehovah can declare "the latter end...from the beginning" (and this, especially, is what the prophet's argument requires); and nothing is known about Hezekiah which makes any sense of these allusions to the north and east.

The most likely explanation is that this recalls the work of the angel of the Lord. Michael, the great prince who stands up for the children of God's people, was at work for Jehovah: "I have raised up (the Assyrian) from the north\* (10:28-32), and he is come; from the rising of the sun he is called by my Name (mi-cha-El); cp. Ex. 23:20,21)." This was the work of the angel of the Lord, decreed before it came to pass (8:7; 10:6,7). Sennacherib was "a ravenous bird from the east" (46:11).

But the rebuking of the invaders' pride was also assigned to the same angel: "He shall come upon princes (Assyrian *s'ganim*) as upon mortar, and as the potter treadeth the clay." This also was declared beforehand, and was duly fulfilled: "The angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians" (37:36).\*\*

God said He would do it, and He did it. The challenge to produce both prophecy and action, which exposed the inane futility of all idol-worship, also triumphantly vindicated the God of Israel.

"First to Zion (the warning): Behold, behold them (the invaders): and (after that) I will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings" (v.27).

Read in this way, the last paragraph of Isaiah 41 follows the previous twenty verses with a ready application to the prophet's own day.

### Messianic fulfilment

But once again, and this time against all seeming possibility, the New Testament requires its reader to go back and find Christ even in such an apparently impossible setting.

"Bring forth the tree of your deaths," demands the King of Jacob of all false

\* Rev. 9:13,14 gives details of other angels in control of an army of the north.

\*\* It is possible that "from the rising of the sun" should also be linked with this destruction, "the day of the east wind" (27:8). Psalm 48, certainly a Hezekiah psalm, has this: "Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind" (v.7; and note v.4-6). Cp. also Is. 30:27: "behold, the name of the Lord cometh from far, burning with his anger."

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religions (v.21), and in due time He rises to His own challenge with the cross of Christ.

"The former things" and "the latter end" all centre in Christ. He is the Alpha and the Omega. From the foundation of the world he is "the lamb slain".

At his trial before the Sanhedrin, both "former things" and "the latter end" were evidence against him when the enemies of the Lord (seed of Abraham by birth, but Assyrians in temper) were determined to "produce their cause" against Jehovah and Jehovah's Son:

"This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days" — the latter things (Mt. 27:63); "even the same that I *said unto you from the beginning*" (Jn. 8:25; cp. 41:26: "who hath declared from the beginning.")

"Hereafter (41:23) shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Mt. 26:64) — the latter end.

"Declare us things for to come" is the challenge in Isaiah (v.22,23). So, with his disciples as well as with his enemies, Jesus gave clear and ample warning beforehand: "Now I tell you before it come, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he" (Jn. 13:19).

It has already been shown that John the Baptist quarried much of his message from Isaiah 40,41. Here now is another example. "First, to Zion (the message was), Behold, behold them (Jesus and the disciples gathering unto him)". Always John's message was: Not me, but Him. "Behold, the Lamb of God." And in Jesus God gave one bringing good tidings to Jerusalem (v.27).

#### "Show...that ye are 'gods' "

But besides good news there was also the withering exposure of men who were the idols and false gods of Israel.

"Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are *elohim*." But either they could not or they would not. Presented with a prophecy which pointed unmistakably to Jesus, rather than say a word of faith in him, they retreated in vexation and silence. Bidden say "Yea" or "Nay" regarding John the Baptist (the former things) they fell back on "We cannot tell" (Mk. 11:33; 12:35-37).

Thus they became, spiritually, a write-off: "Behold, they are all vanity; their works (of righteousness, painstakingly wrought according to the best rabbinic tradition) are nothing: their drink offerings\* are wind and confusion (*tohu*, chaos — until the Spirit of God moves; Ez. 36:26,27).

The leaders of Israel did nothing to show that they were gods (*elohim*; v.23), and Jesus castigated them accordingly: "Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods\*\*?" That scripture continues: "But ye shall die like men (like Adam?), and fall like one of the princes (of this world)." Over against this: "Arise (LXX: *anasta!*), O God, judge the earth: for (in Jesus) thou shalt inherit all nations" (the latter end).

This is what the Isaiah prophecy says — that One raised up from the north (Galilee), who is called by God's Name, will come from the rising of the sun (like the Glory of the Lord on the mount of Olives; Acts 1:11; Zech. 14:4; Mal. 4:2); and he will display divine power against Gentile princes, as the potter treads the clay (v.25).

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\* Another of Isaiah's double-meaning words!

\*\* Ps. 82:6, another Hezekiah psalm!

## 42 (1). "Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth" (v.1-9)

The first thing to observe about this section of Isaiah's prophecy is how remarkably it is integrated with the preceding chapter and also with ch.49. The following tabulation shows this:

	Isaiah 42:1-9	Isaiah 41	Isaiah 49
1.	Behold my servant Israel, Jacob (LXX) whom I uphold mine elect in whom my soul delighteth my spirit upon him (and v.5) judgement to the Gentiles (and v.3,4)	11,27,29 8 8 10 8,9	3,5    8 s.w. 44:3 4,6,8
2.	not cry nor lift up...	Contrast	
3.	bruised reed, smoking flax	2,15,25; 43:17	7
4.	not fail, nor be discouraged isles wait for his law	14 (and 40:27) 5	7
5.	God Jehovah, creator of heavens, spread forth the earth	40:22	13
6.	called thee in righteousness hold thine hand keep thee a covenant of the people a light to the Gentiles	2 10, 13	6 (s.w. twice) 8 6
7.	blind eyes, prisoners		9
8.	Jehovah is my name graven image	25 29	1
9.	former, new things spring forth	22,23 43:19	

From the foregoing it follows readily enough that these repeated expressions must be similarly understood in the various places where they occur. Therefore, whatever chapter 41 was about must decide the interpretation of 42:1-9 (and the same will be found to hold for ch.49).

### Hezekiah once again

Just as Hezekiah, the servant of the Lord, is called Jacob and Israel (the two natures in the child of God!), so also here, for the LXX version has "Jacob my servant...Israel my chosen" (v.1).

But in what sense was it true of Hezekiah that God "put his spirit in him"? Two passages further on suggest prophetic inspiration:

"My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth..." (59:21).

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach good

tidings...to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (61:1,2).\*

The idea of prophetic inspiration is not usually associated with Hezekiah. But the researches of J.W. Thirtle ("Old Testament Problems") have made it very evident that a big proportion of the 150 psalms had their origin or extension in the time of Isaiah, not a few being by Hezekiah himself. There is also the familiar "writing of Hezekiah, when he...was recovered of his sickness" (Is. 38:9-20). "Therefore we will sing *my songs* all the days of our life in the house of the Lord" (v.20).

But is it true that he "brought forth judgment to the Gentiles"? In the sense of imposing the judgment of God upon them, no! However, this word *mishpat* has other associated meanings. It includes the idea of "the rule of God", and especially of "the right religion" (e.g. 56:1; 58:2; 59:8-15; and its frequent use in Ps. 119). In this sense Hezekiah was a true prototype of Messiah:

"And many brought gifts unto the Lord at Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth" (2 Chr. 32:23). A king from whom an Assyrian army reeled back, cowed and shattered, was one to keep friends with! This political and religious development in Hezekiah's reign is the basis of most of Isaiah's delightful passages about the conversion of the Gentiles (e.g. v. 11,12; 45:14; 49:7; 60:3,9,14; 62:2).

In this sense Hezekiah "brought forth judgment unto truth" (v.3), he "set judgment in the Land" (v.4). Those last fifteen years were an epoch not only of God-blessed prosperity but also of devotion to the honour of the God of Israel.

Nor was this achieved by the dictation of brute force. "He shall not cry, nor lift up\*\*, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street" (v.2). After the rout of the Assyrians, the representatives of the nations came to him of their own accord, glad to be on good terms with such a king and such a God.

"He shall not fail nor be discouraged." But indeed, he was, almost! "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgement is passed over from my God" (40:27); and there was prophetic remonstrance against the fears of "thou worm Jacob" (41:14).

"Bruised reed...smoking flax"

Yet Hezekiah came through his trials successfully\*\*\*: "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench." This figure of speech is very apt to describe the king's character. It is illustrated by the understanding and sympathy with which he handled the defects of the reformation which he inaugurated: (a) The law of the "Little Passover" (Num. 9:10) was "stretched" to cover their Passover celebration in the wrong month (2 Chr. 30:13). (b) The Levites, instead of the heads of families, slew the lambs (v. 15,17). (c.) The people ate the passover "unclean" (v. 18). (d) The feast was kept for two full weeks (v.23). Nevertheless, "Hezekiah prayed for them saying, The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God...and the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and *healed* the people" (2 Chr. 30:18,19,20).

This reed-and-flax figure may have another, more specialised, reference. The word for "reed" describes a branch of a candlestick (s.w. Ex. 25:31 -35), of which the flax would be the wick. The frequent figure of David always having a light (or, lamp) in Jerusalem is readily understood as referring to the permanence of David's

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\* This sequence of impressive "spirit" passages is worth attention: Is. 40:7,24; 41:29; 42:1,5; 44:3.

\*\* (Contrast v.11; 33:10).

\*\*\* (All except 39:1-3)

dynasty (.1 Kgs. 15:4; Ps. 132:17; Is. 62:1).

In that case the reed-and-flax allusion is a prophetic assurance to Hezekiah, childless at the time of his acute sickness, that he will live to continue the Davidic line (note 38:5,19).

The ensuing verses have a series of verbal contacts with Psalm 146 such as can hardly be written off as accidental:

<b>Psalm 146</b>	<b>Isaiah 42</b>
4. his breath goeth forth	5. He giveth breath unto the people
5. The God of Jacob for his help...	6. I the Lord...will keep thee (v.1 LXX: Jacob)
6. made heaven, earth, and sea	5. created the heavens...spread forth the earth
6. keepeth truth for ever	3. judgment unto truth
7. executeth judgment for the oppressed	3. bring forth judgment
7. looseth the prisoners	7. bringeth out the prisoners from the prison
8. openeth the eyes of the blind	7. to open the blind eyes

So perhaps Psalm 146 is by Isaiah. Its phraseology has a marvellous relevance to events of his time.

This assertion of God's mighty powers is introduced by: "thus saith *the* God (*ha-El*) Jehovah." It is a declaration that He is the true, the only, God. "My glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (v.8).

This Jehovah, who is the lord of Creation, is also a God nigh at hand to his Servant: "I will hezekiah thine hand...and give thee for a covenant of the people (those who came to keep the Passover all unprepared were accepted for Hezekiah's sake), for a light of the Gentiles...to bring out the prisoners from the prison..." (v.6,7). Even this last phrase found literal fulfilment in the Year of Jubilee (2 Kgs. 19:29) which followed the destruction of Sennacherib's army. Jubilee meant release from bondage, and the king of Assyria was only too glad to send all his Jewish captives back to their homes.

### **Twofold fulfilment**

Thus, once again, the prophecy appears to have been written as a commentary on the life and experiences of good king Hezekiah, but also, most emphatically, as a prophecy of the Messiah whom that fine servant of the Lord foreshadowed. This is probably the meaning of the declaration:

"Behold, the former things are come to pass (already fulfilled in Hezekiah), and new things do I declare (i.e. a further fulfilment in the life and work of the Messiah): before they spring forth I tell you of them" (v.9); and cp. 43:18,19; 48:3,5,6).

This verb "spring forth" (*tzamach*) is one which the prophets delight to use about the Messiah, the scion of the house of David (61:11; 4:2; Ps. 132:17; Jer. 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). and the New Testament concurs by quoting this prophecy (v.1 -4; Mt. 12:18-21)\* to describe the quiet unsensational kindly nature of Jesus' ministry. He sought to emulate the unaggressive patient spirit of Hezekiah, carefully nursing the flickering spirit of true godliness in the nation by an unostentatious encouragement of the faithful remnant among the meek of the earth.

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\* See appendix to this chapter.

But in Matthew the context is also this: "Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him. But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence...that it might be fulfilled..." In other words, Jesus who could have demolished a Pharisee in a head-on collision, chose rather to campaign quietly among the uninfluential but more truly devout section of the nation.

"In whom my soul delighteth" (v.1) uses a Hebrew verb (*ratzah*) which, with its cognate noun (*ratzōn*), very frequently describes an acceptable sacrifice (hence the LXX reading). What a contrast with Isaiah 1:11; "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord.../ *delight not* in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats."

The Lord's gracious endowment with the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit had already been foretold (11:1-4, seven-fold), and was to be emphasized again in words which Jesus made his own: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me: because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek..." (61:1; Lk. 4:18).

Notwithstanding his concentration on a ministry of preaching and quiet appeal, and a steadfast rejection of pomp and circumstance (Mt. 4:8-10; Jn. 6:15), the Davidic hope, symbolized by the reed and flax of David's lamp in Jerusalem, was not to suffer "It shall not be dimmed nor crushed" (v.4).\*

Nay rather, it was to be given a greater power, a wider scope: "the isles shall wait for his law" — in him who is the Hope of Israel, the Gentiles also shall set their hope (2:3; Jn. 12:21).

### The New Creation

Thus, there comes into existence a New Creation, instead of the Old across which men have written their own curse:

"Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath to the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: I the Lord have called thee in righteousness...and will give thee for a covenant of the people" (v.5,6).

Here is Isaiah's constantly repeated idiom of the New Creation. The God who made all things by His might and power can and will make all things new by His righteousness in Christ. It is a wonderful theme, of which Isaiah never tires. The splendid dual purpose of his copious allusions to the creative might of the God of Israel is, first, to sweep out of the arena the futilities of idol-worship, and, second, to assert with untiring enthusiasm God's wondrous purpose to fashion in Christ a New Creation of men and women glorifying His Name with a righteousness not their own. It is a theme enunciated with unwearied eloquence and enthusiasm (40:26,28; 41:20; 42:5,6; 43:1,7,15,18,19; 45:7,8,12,18; 48:7; 51:6,16; 57:19; 65:17,18; 66:22; and also in Psalms of the Isaiah period: 102:18; 104:30; 148).

Paul, so often accused of attempting to talk philosophy to philosophic Athenians, actually shaped his Mars Hill argument on these words of Isaiah: "God that made the world and all things therein...Lord of heaven and earth...giveth to all life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:24,25). Even his quote from Aretas: "we are also his offspring" (v.28), was suggested by Isaiah's phrase: "that which cometh out of it" (s.w. 44:3: offspring). And then Paul went on appropriately to develop the doctrine of the New Creation.

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\* The same verbs as in v.3: "break...quench."

### The Servant's great work

But here, in Isaiah, the emphasis is continued on the Servant of the Lord as the unique instrument of this grand design: "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness", so that a righteousness of God may be revealed on a faith basis to every man of faith; Rom. 1:17. "I will keep *thee* (s.w. Branch; 11:1), and will give thee for a covenant of the people (Israel), for a light of the Gentiles."

Here is yet another of Isaiah's absorbing Messianic themes — the prospect of a New Covenant with God through His suffering Servant (49:8; 54:10; 55:3; 59:21; 61:8).

But there can be no covenant without sacrifice. So here is an often-unrecognized prophecy that except the Servant of the Lord declare God's righteousness and salvation in a sacrificial death, there is no redemption. "This cup is the New Covenant in my blood" (Lk. 22:20). Jeremiah took up the theme with intense expectant zeal: "A New Covenant...my law in their inward parts...they shall all know me...I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (31:31-34).

His emphasis was on a covenant with Israel, but Isaiah, with grand contemporary events as the springboard of his inspiration, took in the nations also: "a light to the Gentiles" (cp. 49:5,6; 45:4-6; 51:3-5).

The aged Simeon learned it from Isaiah: "A light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel" (Lk. 2:32), but he did not live to hear Jesus teach the same things with increasing emphasis in the end of his ministry (Mt. 21:43; 22:9; 24:14; Mk. 11:17; Jn. 8:12; 9:5; 12:20-23).

The eyes of the blind are to be opened, and the prisoners brought forth from their dungeon (v.7). These figures of speech are also blended together: they "that sit in darkness (and are blinded by it) are brought out of the prison house." Here the blindness of Israel and the ignorance of the benighted Gentiles are woven together. All alike need the illumination Messiah brings.

All this is declared beforehand. Not only have "the former things come to pass" which God had revealed through His prophets, but also "new things (of the New Creation) do I declare" (v.9). Thus God affirms His authority and control: "My glory will I not give to another" (v.8). It is an assertion which makes all the more powerful Matthew's quote from this prophecy, for they said about Jesus: "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Baalzebub" (Mt. 12:24). The glory of those mighty works God does not give to another god, neither His praise to graven images. But the Son inherits by right that glory and power which is His Father's (Jn. 17:24; 12:23).

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### Appendix

	<b>Is. 42 Hebrew</b>	<b>Is. 42 LXX</b>	<b>Mt. 12</b>	
1.	Behold my servant whom I uphold mine elect (RV chosen) in whom my soul delighteth I have put my spirit upon him	Jacob is my servant I will help him Israel is my chosen my soul has accepted him I have put my spirit upon him	18. Behold my servant whom I have chosen my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased I will put my spirit upon him	A B C D E

	<b>Is. 42 Hebrew</b>	<b>Is. 42 LXX</b>	<b>Mt. 12</b>	
	He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles	He shall bring forth judgement to the Gentiles	and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles	F
2.	He shall not cry nor lift up nor cause his voice to be heard in the street	He shall not cry nor lift up nor shall his voice be heard without	19. He shall not strive nor cry	G H J
3.	A bruised reed shall he not break	A bruised reed shall he not break	20. A bruised reed shall he not break	K M
	the smoking flax shall he not quench he shall bring forth judgment in truth	smoking flax shall he not quench but he shall bring forth judgment to truth	and smoking flax shall he not quench till he send forth judgment unto victory	N P Q
4.	He shall not fail (be broken) nor be discouraged (be quenched) till he have set judgment in the earth	he shall shine out and shall not be broken until he have set judgment on the earth		R
	and the isles shall wait for his law	and in his name shall the Gentiles hope	and in his name shall the Gentiles hope	S

**Notes:**

- A. Mt. follows Heb.  
 B. Mt: "chosen" (*hairtizō*) is a fairly close equivalent of Heb: "uphold" (*hazaq*)  
 C. "Beloved" is neither Heb. nor LXX. Allusion to "*David my servant* (Ps. 89:19,20)?  
 D. Here all three verbs are regularly associated with the idea of an acceptable sacrifice.  
 E. Mt.'s change of tense is mystifying here. A perfect would have been splendidly appropriate to the context. Intention to emphasize a future showing forth of judgment to these Jewish "Gentiles" (12:14; 22:15) and their council of judgement?  
 H. "Strive" in the sense of public debate. J. "Cry" is a good equivalent of "lift up (the voice)".  
 L. Why Matthew's switch from singular to plural?  
 M,N. All at once, complete coincidence of reading!  
 P. *Ekballō* here instead of *ekpherō*, to suggest the casting off of Israelitish adversaries?  
 Q. 'Truth' means God's Covenant (B.S. 17.15).  
 'Victory' indicates Promise fulfilled.

- R. Those three lines repeat MNPQ, hence the omission?  
 S. All at once, after doing without LXX all this time, here it is, verbatim. "Gentiles" may be said to be necessary to elucidate the idiom. "Hope" is OK as equivalent of "wait for", and it delightfully suggests Gentiles espousing the Hope of Israel. "In his name" is desirable to avoid a mistaken inference from the word "torah".

## 42 (2). Tribulation and Deliverance (v.10-25)

When the development of ideas in this section is analysed it appears, to twentieth century thinking, back to front:

- a. v.10-13: The New Song of praise to God for what He has done.
- b. v. 14-16 describe the deliverance.
- c. v. 17-25 explain the tribulation which preceded the deliverance.

### Isaiah's own day

Once again the assembly of ideas and the phraseology in which they are clothed require reference to God's mighty acts on behalf of His people in the reign of Hezekiah.

The "New Song" is appropriate to celebrate a new kind of deliverance such as was witnessed in the destruction of the Assyrians. Its call to involve all nations round about in the praise of God found response in Gentile awe and respect for Jehovah and His temple in Jerusalem (see on v.4).

At that time the Lord did "go forth as a mighty man;" He did "prevail against His enemies." It is noteworthy that these words twice echo the Hebrew word *gibbor* (cp. "Mighty God"; 9:6). But here there seems to be intention to suggest the name Gabriel, the angel of the Lord who "went forth and smote in the camp of the Assyrians" (37:36).

The mighty overflowing River Euphrates, that apt symbol of Assyrian expansion (8:7,8), was bidden dry up: "I will make the great river (intensive plural!) islands, and I will dry up the pools" (v.15).

The hundreds of thousands of Hebrew captives sent off to Nineveh and Babylon, a far greater captivity than Nebuchadnezzar's, are described in vivid terms:

"This is a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them snared in holes (rounded up and herded into caves ready for deportation?), and they are hid in a prison house\*: they are for a prey, and none delivereth; for a spoil, and none saith, restore" (v.22; the Hebrew text echoes Maher-shalal-hash-baz; 8:1).

It was the Lord who "gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers" (v.34), and this because "they would not walk in his ways." Fine as Hezekiah's reformation had been, it had touched only a fraction of the nation. "Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger and the strength of battle" (v. 25).

However, the great destruction at Jerusalem meant release of the captives. God "brought the blind by a way that they knew not...He made darkness light before them, and crooked places straight" (v. 16).

\* The confident attempts of the modernists to assign this prophecy to the time of Cyrus fall down in the face of passages like this. At the time of Cyrus the Jews of Babylon were settled and prosperous.

It also meant the vindication of the True God against the taunts of those who served the idols of Assyria: "They shall be turned back (literally!), they shall be greatly ashamed, that trust in graven images" (v. 17).

### A new Exodus deliverance

Now it is possible to appreciate why this section of the prophecy (like several others which follow; e.g. 43:1-4, 15-21; 63:9-14) looks back so frequently to the exodus of Israel from Egypt. In the prophet's own day there was a comparable deliverance. Some of these details are worth listing.

- a. "The Lord...a man of war." This is Ex. 15:3, the song of Moses.
- b. "Make the rivers islands...dry up the pools" (v. 15) suggests the crossing of the Red Sea.
- c. "a way that they knew not...paths they have not known" (v. 16) — Israel's way through the waters and in the wilderness.
- d. "Make darkness light before them" (v.16) — the pillar of cloud and fire.
- e. "They that trust in graven images ashamed" (v.17) — the golden calf.
- f. "Who is blind as he that is at covenant peace with me?" (v. 19) — God's covenant with an unspiritual people.
- g. "He will magnify the Law (given at Sinai), and make it honourable" (v.21).

### The Last Days

Like nearly everything that Isaiah has to say, this prophecy ranges forward to another fulfilment when Israel, still deaf and blind, will once again be a people "robbed and spoiled." Again they will be dragged into captivity (cp. Zech. 14:2; Joel 3:1-6; Dt. 28:68; Is. 19:18,20), and their land given for a spoil to the robbers; and all this because "they do not walk in God's ways, neither are they obedient to his law." Again they will be "snared in holes and...hid in prison houses;" and with no-one to bring rescue: "None to deliver...none to say, Restore.\*"

But at such a time, when Israel's hope is lost, when they have come (as it would seem) to the end of the road, "the Lord shall go forth as a mighty man...he shall prevail against his enemies...I will bring the blind by a way that they know not...I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight.\*\* These things will / do unto them, and not forsake them."

The Exodus deliverance under Moses, and the great salvation wrought in the time of Hezekiah will alike pale into insignificance compared with this latest and last great work by God on behalf of His people. It is all written "for the time to come" (v.23); this is a cipher phrase with more than one meaning, for it is "the Spirit of God" written in reverse (s.w. 37:7).

In that time redeemed Israel will "sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise unto the ends of the earth." Then all the nations will take up this glad theme (v.10-12), "giving glory unto the Lord, and declaring his praise in the islands." Thus, at last, after God has "long time holden his peace," Israel's calling as "a kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6) to educate the nations on God's behalf will be realised, and for this the New Israel will be best qualified of all.

### The Gospel

The early church, in their day, saw intense meaning in the prophet's trenchant

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\* Verse 25 seems to anticipate Lk. 19:43,44.

\*\* In 40:4 Israel were bidden do this. But now God does it for them.

phrasing. Jesus intended that they should. He enacted specially impressive miracles on blind and deaf (Mk. 7:31 -37; 8:22-26), parables which most men were too blind and deaf to make sense of, because Israel were "given to the robbers" (v.24; LXX delightfully suggests "those who lord it over them.") With "ears opened, they heard not" (v.20) — the man who was healed disobeyed his instructions (Mk. 7:34,36).

Jesus taught his disciples to see the pangs of his suffering as like "the cry of a travailing woman" (v.14; Jn. 16:21) — the birth of a New Creation. It is a figure which will have new meaning in days to come (Mt. 24:8 Gk.).

## 43 (1). "Ye are My Witnesses" (v.1-21)

The previous section of the prophecy concluded with a picture of the tribulations of the Jacob-Israel people (42:24) to whose rescue God had come in Isaiah's day. Here now is the complimentary picture of deliverance — the marvels of the great transformation in the nation's status and prosperity brought about by God. Yet, paradoxically enough, though with evident truth, there are censures of the chosen people's spiritual limitations.

It is possible that the change of pronouns — he, him, in 42:25, thee, thou, in v.1 — indicates a temporary change of subject from the Jacob-Israel nation to the Jacob-Israel who was their leader and representative. "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel" — on which W.A. Wordsworth succinctly comments: "Jacob the clay, Israel the vessel formed."

This is the man who has already been exhorted more than once: "Fear not...I have called thee by thy name" (41:10,14; 42:6).

This Hezekiah lived closer to God than any king since David. From birth he was named as the prototype Immanuel (7:14), and his royal name carried the assurance of divine help. Therefore: "Fear not...thou art mine."

### A New Exodus

Indeed, with the horrors of the Assyrian invasion there had been good grounds for fear. But now quietness and assurance, "for I have redeemed thee." It was in this way that God foretold His saving of Israel from Egypt: "I will redeem you with a stretched-out arm" (Ex. 6:6).

This echo of redemption phraseology is the first here of a long series of allusions back to the great deliverance in the time of Moses.

"When thou passest through the waters, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire (the pillar of fire?), thou shalt not be burned" (v.2).

"The Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour" (v.3; Heb. *moshiyah*, echoing *mosheh*, the name of Moses).

"I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee" (v.3).

"I, even I, am the Lord" (this is Ex. 3:15).

"Your redeemer (from Egypt; Ex. 6:6), the Holy One of Israel (at Sinai)" (v.14).

"The Lord, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters; which bringeth forth the chariot and the horse, the army and the power; they shall lie down

together, they shall not rise (cp. 26:14): they are extinct, they are quenched as tow" (v. 16,17). Sennacherib's army shared the fate of Pharaoh's.

"I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen" (v.20).

"I am...the Creator of Israel, your king" (v.15; Ex. 15:18).

### **Captives and Fugitives**

The obvious purpose behind these allusions is to proclaim a new deliverance from bondage comparable to the Exodus.

Sennacherib's inscription on the Taylor Prism tells of 200,000 captives rounded up. This deportation of populations was a policy first introduced by Tiglath-pileser III (e.g. northern Israel). Now Sennacherib was following the same pattern. But after the destruction of his army and the devastation of his camp before Jerusalem, these captives became a positive threat to the conqueror's own personal survival, so they were promptly sent back home again from Babylon\*. There is also a probability that as the shattered disorganized Assyrian army trailed homewards many of them were taken prisoner by men of Israel operating as guerillas in the hills. There would later be large-scale exchanges of these prisoners. Isaiah's word "Redeemer" is that which is used repeatedly in Lev. 25 for purchasing the freedom of a bonds slave.

Thus the return of multitudes of captives, who had been given up for lost, would have all the appearance of another Exodus.

Even the promise of "waters in the desert" probably came literally true, for God gave His people the rich blessings of a Year of Jubilee (2 Kgs. 19:29,30) — and the obvious way to bestow these was through a season of extra-copious rainfall (44:3; 48:21; 49:10; 55:10; 58:11; 66:12.)

It may be also, that the exceptional rains made the wilderness tribes unusually prosperous and hospitable instead of being hostile and predatory. "The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness." The language is obviously figurative.

It may be taken as certain that many fugitives had fled to other neighbouring countries, anywhere to get away from these fierce pitiless Assyrians; and they too would come streaming back as soon as the news reached them of the rout of the marauders.

Hence: "I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the limits of the Land" (v.5,6; cp. Ps. 107:2-7,10,14,16 — a Hezekiah psalm).

### **Ransomed by a Redeemer**

Israel's redeemer-God paid a redemption price for their freedom: "I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee" (v.3)\*\*This is the massive victory which Sennacherib won over "the kings of Egypt...and the kings of Ethiopia" (Taylor Prism) at Eltekeh, thus cutting off the last vestige of possible human aid from Jerusalem.

But not only Egypt. Babylon also! "For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have

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\* Another of Sennacherib's conquests about this period. That punitive expedition against Babylon may have made the escape of captives more easy.

\*\* The attempt at a Cyrus application falls down badly here. Cyrus never had these territories. And the details of v.5,6 had no counterpart at the time of the Cyrus restoration.

brought down their bars (cp. 45:2s.w.), and the Chaldeans in the ships of their land cry (In, out, in, out!)" (v.14). This was another of Sennacherib's victories about the same time.

But there was surely an irony about "Egypt for thy ransom," for that plunder assembled by the Assyrians fell to the men of Israel after the fell work of the angel of the Lord!

### **God's Court Case — Third Session**

This prophecy also has an impressive resumption of the court-of-law figure, already used so powerfully (41:1-5,21-29). The third session of the trial now proceeds (v.8-13); and by and by there is to be a fourth (45:20-25).

"Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this, and show us former things? let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified (i.e. their case in law proved correct: or let them hear (my evidence), and say, It is truth" (v.9).

It is the old contention — are the gods of the nations true gods, or is the Holy One of Israel the Lord of all?

"Let them shew former things." And this the religions of Nineveh and Babylon proceeded to do, handing down to later generations weird stories of Creation and the Flood, lurid rubbish all of it. Today, the high priests of modern science purvey imagination-taxing fables full of evolutionary fantasy. By contrast with these, the grand simplicity of the Genesis records continues to make its satisfying appeal for faith in the Almighty God.

The witnesses for the other side are now called: "Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears...Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord." It is the nation of Israel who now stand forward, to prove by their own blindness and deafness the truth of the God of Israel. Strange paradox! but wonderfully true. In Hezekiah's day, that fervent reformation left most of the nation untouched (or there never would have been such a Manasseh reaction). Yet for the sake of His Servant whom He had chosen (37:35), God brought a mighty deliverance to teach the pagan nations His supremacy and also to teach His own heedless people: "that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he" (v. 10).

In all succeeding generations it has been the same. The facts would establish a case in any court of law!

"Nothing could be more unlikely than the events which have befallen the Jewish nation. Nothing like them has ever been foretold of any other nation, or has ever happened to any other...The Jews, therefore, are a kind of standing miracle; being a monument of the wonderful fulfilment of the most extraordinary prophecies ever delivered, which prophecies they themselves preserve and bear witness to, though they shut their eyes to the fulfilment of them" (Whately).

"They (the Jews) stand with their Law and Prophets in their hands, reading them, and authenticating them, yet not perceiving their true purport. This their blindness was foretold, and its penal character proclaimed, in the very books which they have prized above life itself." (William Kay).

### **Jehovah vindicated**

Everything testified by these witnesses proves the overwhelming truth of the Almighty's case:

"I have declared (your salvation beforehand), and have saved (from the Assyrians), and have shewed (i.e. published the news of it), when there was no strange god among you (thanks to Hezekiah's iconoclastic zeal!): therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God (from eternity; LXX). Yea, from this day forth (RV) I am he; and there is none that can deliver (doomed Assyrians) out of my hand: I will work and who shall reverse it?" (v. 12,13).

The final challenge there echoes the words of false Balaam, that superb type\* of natural Israel hostile to the true Israel: "He hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it" (Num. 23:20).

Well might the prophet bid the people: "Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old (these very things which had formed part of the challenge against the vanity of idols; v.9). Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth..." (v.18,19). And, in truth, until Christ came that deliverance in Hezekiah's day remained unmatched.

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\* Note the correspondence: Balaam was a true prophet, and yet unfaithful. He conspired with worldly power to curse God's elect, and this for the sake of personal advantage. He rode the (Messianic) ass, and sought to force it to his own purposes, but was restricted by the angel of the Lord. He offered an abundance of sacrifices, and repeatedly prophesied good and not evil about God's people. He foretold that the Messiah belongs to the true Israel, but later counselled infecting them with the doctrine of heathenism. This proved successful until at last one rose up to destroy this apostasy. Then Balaam was destroyed.

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## **43(2). The Servant and the Blind Deaf Witnesses (v.1-21)**

The witness of the NT. is about as emphatic as it well could be that Isaiah 43 is a Christian Scripture. A study of it as an inspired commentary on God's ways with His chosen people in the prophet's own day can teach the student much. But the real message, at once more obvious and difficult to read, centres in Jesus-Immanuel and his New Israel. The N.T.'s verbal allusions to this prophecy are so copious and yet so elusive that the most patient attempts to build-up a coherent exposition only serve to emphasize the limitations of one's spiritual insight and comprehension.

Now, the Jacob-Israel who is apostrophized is no longer Hezekiah but Jesus: "Thus saith the Lord that created thee (the beginning of the New Creation), and he that formed thee..." This second verb is that which describes the work of the potter with the clay, the work of the Creator in making a new Man (Gen. 2:7).

What a contrast with the way in which men fashion gods, blind and senseless, in their own image (yes, even in the enlightened twentieth century). But God forms man in His image, to become more and more discerning, to be "precious in his sight" (v.4), to be the prototype (which Israel had failed to be) of "a people whom God forms for himself, that they might shew forth his praise" (v.21).

### **The Servant God's kinsman**

True, the people God had already formed, but who were blind and deaf, were His eloquent witnesses. But this man of the New Creation is more: "Ye (natural Israel)

and my Servant whom I have chosen are my witnesses, saith the Lord: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he.\* Before Me there was nothing formed of God (AVM is correct here), neither shall there be after Me (or, other than Me)". It is an emphatic assertion that no *merely* human Saviour is possible. The Messiah must be a Son of God.

This truth is also asserted in other ways: "I have called thee by thy name (the Father names the Child): thou art mine" (v.1).

Yet this Son of God shares human weakness: "*Fear* not: for I have redeemed thee" — he himself needs the salvation of God. But "redeeming" is always the act of a near kinsman. Hebrew *ga'al*\*\* always implies that. So this Jacob-Israel is to count Almighty God as his near kinsman! And indeed, so also must any other mortal man who would share that redemption!

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee (Immanuel)...when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned." It was true of Christ in his immunity from the malevolence of his enemies (Jn. 7:30,44; 8:59; 10:39; Ps. 91:11 etc.). True of him also regarding the fire of the divine presence, as it had been true of Moses when mediating on behalf of his less worthy brethren (Dt. 5:22-28). True also for those in Christ in the divine deluge of fiery fury in the last days (2 Pet. 3:10). And, best of all, true for those truly his in the Day of Judgment and its fiery assessment of faith (1 Cor. 3:15).

### The Servant and his servants

"Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable (LXX: thou hast been glorified), and I have loved thee: therefore I will give men for thee, and people for thy life" (v.4). In his prayer of self-dedication Jesus expressed his own thankful appreciation of this prophecy written for his benefit: "Father, I will that they also, *whom thou hast given me...may behold my glory*, which thou hast *given me*: for *thou lovedst me* before the foundation of the world" (Jn. 17:24).\*\*\*

However, on the face of it, this Isaiah passage seems to reverse the fine familiar truth so often declared elsewhere: "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities" (53:5, and many times in that chapter). But not really, for the Hebrew prepositions are not the same. Here, literally, "I will give men under thee, and people under thy life." This is the OT. counterpart to the frequent NT. assertions that Christ is "made sin for us" — Gk. *huper*, above us, as though sheltering us under his own personal victory over sin.

Appropriately, the prophecy now anticipates the outworking of this communal redemption:

"I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far (s.w. Heb.

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\* Perhaps there is to be understood an ellipsis here: "(He, the Servant, said this) that ye may know..." This seems to be implied by the way Jesus appropriated these words (and 43:25) in Jn. 8:24: "For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." The very puzzling Greek of the next verse also looks back to Is. 43: "Who art thou?.. (I told you that I am) the Beginning (43:9,18), even that which I am now telling you. I have many things (the latter things, the *people* to be formed) to tell concerning you, and to judge (43:26 LXX). But he that sent me (cf. 42:19) is true (43:9), and the things I have heard (43:9) of him, these things I speak". The allusion is certainly there, but is not very easy to fathom.

\*\* "This is to become one of the most eloquent words in later-Isaiah.

\*\*\* Is this last phrase the Lord's equivalent of "from the ends of the earth"(43:6)? But how do the other words come in here: "Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee" (43:3)? Perhaps this phrase is not to be read Geographically, but to intimate the far-spreading conversion of Gentile nations in the Kingdom.

11:13), and my daughters from the ends of the earth".

This is an assurance that the promise made to Jacob-Israel at Bethel will come to a quite unexpected realisation (Gen. 28:14,15a). Such prophecies as these in Genesis and Isaiah braced the faith of Jesus, so that, faced with rejection by the natural Israel, he could yet look confidently to a blessing on all families of the earth (the new Israel) through himself, the promised Seed (Gen. 28:14): "Ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets (including Isaiah!), in the kingdom of God...And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God" (Lk. 13:28,29)\*

There will even be a literal fulfilment of these words in the day when the Son of man "sends his angels to gather together his elect...from the uttermost part of the earth (43:6 LXX) to the uttermost part of heaven" (Mk. 13:27)\*\*.

These are the people "created" and "formed" for God's glory (v.7) — a New Creation "created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph. 2:10).

Nor will natural Israel be excluded, for in the day when they say: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Mt. 23:39), they too will be gathered in again, both spiritually and literally from the four corners of the earth, to share Messiah's blessings (49:22; 60:8ff).

### New Testament commentary

The ensuing section of the prophecy (43:8-13), so obviously about Israel, the blind and deaf nation, being God's irrefutable witnesses, has several remarkable contacts with the NT. It is the kind of allusiveness that is not easy to understand.

- a. "Let all the nations be gathered together" (for a legal trial; v.9) is a phrase that is almost quoted verbatim in the Lord's picture of the Last Judgment: "and before him shall be gathered all nations" (Mt. 25:32). This also is a form of trial, but with what a difference! In Isaiah the nations are invited to assess the evidence *for* God and *against* false gods. But in Matthew the Judge is the Son of God and the nations (i.e. people out of all nations) are themselves on trial (T.E., ch.17).
- b. "Ye and my servant whom I have chosen (mine elect; 42:1) are my witnesses, saith the Lord God...ye are my witnesses...that I am God, from the beginning" (v. 10,12 LXX). The resemblances to the following scriptures can hardly be accidental:

"I am one that bear witness of myself, and the father that sent me beareth witness of me" (Jn. 8:18).

"If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for the witness of God is this, that he hath borne witness concerning his Son" (1 Jn. 5:9). "And ye (disciples) also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning" (Jn. 15:27).

The last of these is specially striking as appearing to put the Lord's disciples in the place of "the blind...and the deaf" in Isaiah. But indeed, when thought is given to the marvellous spiritual obtuseness of the twelve on many an occasion, this equation is not inappropriate.

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\* The next verse here looks back to Is. 41:4; 44:6.

\*\* Is the meaning here that angels, sent to the uttermost part of heaven, will gather the elect from the uttermost part of the earth?

- c. "There is none that can deliver out of mine hand: I will work, and who shall reverse it?" (v. 13). King Herod Agrippa I sought to reverse it (the Lord's deliverance) when he had Peter locked up and when he received to himself the people's acclamation: "a god, not a man!" (Acts 12:22). They saw him as the saviour of their country. But "before me there was no God...beside me there is no saviour" (v.10,11). So Herod died, and the Lord's witness was "delivered" (12:11 s.w.LXX). By such unexpected fulfilments God provides Himself with yet further witness.

### Remarkable New Testament applications

But this is not all. The New Testament provides further commentary, almost startling in its unexpectedness.

When Jesus appeared to his disciples walking on the waters (Jn. 6:19), he was bidding them look for a further fulfilment of Isaiah's remarkable words:

"I am the Lord, *the Holy One...your King...which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters...*" (43:15,16). That highly unusual incident was the immediate sequel to the passionate desire of the multitude to make Jesus *King* (Jn. 6:15). And it was just after this that Peter made his first confession: "Thou art the Holy One of God."

Isaiah exhorted: "Remember not the former things, neither consider the things of old" (43:18)\* — this in a context full of allusions to Israel's beginnings, the deliverance from Egypt. This was also the emphasis made by Jesus in his synagogue discourse: "Moses gave you not that bread from heaven...your fathers ate...and died...I am the living bread..." (Jn. 6:32, 49, 51).

That day Jesus rejected the appeal to force, with which the minds of the people were obsessed: "the chariot and the horse, the army and the power; they shall lie down together, *they shall not rise*" (43:17). By contrast with this, his disciple was promised "eternal life, and I will *raise him up* at the last day" (Jn. 6:54).

Peter, who played such an important role on the occasion referred to, also imparted new meaning to Isaiah's words.

"This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise" (43:21). Peter's version is this: "Ye are a chosen generation...a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness (the blind people that have eyes!) into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). But, like his Master, the apostle applied these words to the New Israel. Indeed, he also appropriated these words to the Messiah: "thou wast *precious* in my sight...my servant whom I have chosen", as Isaiah certainly intended: "a living stone...chosen of God, and precious" (1 Pet. 2:4).

Also, continuing the notion of an Exodus deliverance, which is so strongly a feature of Isaiah 43, the apostle went on to allude to his Gentile readers as "strangers and pilgrims" (1 Pet. 2:11).

Philip's experience with the Ethiopian eunuch similarly has overtones of Isaiah: "I will even make a *way* in the *wilderness*, and *rivers* in the desert" (43:19) — "as they went on the *way* (which is *desert*; v.26), they came to a certain *water...*" (Acts 8:36). Thus was brought from Ethiopia the first of God's sons from far (43:6).

But the beginning of all this was in Jesus. He is the One whom "the beast of the

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\* Compare the assurance given in Jer. 16:14,15 and Rev. 21:4. Instead, "a new thing shall spring forth" (v. 19). Here is one of the great Messianic words *tzamach*.

field shall honour, the dragons and the owls: because I give the waters in the wilderness." By the remarkable details in his brief temptation narrative, Mark recalls this: "In the wilderness forty days...and he was with the wild beasts: and the angels ministered unto him" (Mk. 1:13; this immediately after an allusion to Is. 42).

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### 43 (3). Free Forgiveness or the Curse (v.22-28)

The connection of this section with what has preceded is easy and obvious. Always God sought in His chosen people those who would "shew forth His praise." With the natural Israel written off as a failure in this respect, God turned to the New Israel (1 Pet. 2:9), but not without an expostulation to those now no longer reckoned as His obedient beloved children:

"Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; thou hast been weary of me, O Israel" (43:22). Yet, / have not wearied *thee* with incense," i.e. insisting on a wearisome burning of incense in the temple. Instead, "*thou* hast wearied *me* with thine iniquities" (v.23,24).

Hundreds of years later, another prophet of the Lord was to harness Isaiah's words to an identical situation: "Ye say also, Behold, what a weariness is it (the offering of sacrifice at God's altar)...Ye have wearied the Lord with your words..." (Mal. 1:13; 2:17; cp. Is. 1:14). And this prophet also looked for response from the Gentiles: "God's name shall be great among the Gentiles" (1:11).

"I have not caused thee to serve with an offering," God remonstrated (43:23) — meaning, of course, that the sacrifices He had taught the people to offer were no burden or exaction.

But, conversely, "thou has made me to serve with thy sins" (v.24). So close was the bond between the Lord and His Servant (52:13), suffering for men's waywardness, that it was almost as though God Himself *were* the Servant, bearing a burden of iniquities (53:11).

"Thou hast not brought me the lamb (or, kid) of thy burnt offerings." They had! But the spirit in which the offerings were made reduced their value to zero in God's sight, simply because "thou hast not *honoured* me with thy sacrifices.\*".

#### Sins Blotted Out

All this unworthiness notwithstanding, the God of Israel stands offering with open hand His gift of full and free forgiveness:

"I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake (just possibly, for my Afflicted One; 53:7), and will not remember thy sins" (v.25).

Here is the first mention of one of the most lovely and satisfying themes to be found in all the richness of later Isaiah: "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee" (44:22). "For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off" (48:9). And Isaiah 53 says the same thing no less than twelve times.

This blotting out of transgressions might be a symbolic act of wiping clean, "as a

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\* It has been pointed out that v.22-24 are marvellously like Ps. 50 in their theme, and that v.25 corresponds very closely with Ps. 51.

man wipeth a dish" (s.w. 2 Kgs. 21:13). Or the allusion could be to the ritual of the Day of Atonement. On that day the high priest entered the holy of holies wrapped, so to speak, in a dense cloud of incense (Lev. 16:12,13), "that he die not" in the presence of the Divine Glory. This is certainly the idea in Is. 44:22, and may well be here also, since there is allusion to incense in v.23.

### New Testament Commentary

Peter's allusions to Is. 43, in a discourse which, it can be demonstrated, was spoken on the Day of Atonement, appear to interpret this "blotting out" with reference to the splashing of the sacrificial blood on the mercy seat (a thing which could not be done in his day because the temple had no ark of the covenant):

<b>Acts 3</b>	<b>Isaiah 43</b>
19. That your sins may be blotted out out (Gk. anointed out).	25. I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions.
16. His name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong.	19. For my name's sake.
13. His servant Jesus	10. Ye and my servant whom I have chosen are my witnesses.
15. ... whereof ye are witnesses.	28. I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary.
17. Your rulers.	27. Thy first father hath sinned.
13. The God of our fathers.	4. LXX. Thou wast glorified.
13. Hath glorified his Servant Jesus.	7. Created for my glory.

(For further details: "Acts", H.A.W., p.44ff).

There is another possible link with the gospels: "Thou didst stand before me in thy sins and in thine iniquities" (v.24 LXX). The mind goes instinctively to the New Testament picture of the woman who had been taken in adultery, now left standing in the presence of Jesus whilst "the princes of the sanctuary" (v.28) slunk away. She stood forgiven, with transgressions blotted out... *for mine own sake* — "Neither do I condemn thee..."

### Remembering and not Remembering

This gracious divine assurance: "I will not remember thy sins" (v.25) has a most attractive counterpart in Psalm 103, a psalm much used by Isaiah: "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (v. 14). These scriptures contrast beautifully with the sorry allusion in Hebrews 10:3 to the Day of Atonement: "But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year." Isaiah's gospel rises above this.

Nevertheless there is a wholesome reminder that if strict justice take its course, these unscriptural men of Israel are in a sorry case. Again it is the language of a court of law: "Let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified" (cp. 41:1,21-29; 43:8-13; 45:20-25).\*

From a rigid legalistic point of view (the attitude so beloved by men of Israel in all generations), the people of God had no standing at all — necessarily so, because of

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\* Compare also 43:26; 44:3 with 42:21; 43:2.

their ancestry: "Thy first father (Jacob; v.28; 48:8; 58:14) sinned, and thy teachers have transgressed against me." Can any stream rise higher than its source?

There is here a lovely play on words, for "teachers" also means, much more often, "scorners". By their derision hurled at the Crucified (Lk. 23:36), these men marked themselves out for utter rejection: "Therefore have I profaned the princes of the sanctuary (see 1 Chr. 24:5), and have given Jacob to the curse."

In Hezekiah's day the time-serving Urijah (Is. 8:2; 2 Kgs. 16:11-16) was put out of office in favour of the faithful Eliakim (22:20). And so also in the yet more important first-century fulfilment — Caiaphas rent his high-priestly clothes (Mt. 26:65), and thus, without meaning it, he signified his own demoting from office. And, for the fell work done that day, Jacob was given to the curse, and Israel to reproaches.

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## 44 (1). The New Israel (v.1-5).

The earlier exposure of Israel as a "blind and deaf" people (42:18ff) had been followed immediately by an assurance that God would nevertheless preserve them (43: 1ff).

Now a similar censure of the inadequacy and insincerity of their religious practice (43:22) is followed by a similar promise (44:1-5) that God will yet find for Himself a true Israel of God-blessed, Spirit-guided individuals.

The insistent Jacob-Israel theme is not let go; it is intensified (v. 1,2,5). The familiar phrases are repeated, with added emphasis: "my servant...whom I have chosen...the Lord that made thee, and formed thee...Fear not."

But now there is steady reminder that God is bringing to birth a New Israel — not a self-dependent "Supplanter" like the Jacob born from the womb (Gen. 25:26; 27:36), not "crooked" like the Jacob made lame by his futile fight against the angel of his God-controlled adversity (Gen. 32:25,31), but a people deserving the affectionate nickname Jeshurun — "straight, upright" — which had been forfeited by an earlier generation who had "waxed fat and kicked" (Dt. 32:15).

And who are these, this New Israel to whom the prophet turns with such gladness? They are typified by the startled captives, set free from the willows and water courses of Babylon (v.4; Ps. 137:1,2\*) to come thankfully home to God and His Servant in Jerusalem. They are typified, too, by the Gentiles who learned with awe that "God is in thee of a truth" and who in that spirit came to Jerusalem to dedicate themselves to His service.

### An Outpouring of the Spirit

These provide the pattern and type for the New Nation who warm God's heart with their individual dedication to Him. These are the "thirsty" and the "dry ground" upon whom his Spirit is poured, so that *tzama'* (thirsty) is changed into that lovely Messianic word *tzamach*, (spring up): "They shall spring up *among* (not, *as*) the grass" — the grass which the wind-Spirit of the Lord has shrivelled up (40:7). It is a picture of a dry parched hillside on which, thanks to a refreshing shower from

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\* A psalm which, as Thirtle (OT. Problems) has shown conclusively, belongs to the time of Isaiah.

Heaven, there is now to be seen, pushing its way through the dead dry shrivelled grass, an eager growth of new life full of vigour.

And this growth will not share the fate of "the grass of the field" which has been cast into the oven of the hot desert wind, but with roots reaching down to life-giving moisture they flourish as willows even in adversity.

All this had already been anticipated by Isaiah in a lovely prophecy: "...until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and (thus) the wilderness become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest (a wilderness)" (32:15).

That last phrase illustrates how this, like all other figures of speech, is somehow inadequate or inaccurate, for in the natural world when did a fertilizing shower turn a fruitful farm into wild useless growth? But in the world of God's Spirit this is what happens. However, the main intention is a new and better people of God, created because God is at work in a new way:

"Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up (*tzamach* again!) together; I the Lord have created it" (45:8). It is the divine fruitfulness of God's Year of Jubilee.

Contemporary Joel had the same happy message:

"Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the Lord will do great things...the pastures of the wilderness do spring...the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength...rejoice in the Lord your God: for he giveth the former rain in righteousness...I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh...for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said (through Isaiah), and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call" (2:21-32).

### **Bearing the Name of the Lord**

But though the promised deliverance is to be "in Mount Zion", it will not be for Israel only: "This (Gentile) shall say, I am the Lord's; and this shall call himself by (or, call upon himself) the name of (the God of) Jacob\*; and this shall inscribe on his hand: 'The Lord's,' and shall dignify himself\*\* with the name of (the God of) Israel" (v.5).

This expressive figure of speech — the name written in the hand — tells of a bond not to be broken. It is the sign of the slave tied to his master (as in Rev. 13:16). Thus Paul gloried in the fact that he bore the marks of the Lord Jesus (Gal. 6:17).

But it was also a bond tying the master to his slave: "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands," God declared to His community of true Zionists (49:16), and went on to prophesy a remarkable accession of strength from the Gentiles.

### **The Accession of the Gentiles**

"Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee as a bride doeth...The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell...Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these? (49:18-21).

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\* As in Ps. 24:6.

\*\* As in Job 32:21,22.

From now on the theme of the conversion of the Gentiles to an Israelitish faith better than that of Israel itself, constantly appropriates the prophet's pen. Again and again he uses the remarkable accession of Gentile devotees to the religion of Israel in Hezekiah's day, to point his readers to a time when a greater than Hezekiah would convert ignorant Gentiles to be the true seed of Abraham.

"The labour of Egypt, and the merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans...shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine...they shall fall down before thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else..." (45:14).

"Nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God " (55:5).

"The sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord...even them shall I bring to my holy mountain...for mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people. The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, besides those that are gathered" (56:6-8).

"The sons of strangers shall build up thy walls...men will bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles" (60:10,11).

These are only samples of a theme and variations of increasing fascination and loveliness.

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## 44 (2). Idols cut down to size (v.6-20)

One of the outstanding characteristics of this section of Isaiah (ch.40-48), which becomes very evident from a straight reading of the text, is the way the prophet recurs time and again to favourite themes — the Servant of the Lord, God's witnesses, "Fear not", waters of refreshing, the apostrophe to Jacob-Israel, and so on. One of these themes is the withering exposure of the follies of idolatry. This onslaught now reaches its climax in a sustained diatribe of blistering contempt. But first comes an assertion of the supreme authority of the God of Israel:

"Thus saith  
    Jehovah,  
    the king of Israel,  
    his Redeemer,  
    the Lord of hosts,  
    the First and the Last.  
Beside me there is no god."

All of these divine titles are to be considered against the background of the great crisis of Hezekiah's reign. It was not a contest between the military might of Assyria and the military weakness of Israel, but a challenge made by the futile god of Assyria against the supremacy of Israel's God.\*

He is Jehovah, who made such "great and precious promises" to the fathers of the race. He is the true King in Jerusalem — Hezekiah was only His representative. This Jehovah is, somewhat startlingly, Israel's Redeemer. The fact was proved by the thunderbolts of wrath hurled against the invader (though, indeed, many a pious man in Israel must have been led to wonder in what ways so great a God could be

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\* Observe the force of the catalogue of passages quoted in ch. 7 (Pt. 3).

'near kinsman' — *go'el* — to so paltry a people!). He is the Lord of hosts of angels who do His bidding in this world of His and who shattered the might of Assyria beneath the walls of Jerusalem.\* He is the First and the Last, foretelling from earliest days what He means to do, and then bringing all to pass in its proper time.

These remarkable names of God are all brought together in the Apocalypse, because that great prophecy is also an exhortation to the New Testament Israel of God to have no truck with the false gods of power.

#### Revelation 1:8

I am Alpha and Omega  
The Lord (= *Adonai*)  
God (see RV etc)  
Which is, and which was, and which is  
to come  
The Almighty (LXX: Lord of hosts)  
Him that loved us, and washed us  
from our sins in his own blood.

#### Isaiah 44:6

The First and the Last  
The King of Israel  
Beside me, no Elohim  
Jehovah  
  
The Lord of hosts  
The Redeemer.

This remarkable parallel not only interprets the name Jehovah, it also suggests that all these divine titles now belong to Jesus!

In particular, the repeated title: "The First and the Last" emphasizes, in Rev.1, the "shewing of things which must shortly come to pass" (cp. Is. 44:7). In Rev. 21:6,8, it suggests the reprobation (as in Is. 44) of all that make a lie. And in Rev. 22:13,14 it graciously offers the tree of life in place of the tree of death so effectively cut down by the keen edge of Isaiah's invective (44:13-17).

The challenge to the gods of the heathen is not mere emotional rhetoric; it gets down to the brass tacks of commonsense argument:

"Who is like unto Me? Let him stand forth (LXX), and proclaim it, and declare it for me, since I appointed the People (Israel) of old, and the things which are coming (in the near future) and which shall come (in the remote future). Let *them* (the idols) declare them!"

It is a repetition of an earlier appeal (43:9)\*\*. Only a God who is from everlasting to everlasting can first challenge contemplation of His great acts in past history, and then proceed to foretell what He will do in the years to come, and then do it.

And yet again: "I have declared the former things from the beginning...I did them suddenly, and they came to pass...I have showed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, and thou didst not know them" (48:3,6).

No other religion makes this challenge, or responds to it. Today's fashionable enthusiasm for Islam and Buddhism and what-not is so much hot air, for none of these cults, hoary though they may be, can point to unmistakable divine vindication in past history, and none of them can offer a single prophecy, either fulfilled or for the future.

With the God of their fathers behind them, Israel may face every test of faith with relaxed confidence: "Fear ye not, neither be afraid." All such exhortations in Isaiah have the same point. In those days there was no terror to compare with the paralysing dread of invasion by cruel pitiless Assyrians, (cp. 10:24; 31:4; 37:6; 41:10-14; 43:1,5; 51:7,12).

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\* Note the allusion to Michael ("Who is like unto me?") in 44:7.

\*\* And also of the "court of law" metaphor (41:1,21 -29; 43:8-13; 45:20ff).

So the prophet stiffened the backbone of his fellows with the simple practical argument that with Israel God was a God of limitless power, whilst the inspiration and support of Sennacherib's legions was a senseless dumb idol! Then what must be the outcome?

"Ye, Israel, are my witnesses. Is there a God\* beside me? (2 Chron. 32:7,8) Yea, there is no Rock\*\* (v.7). But, by contrast, they — these futile idols — are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know" (v.9). Thus these still and silent deities eloquently proclaim their own futility. True, Israel also had repeatedly shown themselves to be spiritually deaf and blind (43:8); yet that very deafness and blindness was a witness to the truth of God (see ch. 13 Pt.3). They were custodians of a prophetic witness for which they themselves provided impressive undesigned fulfilment.

"Graven image!" — with the contemptuous repetition of this opprobrium, Isaiah now really got into his stride in his onslaught on the futilities of pagan religion.

"Behold, all that join themselves thereto shall be ashamed, and the workmen, they are of men." In clever fashion he made a characteristic play on the double meaning of his Hebrew: "All its sorceries (s.w. 47:9,12) shall be brought to shame; and the enchantments, they are of men (i.e. contrived by unscrupulous priests)".

There follows a short contemptuous description of the making of a metal god: "The smith sharpeneth a tool and worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms" — and all this while the god is a useless piece of metal, not even fit to be admired.

Even "the strength of the arms" of the dedicated god-maker fades away as he works, for the mumbo-jumbo of this ridiculous religion requires that he goes to his "holy" work fasting. So "he is hungry, and his strength faileth: he drinketh no water, and is faint" — the obvious point behind this irony being this: If the one who makes the god has such failing powers, then just how much almightiness is there in what he makes?

What a contrast with "the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth — He fainteth not, neither is weary...He giveth power to the faint..." (40:28,29).

Is it possible to believe that one who could be so contemptuous of idols would go on to extol the divine right of idol-worshipping Cyrus or to appropriate a man of such crass religious ignorance as a type of Messiah? This prophecy now under consideration poses a big problem in the interpretation of what comes next.

However, on this present theme Isaiah has only just got going. The fashioning of the wooden image comes in for even more scornful censure:

"The carpenter stretcheth out a line; he marketh it out with a pencil; he shapeth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compasses" — here is the draughtsman at work, "making it after the figure of a man (a god made in the image and likeness of one of his creatures!), according to the beauty of a man\*\*\*, to dwell in the house (the temple)" — and that is all that this god can do: just stay where he is put, and do nothing.

The process of making the god is excoriated with growing gusto: "He heweth down cedars, and taketh the cypress, and the oak."\*\*\*\* LXX continues here: "God planteth, and the rain (i.e.

\* The only occurrence in Isaiah of Eloah, to make deliberate contrast with 2 Chr. 32:15 — Sennacherib's boast that "no (*no god* — *eloah*) was able to deliver his people out of mine hand."

\*\* Another of the expressions binding the two halves of Isaiah's prophecy together; 17:10; 26:4.

\*\*\* The word so often describes the glory of God!

\*\*\*\* It has been well observed that these are all trees of Palestine. But if "deutero-Isaiah" lived all his days in Babylon, why does he choose to mention these?

*His* rain) doth nourish it."

From first to last (contrast v.6), the idol does nothing for itself. Even the stuff it is made from is the superb creation of the God of heaven and earth.

With a scorn and sarcasm matched only by Elijah on mount Carmel (1 Kgs. 18:27), Isaiah holds up before all the world the pathetic nonsense of all idol-making. Is it his zest for the task or is it that he feels the need to spell out the lesson in simple repetitious ABC fashion, as though for children, which makes him repeat his argument? (v. 14-15, 16-17,19).

Here, then, is the caustic delineation of a man chopping a tree down. With half of it (v.16RVm) he makes a roaring bonfire and enjoys the light and warmth of the blaze. With half of it he stokes his oven and bakes his bread and roasts a joint of meat, and then has a good feed. Then with odds and ends that are left ("the residue"; v. 17), he gets to work to fashion his noble worshipful deity\* before which he now prostrates himself in beseeching adoration: "Deliver me; for thou art my god."

Isaiah is hard put to decide between the intelligence of the god and of its devotee: "They know not, neither do they consider...None calleth to mind, neither is there knowledge nor understanding." Lord, what fools these mortals be!

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\* In v. 16 LXX reads "gods" — as who should say: "First a batch of loaves, and then a batch of gods"!

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## 44 (3). The Cyrus Problem (v.28)

The double mention of Cyrus (44:28; 45:1) in the next section of Isaiah is the one fact far outweighing any other, which has decided the moderns in favour of a captivity date for Isaiah 40-66.

They lay it down as a dogma: there is no such thing as genuine prophecy in such detail as this, foretelling more than 150 years beforehand not only that Jewish captives would return home to rebuild Jerusalem, but also the *name* of the man who would encourage them to it.

Therefore, they argue, this prophecy was written at, or immediately before the time when these things happened — B.C. 537 approx.

Believers in the inspiration of Holy Scripture argue back: But there are comparable prophecies elsewhere, and there is therefore no reason why this Isaiah passage should not provide another example. Then the famous mention of Josiah in 1 Kgs. 13:2 is cited. It has to be, because there is actually no other strictly parallel example available. It is, of course, true that God could inspire one of His prophets with detail of this kind. But does He? Did He?

Actually the Josiah prophecy is hardly a good foundation to build on, for those words: "Josiah by name" could well be an editorial parenthesis inserted for explanation's sake at the time 1 Kings was being put together. It is noteworthy that, when Josiah arose to fulfil this prophecy (2 Kgs. 23:15-18), the record there makes no allusion to it. With the inserted phrase at 1 Kgs. 13:2 the compiler has already made all the explanation that is necessary\*. No! this way of defending a contested position is not too satisfactory. The confident critical onslaught is more

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\* It is useful also to observe that in 1 Kgs. 13:32 there is a similar anticipation of later historical fact in the mention of Samaria (16:24), not yet built in the time of the Josiah prophecy.

easily and more accurately defeated with other weapons than these.

There are far too many details in this section of Isaiah disallowing any reference to Cyrus at all. Such a statement may appear somewhat arbitrary, but indeed there are very good reasons behind it:

1. As has been shown (or will be), all the prophecies in Isaiah 40-66 are built on Hezekiah and his times. Then the sudden insertion of about 25 verses about Cyrus is completely out of character and away from the main purpose of this part of the book, which so evidently is: to use Hezekiah in order to foreshadow the Messiah.
2. All through ch. 40-53 "my servant" is another title for "Jacob-Israel". Many times these names come in close conjunction (e.g. 41:8; 44:1,2; 48:20; 49:3). This is evident in two places (44:21; 45:4) in the section (44:21 -45:19) now under special consideration. Then is it credible that in the middle of this mass on uniform usage there should be a sudden solitary allusion to Cyrus as "my servant"?
3. The same portion of the prophecy includes two of Isaiah's characteristic blasts against idol-worship. "The Lord...that frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad" (44:25). "They shall be ashamed, and also confounded, all of them: they shall go to confusion together that are makers of idols" (45:16). And all this follows immediately on the prophet's most withering onslaught on the folly of idol-worship (44:9-20). In such a context is it conceivable that Cyrus, a dedicated idolater, would be held up for the esteem and adulation and gratitude of the faithful?

It used to be said that Cyrus was a monotheist. This is now known to be nonsense. The finding of the Cyrus Cylinder has settled that point. Here are a few quotations from it:

"He (Marduk, the chief god of Babylon) scoured all the lands for a friend, seeking for the upright prince whom he would have to take his hand. He called Cyrus, king of Anshan."

"Marduk the great lord...went at his (Cyrus's) side like a friend and a comrade."

"I am Cyrus, the king of the world...whose rule Bel and Nabu cherish." "I sought daily to worship him (Marduk)."

"At my deeds Marduk, the great lord, rejoiced, and to me...he graciously gave his blessing, and in good spirits before him he (glorified) exceedingly his high (divinity)."

"The gods whose abode is in the midst of them (all the countries west and east), I returned to their places, and housed them in everlasting abodes...May all the gods whom I have placed within their sanctuaries address a daily prayer in my favour before Bel and Nabu, that my days may be long, and may they say to Marduk my lord: 'May Cyrus the king who reveres thee, and Cambyses his son...' " (the text breaks off here).

Another inscription found at Ur assigns Cyrus's victory to the help of Sin, the moon god.

Such details as these make it a moral and intellectual impossibility for the writer of this part of Isaiah (even if not Isaiah himself) to laud and extol Cyrus in the way that he appears to do.

4. In addition to all this, it is obvious (so obvious that one is left wondering why the critics have not noticed it!) that the characteristic phraseology in this "Cyrus" prophecy is used over and over again in this part of Isaiah with reference to Jacob-Israel:

- a. "The Lord, which hath called thee (Cyrus?) by thy name" (45:3,4). Cp: "From the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name (Israel)" (49:1,3).
  - b. "I have raised him (Cyrus?) up in righteousness" (45:13). Cp. "Who raised up the righteous man from the east?" (41:2). Is this Cyrus also?
  - c. "I will make straight all his (Cyrus's?) ways" (45:13). Cp. "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (40:3).
  - d. "Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God" (45:14). this can only apply to Israel.
  - e. "His anointed, to Cyrus" (45:1). But all through the Old Testament this very common but exalted title is used only of Messiah or a king reigning in Jerusalem. It is almost impossible to believe that a prophet of the Lord would give this high dignity to a pagan monarch.  
"He shall perform all my pleasure" (v.28) is quoted (from LXX) by Paul with reference to *David* (Acts 13:22), a detail entirely in harmony with OT. usage. On the other hand, if this phrase really belongs to Cyrus what right had Paul to appropriate it to bolster up his argument about David?
  - f. If the prophecy is about Cyrus, why should the Hebrew text of consecutive verses apparently make allusion to the names of Hezekiah and Hephzibah, his wife?: "whose right hand I have holden" (45:1); 'all my pleasure" (44:28). A most remarkable coincidence!
5. The prophecy includes details (45:14) which were never true of Cyrus in any sense: "The labour of Egypt, and the merchandise of Ethiopia, and the Sabeans...shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine...in chains they shall come over...they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else." But such words as these, however understood, are very clearly applied to God's glorifying of *Israel*: 49:23; 60:9-16. It is easy to find an application of these words to Israel in the time of Hezekiah, but they are palpably untrue regarding the restoration from the later Babylonian captivity.
- It is also to be noted that the associated phrase: "I will direct all his ways", makes little sense regarding Cyrus, the pagan empire-builder. But reference to godly Hezekiah presents little difficulty.
- And in the same verse, the words: "not for price, nor for reward" appear in flat contradiction with 43:3: "Egypt for thy ransom." Yet the Cyrus expositors are logically committed to apply both passages to the Persian king. The modernists casually cut this Gordian knot by pronouncing "not for price, nor for reward" an interpolation (e.g. Wade, p.295).
6. The mandate given by Cyrus to the captive Jews in Babylon is introduced (Ezra 1:1-3) with a pointed allusion to relevant Jeremiah prophecies, but the Cyrus prophecy in Isaiah is given no mention. Yet this would have been far more to the point. This omission has never been adequately explained. Admittedly, the argument from omission can be precarious, but in this instance it carries much more force than usual.
  7. The religion of the Persians was dualistic, with a god of light and good and a god of darkness and evil. It has often been claimed that Is. 45:7 was written with pointed allusion to this: "I form the light, and I create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things."

If indeed there is such an allusion implicit here, the words can only be read as a denunciation of the religion of Cyrus. Somewhat out of place, surely, in a prophecy which is supposed to extol Cyrus as "the Lord's anointed"! Actually, these words enunciate what is a commonplace truth in other Scriptures which have nothing to do with the Persian period; e.g. Dan. 2:22; Ps. 139:11,12.

8. Much is often made of the words: "I girded thee, though thou hast not known me" (45:5). But the word "though" is a translator's addition; it is not in the text. Literally: "and thou didst not know Me", with reference not to the religion of this Anointed but to his birth, or before. Isaiah 49:1 and the Immanuel prophecy (7:14) provide good parallels.
9. Has God ever given Israel a Gentile deliverer? Captivity prophet Jeremiah foretold: "Their ruler shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me (hopelessly untrue of Cyrus!): for who is he that hath been surety for his own heart?" (30:21).

All these considerations lead to one plain conclusion — that the name of Cyrus has no business in this prophecy at all. Indeed, if the words "of Cyrus" (44:28) and "to Cyrus" (45:1) are omitted, there is no dislocation of the text, and the entire section fits into place as another characteristic prophecy about "Jacob-Israel". As will be seen (ch. 18), the exposition of the words goes easily, and actually involves a good deal of repetition because the theme itself is a repetition of much that Isaiah has already written in ch. 40-44.

Then how did the name of Cyrus come to be there at all? There are four possible explanations of this:

1. it is a misguided rabbinic comment which has crept into the text.
2. It is a misreading of a similar Hebrew word meaning "(God's) workman" or "craftsman" — a deliberate contrast between Hezekiah's zeal for the temple and the fashioner of idols whose work Isaiah has so often and so caustically derided.\*
3. The name of Cyrus was deliberately inserted by Jews (political Zionists) who wanted to influence the new king into helping them back to their homeland.
4. By reading the Hebrew "to Cyrus" (LCVRS) as two words, with the slightest possible alteration\*\*, the passage reads: "that saith to thee, the inheritor (s.w. 65:9), my shepherd." If this is the correct approach, then there comes to light a very intriguing play on words, for now the Hebrew words for "inheritor" and "perform" (in v.28) make up the name of Jerusalem (also in v.28).

It is the third or fourth of these explanations which is the most likely. The Jews have always evinced a willingness to influence politically powerful Gentiles in their favour by phoney exposition of their Holy Scriptures.

In just this way Josephus got to work on Vespasian. His own record (B.J.3.7.3,9 and 4.9.7 and 6.5.4) implies that he made unscrupulous use of Biblical prophecies and shrewd fabrications or interpretations of his own dreams, about the exaltation of Vespasian, and later Titus, to the dignity of Caesar.

Onias the high priest used Isaiah 19:19,20 as a prophecy to persuade Ptolemy and Cleopatra to grant him permission to build a temple in Egypt (Ant. 13.3.1 .)\*\*\* It seems very probable that Ptolemy Soter the first Greek king of Egypt took his royal

\* This is the explanation favoured by J.W. Thirtle in "Old Testament Problems", ch. 16.

\*\* A *yod* for a *waw*, a common enough mistake in the Hebrew MSS!

\*\*\* And in his footnote at this place, Whiston argues very persuasively for another Jewish corruption of the text of Isaiah.

name (Saviour) from that prophecy.

Similarly the high priest Jaddua claimed a divine revelation in a dream and succeeded in softening up an angry Alexander (the Great) by showing him a prophecy in Daniel about himself (Ant. 13.8.4,5).

And in modern times political Jews, unbelievers without any confidence whatever in the authority of their own Scriptures, have been ready enough to use the Promises in Genesis to bolster up their claims to the Land of Israel.

In exactly the same way, it is suggested, Babylonian Jews made the smallest alterations imaginable to their copy of Isaiah in order to gain the special favour of Cyrus\*. Josephus records (Ant. 11.1.2) that Isaiah's prophecy was brought to the attention of the Persian king:

"Accordingly, when Cyrus read this, and admired the divine power, an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfil what was so written; so he called for the most eminent Jews..."

The Cylinder of Cyrus quotes phrases out of Isaiah: "whom he (Marduk!) took by his hand...he called him by name" (45:1,4). Also, Isaiah's words: "that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside Me" (45:6), are very closely matched by a passage in the Cylinder of Cyrus, only applied to himself, *not* to the God of Israel.

Another expression: "Their sighing I stilled," is quoted from Isaiah 21:2. How would Cyrus know these words without having some Jewish mentor to steer him to an out-of-context application of this Scripture to himself? The implication seems to be that someone was more intent on making an impression on Cyrus than on rightly dividing the Word of Truth \*\*

Strabo says that originally Cyrus's name was Agrodates. Since Cyrus is Elamite for 'shepherd' (Is. 44:28), it begins to look fairly likely that it was in pleased reaction to the prophecy of Isaiah that the king changed to the more familiar name. The remarkable fact that Xenophon refers to Cyrus as "God's shepherd" tends to strengthen this conclusion.

The over-all result from this analysis would appear to be that this Scripture, a genuine prophecy of Isaiah, was not about Cyrus at all, but — as will be expounded in the next two chapters — about Hezekiah and about the Messiah of whom he was so splendid a prototype.

\* Thus, hundreds of years before Jesus, the scribes were saying: "We have no king but Caesar"!

\*\* It is difficult to imagine men like Ezra or Nehemiah going in for antics of this sort. Yet it may be inferred from Ezra 1:1-4 that Cyrus had some Jewish adviser at his elbow, for the phraseology of his proclamation is thoroughly Hebraistic in every phrase. And this Jewish courtier, whoever he was, would be quietly laughing up his sleeve because Cyrus is also marvellously like the Hebrew word for "potsherd" (see Is. 45:9).

### **Additional Note**

W.A. Wordsworth (in "En-Roeh") has some searing comments to make on this Cyrus problem:

"It is contrary to all analogy that Isaiah should have foretold the coming of Cyrus: incredible that any prophet, inspired to write the preceding paragraph (in Isaiah 44) ridiculing idolatry, should give to one, who boasted himself a worshipper of Merodach, the titles "My Shepherd and anointed". It is almost incredible that scholars, who know the facts about Cyrus and believe the Spirit of the Holy One spoke through the prophets, should have acquiesced so long in the abominable insult to the most inspired of seers, which results from the Deutero-Isaiah hypothesis..."

"It is in favour of the faithfulness of the Jewish scholars (according to their lights) that the Messianic Text cannot without some violence to grammar be made to give the sense they require..."

"I would draw special attention to Christ's saying: 'I am the good shepherd, I am the door of the sheep; all that came before me were thieves.' I feel no doubt that this refers to the mis-reading 'Cyrus, my shepherd;' In accepting the titles Yahweh's shepherd and his Christ (anointed), Cyrus was a receiver of stolen goods..."

"Why have Christian scholars followed the blind into the ditch? Nothing has done more to sap the vitality of the Church than the vague sense that the OT. is discredited, a delusion which is the result of the "assured results" of critical studies. Of this whole building of Babel the Deutero-Isaiah delusion is the chief corner brick; and of that delusion the name of Cyrus is the crumbling clay..."

"The inscription (of Cyrus) also shows, out of Cyrus' own mouth, that he reversed the policy of Nabonidus, which by centralizing all worship in the temple of Merodach had tended towards monotheism; Cyrus showed favour to all the heathen gods; how could the writer of Isaiah 44 call such a broad-minded idolater Yahweh's Shepherd and anointed?"

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## 44 (4). A Greater than Cyrus is here (v.21-28)

In this new prophecy of forgiveness and redemption there is once again the ambiguity already encountered. Jacob-Israel may be the nation, or may be the leader of the nation — Hezekiah (45:4 suggests the former).

First, then, the exhortation to "remember these things," i.e. the long drawn-out castigation of the follies of idol-worship (v.9-20). There is a special reason for avoidance of all such folly: "I have formed thee." This sums up in a phrase the many long years of discipline needed to change their forefather Jacob into Israel, and also the patient instruction of Jacob's seed. "*I have formed thee*" — what a contrast with the prophet's biting commentary on the ignorant pagan patiently shaping and fashioning his god and then prostrating himself in worship before it!

Do not forget this lesson, O Israel, for you will not be forgotten\*. "He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps."

### Sins Forgiven

And now, the most sublime assurance imaginable: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions...return unto me; for I have redeemed thee" (v.22).

Repent because you are forgiven! This seems to be the wrong way round. "Repent ye, therefore, that your sins may be blotted out," was Peter's exhortation. But in Hezekiah's day, the people had been redeemed from inevitable destruction (as it seemed), and for the sake of their great leader had been forgiven — and this at a time when most of them had failed to join in the surge of reformation their king had called for.

"Blotted out as a thick cloud" is a direct allusion to the Day of Atonement, for even the high priest, the most worthy man in the nation, was required to go into the Divine Presence enveloped in a cloud of incense, "that he die not" (Lev. 16:13).

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\* This could be (as LXX): "Thou shalt not forget Me." The Hebrew word also means "shrink" (s.w. Gen. 32:32!) — You shall not shrink away from Me.

Three times it is emphasized that "the Lord hath redeemed Jacob" (v.22-24). Well might heavens and earth erupt into uncontrolled rejoicing: "Break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein." These trees which might be fashioned into gods for worship (v. 13,14) cry out and shout in adoration of the God who has made them. And well they might, having been saved from further depredations by callous Assyrians envious of a verdure-clad land so much better than their own.

This appeal to all Nature to join in glorifying the God of Israel is a common feature of Isaiah's writing. He has an entire psalm about it (104); cp. 42:10-13; 45:8; 49:13; 55:13. And if inanimate creation, then how much more ought God's greater works — His redeemed — to rejoice in Him?

The God of Israel has vindicated Himself against all bogus religion coming from the minds of men, whether home-made or imported: "He frustrateth the tokens of the liars (the priests; LXX: ventriloquists; 20th century: mediums; cp. 47:13), and maketh diviners mad."

To help His people, "he confirmeth the word of his servant (Hezekiah: "There be more with us than with him...with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles;" 2 Chr. 32:7,8). He performeth the counsel (i.e. prophecy; 46:11) of his messengers"\* (Isaiah, Joel, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk — what a team!).

### Comfort for Zion

The prophets of the Lord gave specific assurance: "Jerusalem shall be inhabited, and the cities of Judah shall be built." Boastful Sennacherib talked openly of deporting these men of Jerusalem to a land far away (36:16,17). With his long catalogue of victories against "the fenced cities of Judah" (36:1) he mocked their resistance and scared them with tales of devastation.

But the word of the Lord said exactly the opposite. The strong-flowing Assyrian tide must recede. "I will dry up thy rivers." It was Jehovah who had brought this irresistible invader into the land: "The Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the River, strong and many" (8:7,8; cp. 17:12, and contrast 37:25). So only the Lord could save his people and this for the sake of His Servant: "He is my shepherd (gathering the lambs with his arm; 40:11; he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord; Mic. 5:4). He shall perform all my pleasure (here is a lovely play on Hephzibah, the name of Hezekiah's wife), saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid."

There is no problem about these words. The foundation referred to is the altar of burnt-offering which apostate Ahaz had ruthlessly shifted out of the way, so that the temple service might centre *round* his new Assyrian altar (see the details in 2 Kgs. 16:10-16; B.S. 4.09). But one of Hezekiah's first reforms had been the restoration of the traditional order: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried-stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation" (Is. 28:16). Peter expounds this passage in explicit fashion about an altar in a temple (1 Pet. 2:4-9).\*

A reassuring promise of the re-building of Jerusalem was just as necessary, for, years before, the cataclysmic earthquake in Uzziah's reign (Am. 1:1; 3:14,15; 9:1-6,14; 8:8; Zech. 14:4,5; Is. 2:10-22; 64:1; Jos.Ant. 9.10.14) had left large parts of the capital in ruins, and the beggarly policies of king Ahaz had made restoration mostly out of the question. Hezekiah had inherited

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\* Matching this plural, LXX has "servants", thus providing a parallelism. In that case, the allusion to Hezekiah disappears.

\*\* For fuller details of this large and impressive topic see the commentary on Isaiah 8:14; 28:16.

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a Jerusalem difficult to defend because of its shattered walls (see 22:9,10; 2 Chr. 32:5). But now, with the Assyrian ebb-tide flowing strongly, and a great surge of prosperity lifting the nation out of its miseries, the restoration of city and country went on apace.

### Further Fulfilment

And now it is time to turn to the Messianic reference of this prophecy.

It is possible to demonstrate that Peter's healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple took place on the Day of Atonement. (See "Acts", HAW, ch.12). Hence his words: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord..." (Acts 3:19). This is Isaiah 44: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions... return unto me (i.e. repent);" followed by the season of refreshing: "Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: Shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains...for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified him in Israel."

Here, "shout" could also read: "sound a trumpet" (as in Num. 10:2,9; 2 Chr. 13:12 and LXX). Read this way, there is anticipation of NT. association of cloud and trumpet in prophecies of the Lord's second coming (Mt. 24:31; 1 Th. 4:16,17; Rev. 1:7,10; 14:15), when the most wonderful of all seasons of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord.

### New Creation

"It is I, Jehovah, that maketh all (these) things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself." Why the Covenant name of God here? Surely "Elohim" would be more suitable, putting emphasis on His mighty power!

But no! This is a prophecy of new heavens and earth, the New Creation in Christ, and any name except Jehovah would be out of place.

Appropriately, then, this is the first of a series of links with Isaiah 40 (see v. 12,22 there):

Chapter 44	Chapter 40
26. That confirmeth the word of his servant.	8. The word of our God shall stand for ever.
26. His messengers	9. Thou that bringest good tidings.
26. Jerusalem inhabited, cities of Judah built.	9. Jerusalem...the cities of Judah.
28. My shepherd	11. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd.
45:2 Crooked places straight.	4. The crooked shall be made straight.
22. Blotted out thy transgressions.	2. Iniquity pardoned.

Such a comparison becomes another nail in the coffin of Cyrus, for assuredly Isaiah 40 is not about *him*. But reference to the Messiah and to his true prototype Hezekiah is easy.

## Messiah and Moses

This Scripture has also a series of allusions to Moses, the fitness of which in a Messianic prophecy needs no emphasis:

"Thou art my servant (44:21)...The Lord that formed thee from the womb (v.24)...That frustrateth the tokens of the liars (v.25)...That saith to the deep, Be dry (v.27)...my shepherd (v.28)...I will loose the loins of kings, to open before thee the two leaved gates (deliverance from captivity; 45:1 )...I will go before thee (v.2)...I will give thee the treasures of darkness (Sinai; v.3)."

Allusions such as these to Moses and the Exodus crop up frequently right through Isaiah. But it is the saving of a New Israel, and by the hand of One greater than Moses, one who is "my shepherd (Jn. 10:11), who shall perform all my pleasure (Mt. 17:5)."

There is here also a promise that God will "*confirm the word* of his servants (LXX), and perform the counsel of his messengers." The world became aware of this when disciples went and "preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and *confirming the word* with signs following" (Mk. 16:20).

But their message involved the destruction of the old unregenerate Jerusalem, and the building of a New Jerusalem, in its place, a Jerusalem with a temple holy to the Lord, with its foundations laid immovable — "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). Through him, and only through him will the cities of Judah be built. All the dedicated efforts of political Zionism are destined to perish.

## 45 (1). The Lord's Anointed (v.1-7)

The one described as "my shepherd" (44:28) is now called "my anointed" — the second Moses (Num. 12:7) is also a second David (2 Sam. 7:19-20).

Reasons have already been supplied for regarding the name of Cyrus as an intrusion. Verse 6 here supplies another reason: "That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is none else." To apply such words to idol-worshipping Cyrus the polytheist would be the height of absurdity.

This man, the Lord's anointed, is one "whose right hand I have holden." Here is the name of Hezekiah woven into the Hebrew text. The entire passage is about him. Through the dramatic action of His angel (37:36), the Lord did "subdue nations before him; the loins of kings were loosed" — it is a picture of warriors with their swords unbuckled and laid aside; the overwhelmed people of Judah need fear Assyrian invasion no more (41:10).

A psalm of Hezekiah has a similar but even more vivid description: "For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail" (Ps. 48:4-6).

Sennacherib was in the habit (which Napoleon also adopted) of making his favourite generals into kings of conquered provinces: "Are not my princes all of them kings" (10:8). But, all at once, under the walls of Jerusalem, that grandiose acquisitive policy came to a dead stop.

### Gates opened and gates smashed

The great "two-leaved gates", which had been fast shut to, so that the temple might be the last citadel if the invaders broke through the hastily patched up city walls (22:8-10), were now thrown open, and that permanently: "the gates shall not be shut."

But other doors, "the gates of brass, and...the bars of iron I will break in pieces." The forces of tyranny which had marched off hundreds of thousands of Jewish captives into bondage in Babylon, now gave way, to allow a bewildered happy people to come streaming home (compare the same language in Ps. 107:16, yet another Hezekiah psalm)\*.

The change of pronoun — "him...thee" (v.1,2) — is now explained: "I will go before thee (the captive people returning home) to make the rugged places plain" (cp. 40:4).

Now, "the treasures of darkness, the hidden riches of secret places", all the remaining royal and temple treasures which had been hidden away in secret subterranean caverns, were brought out again to glorify the House of the Lord, and to be a permanent reminder that Jehovah is not on the side of the big battalions, but with those who are called by His Name.

### Named by God

It is probable that verse 3 should read: "...that thou mayest know that I am the Lord, which call thee by thy name: the God of Israel." The allusion is to Immanuel, "God is with us". And the identical phraseology in other places (42:6; 43:1; 49:1) makes a Cyrus reference here a stark impossibility.

The words that follow have been misleading: "I surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me" (v.4). Here, for generations, the ordinary reader has been at the mercy of a translator who chose to turn interpreter. There is no word "though" in the Hebrew text, but just a straight "and" which, if it must be interpreted, would be better read as "when", with reference to the naming of Immanuel before birth: "I surnamed thee when thou didst not know me" (and so also in v.5); or with the allusion to the endowment of royal titles after Hezekiah was born: "Wonderful counsellor, Mighty God, Father of the Age, Prince of Peace" (9:6).

The vanquishing of Assyrian might vindicated Jehovah not only before His own people but through all the surrounding nations: "that they might know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside Me" (v.6) — "And many brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah...so that He was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth" (2 Chr. 32:23). So also in another Hezekiah psalm: "The nations shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth Thy glory" (102:15).

In all these remarkable developments there was abundant demonstration that it is the God of Israel who "forms light and creates darkness; He makes peace and creates evil" (v.7). All the tribulation of Hezekiah's day had come at His behest, announced beforehand by Isaiah (e.g. 10:5,6) and his fellow-prophets (Joel 2; Mic. 5 etc). But the same was just as emphatically true about the great deliverance which God had wrought. It was all His work. There was purpose in it all.

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\* For Hezekiah himself there were other gates of brass which had proved powerless (38:10).

### **Now consider the Messiah**

Behind this prophecy there is more than one Purpose, for — as in all the preceding parts of it — the real intention is to exhibit the redeeming work of God's Messiah.

He is "the Lord's anointed" (v.1), his Christ: "I have put my spirit upon him" (42:1) — the sevenfold "spirit of the Lord, of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might, of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord" (11:1,2).

The assurance: "whose right hand I have holden," echoes the promise already given to the Messiah: "I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (41:13).

### **The gate of His enemies**

This heavenly leader "breaks in pieces the gates of brass" which hold his people in bondage, he shatters their "bars of iron" (cp. 42:7,22). This is the fulfilment of the great promise made to Abraham: "thy Seed shall possess the gate of his enemies" (Gen. 22:17). The greatest enemy, and the last to be destroyed, is Death. This Redeemer now holds the keys of Death and Hell (Rev. 1:18), and therefore he, and he only, can decide who shall be set free from that fortress.

By contrast, there is another city, which is all temple, which will be thrown wide open to all the Messiah's men — "and the gates shall not be shut" (v.1). "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation that keepeth truth may enter in" (Is. 26:1,2).

The Messiah leads the way: "Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord: this is the gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter" (Ps. 118:19,20).

### **The unsearchable riches of Christ**

The promise that "I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places" (v.3) was eagerly seized by Paul to expound the wealth of heavenly blessing in Christ: "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). God, "who is rich in mercy" (Eph. 2:4) has revealed in the gospel "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (3:8). Who can doubt that Isaiah's message was the fountain and inspiration of Paul's fine phrasing here?

Here also is the explanation of the otherwise mysterious inclusion of "riches" in the ascription of praise to the Lamb who is worthy to receive the seven-fold inheritance (Rev. 5:12). And that phrase: "the riches of secret things" employs in LXX a word — "invisible" — which the NT. applies only to Almighty God (Col. 1:15,16; Rom. 1:20; 1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 11:27).

This man of divine privilege belongs to God from birth: "I surnamed thee when thou didst not know Me" — the Father names the Child — "I girded thee (decreed thy royal majesty; v.1; 11:5; Mt. 2:2), when thou didst not know me." From the Immanuel prophecy (7:14) onwards this language — used of Jacob and Moses, men of destiny — belongs to the Messiah: "The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name" (49:1). "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness...I have called thee by name; thou art mine" (42:6; 43:1).

These Messianic blessings all come unexpectedly together in another prophecy: "It is God that girded me with strength...Thy right hand hath holden me up...Great salvation (Jesus!) giveth he to his king; and sheweth mercy (the fulfilment of the Promise) to his anointed, to the Beloved, and to his seed for evermore" (Ps. 18:32,35,50).

Gentile nations learn this message with gladness: "from the rising of the sun, and from the west, they know that there is none beside Me" — a God who brings "evil" that men might learn to see it as their supreme good, the blessing of the God of Israel. He "forms the Light and creates Darkness", just as He did in the beginning of creation (Gen. 1:3-5). But this is a New Creation, a new and better world.

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## 45 (2). Righteousness — for Jew and Gentile (v.8-17)

Logically, because of context and similarity of phrasing, the next section of Isaiah 45 should be about the same person as the first paragraph. Modernists and traditional expositors alike say this must be Cyrus. But the difficulties, usually glossed over, are considerable:

- a. "I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways" (v. 13). The last phrase is certainly not true of Cyrus, the passage is echoed in 48:15 — but there verse 12 explicitly applies the words to "Jacob and Israel, my called."
- b. "He shall build my city" (v. 13). In the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes Nehemiah found Jerusalem still in a ruinous condition. Haggai had made similar complaint in the second year of Darius (1:1,9). So if this prophecy was intended with reference to Cyrus, it was a false prophecy.
- c. "He shall let go my captives" (v. 13). The context has repeated allusion to the Exodus. But a new Exodus calls for a new Moses (v. 15: *Moshiya*), a fresh spoiling of the Egyptians (v. 14), another judgment on the idols of the mighty (v. 16), a re-adoption of Israel as God's firstborn (v. 11), and — to complete the parallel — another discomfited Pharaoh; and Cyrus in no way fulfils that role.
- d. As already pointed out (ch. 18), the prosperity of Egypt, Ethiopia and the Sabeans (v. 14) did not come to Cyrus, either of free will or by conquest. And the second half of this verse *demand*s reference to "Israel".

Only Horatio Nelson can be a disciple of king Cyrus. The signals do not carry that message.

### Contemporary fulfilment

Once again the language of this part of the prophecy is readily seen to spring naturally from the circumstances of Isaiah's own day. The interpolated song of gladness (v.8) is clearly in character with the rest which

are so common all through Isaiah's prophecy. (5:1ff; 16:9,10; 25:6-9; 26:1ff; 27:2-4; 42:10,11; 44:23; 12:5,6; 24:15,16; 35:10; 49:13; 54:1ff; 65:14,17ff; 26:19; 52:8-10; 48:20,21; 51:11; 55:12,13).

This song (which has marked similarities to 55:9-11) celebrates the marvellous Year of Jubilee in Hezekiah's reign, when with a season of copious rains and surpassing natural fruitfulness (2 Kgs. 19:29,30) God made amends to His people for the ravages of Assyrian invasion: "Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it" (45:8).

According to His promise (Lev. 25:21), God was opening the windows of heaven and pouring forth a Jubilee blessing on His people.

### **Complaint answered**

Yet the perverse in Israel still found something to grumble about. Why does God allow such horrors as those which have lately come upon us? Why is it that others who are not His Chosen Race should so often appear to fare better than we? Thus the clay said to him that fashioned it: "What makest thou?" and "He hath no hands" (i.e. he is a God who does nothing). Only a spirit of rank perversity would thus question the ways of the Almighty.

Did not current events show only too plainly that all their ways were in the hands of a powerful, all-wise Creator: "I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded" (v. 12).

Here was neat reminder that the One who commands the host of heaven, and whose name is The Lord of hosts (v. 13), had once led forth "all the hosts of the Lord out of the land of Egypt" (Ex. 12:41). So He was hardly likely to cast them away now as irredeemable.

How could He, since their Leader and King was one for whom He had such high regard?

"I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways." Jerusalem would be exalted, and the host of captives, taken away from the fenced cities and homesteads of the land, would come joyously home again.

God had sold his people for nought, and had not increased His wealth one jot by the price paid for them (Ps. 44:12). And now, similarly, it was "not for price, nor for reward" (v. 13) that they were being set free.

### **Respected by the Gentiles**

And not only rid of Assyrian tyranny, but also exalted in the eyes of the nations: "Many brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that he (He?) was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth" (2 Chr. 32:23).

Isaiah mentions some of these nations who now sought friendship with the people Sennacherib had trampled on: "Egypt, Ethiopia, the Sabeans" (v. 14).

Many of Isaiah's prophecies have this common theme and point the same lesson: The nations bring tribute to Israel (18:7; 23:18; 60:5ff; 61:6) because Jehovah has exalted Israel (49:7; 60:10; 61:9); and this proves Him to be the true God (40:5; 44:3-5; 48:20; 49:7; 52:10; 59:17; 61:9).

Yet the prophet is careful to emphasize that his inspiration ranges forth far beyond

the days of Hezekiah. That good king's personal vanity brought a threat of yet another captivity. However, his repentance became the ground for a long deferment of that judgment (ch. 39).

So Hezekiah knew that one day trouble would come. However, ultimately, "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded without end (literally: until the ages of until)" (v.17).

### Jesus — the Lord's Salvation

"Saved by the Lord" is Isaiah's own name. It is also the name of Jesus. Through the former comes the message of salvation for ever. Through the latter comes the salvation itself. Every detail of this prophecy is to be read again, this time with reference to *him!*

The opening song of rejoicing (v.8) celebrates God's great blessing — a salvation which *is* righteousness. It is His outstanding righteous act, one by which he convicts sinners of their sin, and yet sets them free from its defilement, clothing them with a righteousness they have no right to. It is a theme which, from now on, Isaiah never tires of (45:20; 51:5,6,8; 56:1; 59:16,17; 61:10; 62:1; 63:1). Yet he never explains it. It is a glorious truth, to be received with gladness, marvelled at, rejoiced in, and to give thanks for.

With what deep satisfaction did the Bible-instructed mind of Paul fasten on Isaiah's ready-made matchless definition of the gospel:

"The gospel...is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is a righteousness of God (i.e. the righteousness God provides) on the basis of faith to every one who shows his faith in it" (Rom. 1:16,17).

That last expression is the apostle's up-to-date summary of the truth in Isaiah that "the skies pour down righteousness" (it is the blessing and gift of God), and men respond: "the earth opens and brings forth salvation." Yet even then the growth out of the rain-soaked ground can happen only because *God* has imparted fecundity and the power of irresistible growth (Mt. 13:23).

This lovely figure of speech has yet more to reveal. Without the pouring forth from heaven of a gracious Holy Spirit upon a young woman of Nazareth, there would be no Immanuel. Unless there be an Easter morning when the earth literally opens there can be no Melchizedek priest-king in heaven or in Jerusalem. Only thus is there righteousness and salvation.

### Jewish grumbling

But Isaiah knew the contrary spirit in his people. He anticipated the reaction of Israel against the salvation Jesus brought:

"Woe to him that striveth with his Maker (his Potter, his Fashioner), a (Jewish) potsherd among the (Gentile) potsherds of the earth!" The NT. tells of strong Jewish resentment in the early church against the acceptance of Gentiles on equal terms with themselves.

"Shall the clay say to Him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or (shall) thy work declare, He hath no hands?" The Jew forgot that he himself was the special handiwork of God (note the glance back to the making of Adam; Gen. 2:7); instead he challenged God's right to fashion Gentiles in the same mould as himself\*. Or he swung to another extreme and doubted

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\* "What makest thou?" is a brusque forbidding of further action; see Eccl. 8:4.

whether God really had a purpose with Israel: "He hath no hands," i.e. God is no longer at work.

### Potter and clay

But the faithful remnant bowed in humility before God: "O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hands"\* (64:8).

Paul adopted precisely this figure of speech in his sustained effort to persuade Jewish believers to see God's purpose with recalcitrant Jew and eager Gentile in proper perspective: 'Nay but, O man (Jew), who art thou that repliest against God (as in Is. 45). Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump (the same kind of human nature — the Jew is inherently no better than the Gentile) to make one vessel (the Gentile) unto honour, and another (the Jew) unto dishonour?' (Rom. 9:20,21).

This is Paul's way of saying: How can you hope to understand the ways of a God who is so much higher than yourself?

And this is Isaiah's argument also. What right has a child to argue with his parents (v.10). Then "will ye ask *Me* \*\* of things to come concerning my sons (Ex. 4:22), and concerning the work of my hands will ye command *Me*?" For, consider: "I have made the earth, and I created man upon it: my hands have stretched out (as an expanding universe?) the heavens, and all their host (every one of those billions of worlds) have I commanded."

Are the purposes of such a God to be subject to criticism or complaint? Cannot He who has fashioned such a creation bring to the birth a New Creation, those who are His sons, begotten through the redeeming work of One who showed righteousness from above and who has brought forth salvation because the earth has opened (v.8) that he might come out of the tomb?

### Messiah's role

This Saviour God has "raised up (awakened — out of death?) in righteousness, all his ways are right (v.13: LXX): he shall build my city (the New Jerusalem), and he shall let go my captives," those who for their iniquities have sold themselves (50:1). This is a redemption "not for price nor reward", as judged by human captors and slave-traders. "Ye have sold yourselves for nought, and ye shall be redeemed without money" (52:3). Yet the price paid for undeserved freedom is the highest ever. Paul explains the paradox: "Ye are justified *freely* by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiatory sacrifice through (your) faith, by his blood (his sacrifice) declaring his righteousness..." (Rom. 3:24,25).

### Gentiles become Jews

The final answer to Jewish cavil about the grace of God coming on Gentiles is that these blessed people will become Jews. The pronouns change from "him" (the Messiah) to "thee, thou" (Israel — 6 times in v.14). "They shall come after thee. In

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\* Cp. also: 29:23; 60:20; 19:25; Ps. 145:10; and especially Eph. 2:10 (alluding to which of these places?)

\*\* In v.10-13, no less than twelve first person pronouns!

chains (which they willingly accept) they shall come over" — here the text suggests "they shall become Hebrews."

These new Israelites proclaim their faith: "Surely God is in thee." To be sure, He is, for Israel's Messiah is called Immanuel.

Yet — another strange paradox! — the God who reveals Himself to Gentiles is also a God who hides Himself from Israel: "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." He turns away from Israel (6:9,10,2) in disgust at their stubbornness, but only in order that he might gather them:

"Israel shall be *saved in the Lord* with an everlasting salvation!" It had been promised by Moses after his blessings on the tribes of Israel (Dt. 33:29), made seemingly impossible by the nation's hardness of heart, and yet was re-enunciated with confidence by the apostle Paul: "And so *all* Israel shall be saved (both Jews and Gentiles)," for "a Deliverer shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:26).

At that time the futilities of unbelief will be exposed: "makers of idols (whether ancient or modern) shall be ashamed, and also confounded, all of them: they shall go to confusion together," but this new-made Israel of God "shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end." "My salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished" (51:6).

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## 45 (3). "Unto me every knee shall bow" (v.18-25)

The God who saves is a real God, and no phoney or make-believe. It is He who created all things who also reveals Himself by revealing His mighty acts and purposes beforehand.

He created the earth for habitation\*, not to continue "without form and void" (*tohu*; s.w. Gen. 1:2). In the same way, that which He speaks to men through his prophets is intelligible and intended for their instruction and betterment. His revelation is not at all in the same category with the heathen oracles which give puzzling ambiguous instructions spoken in a holy place [*maqom*] of gloom and mystery. Instead, that which God reveals proves His existence and His power, for well before the event He makes known what is to happen, and it does happen precisely thus, because he is a God at work in the world He has made. All is in His hand.

This renewed argumentation between the living God and the futilities of idol worship is really the next round in the contest which had been set going by the Assyrian invasion of Judah. The scornful challenge made by Sennacherib that reliance upon Jehovah was miserable folly\*\* was to recoil on his own head in more ways than one.

The land of Israel was meant to be inhabited by God's own people, and neither Assyrian military might nor religious zeal for Ashur would appropriate it to that empire of tyranny, for all was under the control of Jehovah. He had declared beforehand that the Assyrian invasion would come (8:7,8; 10:5-7). He had also declared the ultimate discomfiture of that arrogant ruffian (14:24,26; 17:13,14). And so it came to pass. A just God, in the punishments He inflicts on Israel; and a Saviour, in the way He redeems His people from utter disaster.

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\* A re-pointed Hebrew text would read: "for a sabbath" (Gen. 2:1).

\*\* See H.Gt., ch.14,15.

The outcome of this awe-inspiring experience was to be that "all the ends of the earth" - Israel and their Gentile neighbours alike — would "look unto Me," so that unto the God of Israel "every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear (loyalty)" — a remarkable confession that "in the Lord have I righteousness and strength."

### The real fulfilment

Great and impressive as all this was, it was only a prototype. This prophecy, like all that has gone before it, belongs to the Messiah. Even the renewed tirade against the folly of idol-worship (v. 18-20, especially v.20) is relevant to the sending of the gospel to Gentiles now being brought out of spiritual chaos (*tohu*) into the Light and Sabbath (v. 18,19) of God's New Creation, a new heavens and earth wherein righteousness will dwell (inhabit — as in v.18); 2 Pet. 3:13.

That emphatic phrase: "he hath established it", uses the word which comes no less than five times in the pronouncement of God's Messianic promise to David (2 Sam. 7:12,13,16,24,26).

There is a strange paradox about the Almighty's declaration: "I have not spoken in secret" (v.19), and the earlier assertion: "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself" (v. 15). The divine message had been made plain enough to Israel (48:16; Dt. 30:11ff). It was only the nation's unworthiness or indifference which had brought the hiding of his face (6:2,9ff).

When Paul called the gospel he was preaching to Gentiles a "mystery", he did not mean an enigma, but rather that which had not been made fully clear to Israel, nor, until he began his work, published abroad to Gentiles (cp. Eph. 3:2-6).

### Another legal trial

In the vindication of God — in his judgment on Israel and extension of grace to Gentiles — a court of law is once again invoked (v.20-25). Phrase after phrase has this flavour: "Assemble yourselves...draw near together...they have no knowledge...Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together...I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth...righteousness...In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified..." (cp. on 41:1).

In this place the chief witnesses are no longer the people of Israel, blind and deaf (43:8,10), but enlightened Gentiles: "ye of the Gentiles that have been caused to escape" (v. 20).

By contrast, what value as witnesses are those who "have no knowledge, that carry the wood\* of their graven image in procession (46:2,7), and even into battle, as a talisman (2 Sam. 5:21 RV) — and that pray unto a god that cannot save\*\*."

### Jehovah vindicated

The strength of the Almighty's case is that His purposes have been announced beforehand. It is an argument the logic of which the prophet rubs in with ruthless efficiency (41:22; 43:9; 44:7,8; 46:10; 48:3,14). The God of Israel foretells "from ancient time" what will come about, and in due time it happens. Therefore He is not a dumb idol which has no knowledge. Instead, his claim to be the maker of heaven and earth, the One who frames and fashions human history, must be taken seriously, especially since He has shown Himself to be "a just God (in the punishment

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\* The text has a nice play here on the similarity between Hebrew for "wood" and for "counsel".

\*\* The Hebrew of this last sentence is cleverly contrived to sound like heathen gibberish.

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and tribulation inflicted on Israel) and a Saviour (in offering redemption to the Gentiles)" (v.21)\*.

The appeal follows: "look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (v.22). The Gentiles responded to this call "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9 — Paul was referring to the LXX of this Isaiah passage). Other allusions are traceable in James' speech to the council in Jerusalem: "That the residue of men might seek after (Am. 9:12 LXX) the Lord, and all the Gentiles (45:20,22)...saith the Lord who maketh these things known (RV) from the beginning of the world (45:21)...them which from among the Gentiles are turned to God (45:22 LXX)" (Acts 15:17-19).

Here was the fulfilment of what had been so wonderfully foreshadowed in the wilderness: "If a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked unto (s.w.) the serpent of brass, he lived" (Num. 21:9; cp. Ps. 22:27). But now it was a salvation freely offered to those in "the ends of the earth" (v.22; 49:6; 52:10).

### The oath of God

More than this, it was a salvation long ago promised to Abraham ("declared from ancient time"; v.21): "I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth — righteousness" (v.23). The word of the angel to Abraham had been: "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord...in thy seed shall all the nations (Gentiles) of the earth be blessed (with righteousness; Gal. 3:8)" (Gen. 22:16,18).

The sworn purpose of God in Christ is more certain than anything else men know. It is a word which "shall not return (as though void of power; 55:11; Jer. 23:29)... Unto *Me* (and not to idols) every knee shall bow, every tongue swear (loyalty)" (v.23; contrast 46:1).

The apostle Paul had no hesitation in using these words in two complementary, but not contradictory, senses:

"Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me (Christ?) and every tongue shall confess\*\* to God" (Rom. 14:10,11). Here, idols are pushed into the background. "To *Me* (and not to one another!)" seems to be the implication.

### The Holy Name

But in Philippians 2 the emphasis is on the exaltation and glory of Christ: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him the Name which is above every name: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father" (2:9-11). This idea, that the glorified Jesus shares the Holy Name of Jehovah becomes a commonplace in the NT.\*\*\*

It is interesting to note how Paul used these five words with a differing emphasis — in Romans 14, "a just God" (in the day of judgment), and in Philippians 2, "a Saviour" (see v.8 there).

In the trial of the Lord Jesus Christ there was a poignant fore-shadowing, heavily

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\* For other redemption paradoxes see Dan. 9:16; Rom. 3:26; Ps. 62:12; B.S. 10.08.

\*\* "Confess" here proves that Paul used the Alexandrine text of LXX. So also in quite a number of other places.

\*\*\* Other examples: 1 Pet. 3:15 RV (= Is. 8:13); Acts 2:21 (Rom. 10:13); Jn. 5:23; 12:41; 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:30,31; 10:9; Eph. 4:9; Heb. 1:6,8,4; Rev. 1:11 (14,15); 21:6,7; 22:13; 3:12,14; 19:12,16; 20:12.

charged with dramatic irony, of the ultimate fulfilment of this prophecy — rough Roman soldiers came bowing the knee before him and hailing him "King of the Jews" (Mk. 15:18,19).

But now, no irony, no mockery: "*Surely*, in the Lord have I righteousness\* and strength." In the final instance the words are Messiah's — the parallel in 41:10,11 proves this — but his righteousness and strength become the saving power of those who are his: "When we were without strength...Christ died for the ungodly," so that we might "receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness" (Rom. 5:6,17), and thus "be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21; cp. Phil. 3:9).

To him, the Saviour-Messiah, "shall *he* (the believer) come" — the singular verb emphasizes that men receive this salvation as individuals; yet the prophecy's conclusion is comprehensive: "In the Lord shall they be justified (righteousness!) and shall boast themselves to be *all* seed of Israel" (v.25). Whether Jews or Gentiles, they are all seed of Israel, and proud of it: "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." Thus Paul fused together two wonderful Scriptures to the honour of Christ (Heb. 9:23,24; Is. 45:25).

### Unexpected N.T. links

Finally, a somewhat intriguing appendage to this chapter directs attention to some unexpected similarities between Isaiah 45 and two N.T. passages. First, Paul and Silas in prison at Philippi:

<b>Acts 16</b>	<b>Isaiah 45</b>
26. The doors opened.	2. Break in pieces the gates of brass.
26. Every one's bands loosed.	13. He shall let go my captives.
29. He came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas.	14. In chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee.
24. In the inner prison.	19. I have not spoken in secret, in the dark places of the earth.
25. Sang praises unto God.	25. In the Lord all the seed of Israel shall glory.
30. What must I do to be saved? ... Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved.	22. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.
34. He set a table before them (a Breaking of Bread service).	16. (Gentiles) keep a feast before me (LXX).
36. Go in peace.	7. I make peace, and I create evil.
38. The magistrates feared...they	24. All that are incensed against him
39. came and besought them.	shall be ashamed.

There seem also to be remarkable similarities of idea and phrasing between the second half of Isaiah 45, and the synagogue healing of the infirm woman, as though bidding the reader of that prophecy see it as an anticipation of the gospel.

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\* In Hebrew, an intensive plural "his righteousness, the finest of all."

Luke 13	Isaiah 45
11. Bowed together.	14. Bow down.
11. To the uttermost.	23. Every knee bow (and 46:2).
12. <i>aooluo</i> (pert. tense)	17. World without end.
13. Glorified God.	46:1 LXX: <i>ekluo</i> (pert. tense)
17. Glorious things.	25. LXX: Shall glorify.
16. Whom satan hath bound.	13. My captives.
17. Put to shame.	16,24 Put to shame.
13. Laid hands on her.	11. Work of my hands.
16. Daughter of Abraham.	11. My sons.
13. Made straight.	22. Look unto me, and be ye saved.
24. Come and be healed.	24. To him shall they come.
14. The synagogue.	20. Assemble yourselves (LXX: <i>sunago</i> ).

## 46 (1). Bel, bow down! (v.1-13)

In these studies it has already become evident that sometimes the Messianic message and sometimes the contemporary relevance dominates the prophecy. Neither is ever out of sight, but sometimes the emphasis is more one way than the other.

Now, for a couple of chapters, special attention is focussed on the greater contest between Jehovah and the gods of Assyria.

From the point of view of God's man of faith the issue can never be in doubt —

"Bel, bow down! Nebo, make obeisance!"

These gods are normally associated with the religion of Babylon\*, but there was no real difference between that and the fashionable cults of Assyria\*\*. True, Marduk (Bel) was the chief god of Babylon, whilst Ashur, Nineveh's national deity, was deemed pre-eminent in Assyria. But really there was nothing to choose between them. And in Isaiah's day it was Sennacherib who thought he could challenge the reputation of Jehovah, the more so since in the days of Ahaz (2 Kgs. 16:10-18) Assyrian religion had actually become established on mount Zion, and then had been peremptorily sent packing by Hezekiah the enthusiast.

So, here, Isaiah resumes the gusto of his earlier withering strictures on Assyrian idol-worship with a picture of the pagan images in the invaders' camp being loaded onto waggons to be unceremoniously carted away from the field of devastation outside Jerusalem:

"Their idols belong to beasts (these dumb creatures are in charge of them)...a burden to weary animals."\*\*\*

As the weary animals bow under the fatigue of their load, so too these gods have to bow to the superior might of the God of Israel. "Unto me every knee shall bow," Jehovah had declared (45:23). And now the point was being rubbed in through the ignominious discomfiture of these idols.

\* Cp. the names Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and the rest.

\*\* E.g. there was a temple of Nebo at Calah (Gen. 10:12), an important part of the city of Nineveh.

\*\*\* "The honoured has become the onerous".

The moderns are very fond of applying this prophecy to Cyrus's victory over the gods of Babylon; they make him the "ravenous bird from the east" (v.11). But the discovery of the Cyrus Cylinder has written absurdity across such a conclusion. For Cyrus himself prayed to Bel-Marduk for a blessing on his imperialism. Indeed he urged the people of Babylon to harness all their gods to the success of his cause. The hypothesis of a post-captivity "deutero"-Isaiah constantly runs into problems of this sort.

### **Jehovah and Israel**

A lovely and telling contrast is made between Nebo and Bel, borne by their devotees, dragged around on carts, and Jehovah who Himself bears His people Israel from childhood as though He were their nursing-father: "In the wilderness thou hast seen how that the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went" (Dt. 1:31).

So also Isaiah: "Israel...are borne by me from the belly" and are "carried from the womb" (v.3). But not just in national childhood. A superb fivefold personal pronoun intensifies the emphasis: "Even to your old age, I am he: and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry you, and will deliver you" (v.4).

In other words, ceaselessly all through their history God cares for them and delivers — yes, delivers! What a contrast with those images which "themselves are gone into captivity" (v.2) — taken by men of Israel harassing the retreat of these shattered bewildered Assyrian devotees.

### **The tirade continues**

With this fresh demonstration of idol helplessness putting a new point to his pen, Isaiah takes up the exposure of pagan folly with renewed zest.

What sort of likeness can you possibly find *anywhere* to the Creator of all? (v.5). See these fools pouring out their treasure, and assiduously dedicating all their finest skills to the making of a god who then has to be propped up, and who cannot stir an inch without the muscle-power of brawny unspiritual iconoclasters (v.6,7).

The marvel of it, then, that God's own children should be taken in by mummery of this sort! Yet even now there were in Israel those who were mesmerised by such cults. Why don't you grow up? Use your brains, and then see yourselves as grievous sinners in your Creator's sight. "Shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors" (v.8; cp. 48:8).

### **God in control**

The suggested cure is a contemplation of the mighty acts of God, both ancient and recent — His work in Creation ("the former things of old"), and also His shaping of current events. The end had been declared from the beginning — the irresistible Assyrian invasion (8:7,8; 10:5,6), the futility of all statecraft to cope with the situation (8:9,11,12; 30:1-5), the catastrophic overthrow and sensational deliverance (14:25; 17:11-14; 30:30,31 etc.)

The prophet now drew fresh attention to these remarkable facts: "I have spoken, I *will* bring it to pass; I *have* purposed it, I *will* also do it!" (v.11).

This "calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man...from a far country" was

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Jehovah's work. The far country was Assyria, the man Sennacherib, called "a ravenous bird" with caustic allusion to the god he worshipped. Nisroch (37:38) would sound to Jewish ears like "the eagle is my brother," but it could also be a Hebraised form of the name Ashur compounded with the name of Aku, the moon-god, also called Sin.\*

There was no longer any need to take on these pagan invaders in religious dialectic. But men of Israel must be rescued from their pernicious self-reliance and wretched faithlessness. Hence the expostulation: "Hearken unto me, ye stouthearted, that are far from righteousness" (v.1 2; 48:4).

Let them put their trust in God's deliverance, now imminent: "I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry\*\*": and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory" (v.13 cp.45:21 -25). It was to be a climax that would leave all without excuse.

### A message for later days also

This final exhortation took on a splendid appropriateness in NT. times when Israel, "going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). But "My righteousness, My salvation" (46:13) means Jesus, the Lord our Righteousness. And he is not "far off", for "the Word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is the Word of faith which we preach" (Rom. 10:8). "Not far off" in another sense also, for "yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Heb. 10:37).

In Hezekiah's day, Heaven's "salvation" (deliverance) came when the people through their king went into the sanctuary of the Lord and prayed for help which they could not provide for themselves. Today, when natural Israel and an unspiritual New Israel likewise betake themselves to earnest prayer for the open display of God's "righteousness" in an evil world, then "salvation" will come, but not until. Today, by their lack of heartfelt sincerity, prayers for the Second Coming turn that great Day into a formality, a matter of mere words. "We believe it, Lord, but not much."

There is need for a New Birth. God can bring this to pass, and He will: "I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and I will deliver you" (v.4). These emphatic words will yet take on another meaning.

### The Last Days

Peter evidently saw the force of this prophecy for the idol-worshipping generation that will see the coming of the Lord, for his treatise on the Last Days uses the vocabulary of Isaiah here.

<b>Isaiah 46</b>	<b>2 Peter 3</b>
10. My counsel shall stand	9. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise.
13. I bring near my righteousness.	13. New heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.
13. My salvation	15. The long suffering of our Lord is salvation.

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\* Sennacherib is probably: "Sin-Aku is on my side."

\*\* So also a contemporary prophet: Hab. 2:3.

**Isaiah 46**

13. — shall not tarry (LXX: *bradunō*)  
 10. Declaring the end from the beginning.
8. Ye transgressors  
 8. Bring it to mind (LXX: *epistrephō*)  
 8. Remember this
8. Bring it to mind

**2 Peter 3**

9. The Lord is not slack (*bradunō*)  
 4,5 Where is the promise of his coming?...as they were from the beginning.
17. The error of the wicked.  
 11. All holy conversation (*anastrophē*)  
 1. I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.  
 9. That all should come to repentance

There are also correspondences with a strongly-Messianic psalm which are difficult to account for.

**Isaiah 46**

3. Israel borne by me from the belly.  
 4. Even to your old age, I am he.  
 13. My righteousness... my salvation.  
 9. I am God, and there is none like unto me.  
 4. I will deliver thee.

**Psalm 71**

6. By thee have I been holden up from the womb.  
 18. When I am old and greyheaded.  
 15. Thy righteousness...thy salvation.  
 19. O God, who is like unto thee?  
 2. Deliver me in thy righteousness.

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## 47 (1) Babylon or Assyria?

The Babylon prophecy which fills Isaiah 47 is, of course, one of the main foundations of the modern view which dates "Deutero-Isaiah" at the end of the Babylonian captivity. So an examination of this side of the problem is called for.

Through long centuries Mesopotamia was dominated by Babylon on the Euphrates ("leviathan the crooked serpent") and Nineveh on the Tigris ("leviathan the swift serpent"; 27:1). The cultures, languages, religions, economics, ambitions of these two cities were practically identical. In Isaiah's day, and for another hundred years, Assyria was dominant. Then, with the help of Medes, Elamites and others, Babylon utterly destroyed Nineveh (B.C. 606), and took over the imperial role for most of the next century.

In the time of Isaiah, because of the problems constantly created by the turbulent irrepressible Merodach-Baladan, the Assyrian kings mounted one campaign after another against Babylon. Sennacherib himself captured and re-captured the city several times over. In an attempt to quell these troublesome Babylonians, hundreds of thousands of captives were deported to other parts of the Assyrian empire (see, for example, 2 Kgs. 17:24). This policy of deportation was first invented by Tiglath-pileser III.

The Assyrian kings were immensely proud of their conquest of Babylon. "King of Babylon was their most glorious title (cp. "Ind. Imp." in the days of the British Raj), and, whatever the inconvenience to state affairs, they seem to have made a point of being in Babylon at the appropriate time each year in order to "take the hands of Marduk," receiving through the high-priest of that god the authority to rule the city for the ensuing year.

All this helps to explain — what would otherwise be somewhat bewildering — how in some OT. passages there seems to be a confusion between Babylon and Assyria, one of these names being used when the other would seem to be more appropriate.

Ezra refers to Darius (Hystaspes?) as "king of Assyria" (6:22). Lamentations refers to Egyptians and Assyrians (5:6) at a time when Assyrian influence had gone completely; presumably Babylonians are meant. Exactly the same switch of names comes in Zech. 10:10,11.

Similarly, Isaiah's prophecies against "Babylon" (ch. 13,14) are pointless, quite without any contemporary significance, if written with reference to Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon of a century later. But once the equation of contemporary Assyria with Babylon is recognized, these chapters could hardly be more relevant. In any case, ch. 14 switches its nomenclature very pointedly from "king of Babylon" (v.4) to "the Assyrian" (v.25), thus leaving the interpreter without excuse. So it was not inappropriate for Zephaniah (2:14,15) to allude to Isaiah 13 (v.21,22) in a prophecy about Nineveh.

Micah, one of Isaiah's contemporary prophets, mentions the aggressor by name — "the Assyrian" (5:5); yet the "daughter of Zion" is told that she shall "go even to Babylon" (4:10) into captivity, and "there thou shalt be delivered." Following out their usual policy, the Assyrians deported great numbers of captives from Babylon, and then Sennacherib (according to the Taylor prism) rounded up 200,000 Jewish prisoners and, according to this scripture, carried them off to Babylon to fill their places.

Here also is the explanation of the otherwise mystifying reference in 2 Chr. 33:11: "the king of Assyria (Esarhaddon) took Manasseh,...and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon."

And Stephen perpetrated no howler when he turned Amos' prophecy (5:27) that God would "cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus" (the Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom) into "I will carry you away beyond Babylon (Acts 7:43).

All the "sons of Korah" psalms are Hezekiah psalms, yet Psalm 87 leaves Assyria out of its catalogue, and mentions Babylon as the counterpoise to Egypt.

### **Other Prophets quote Isaiah**

Nahum 3 is unmistakably about the overthrow of Assyria (v.7), yet that chapter makes great use of Isaiah 47 which is addressed to "the virgin daughter of Babylon" (3:4,5,16=47:2,3,9,15. Nahum 1:15 (=Is. 52:7) and 1:13 (=47:6d) are other examples. And Zeph. 2:13,15 very clearly refers to Is 47:8, applying the words to Assyria.

These facts are specially valuable as showing that Nahum, probably Isaiah's contemporary, and Zephaniah, who came nearly a century after Isaiah, read Isaiah 47 as a prophecy about Nineveh and not Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon. They are also something of a problem to those who insist that "deutero"-Isaiah comes at the end of the Babylonian captivity, for how could Nahum or Zephaniah quote from a prophet who wrote at the end of the seventy years in Babylon?

There are phrases in Is. 47:1 which were surely chosen to make deliberate allusion to what the prophet had already said about Jerusalem. "O virgin daughter of Babylon" echoes the derision of 37:22: "the virgin daughter of Zion hath laughed

thee to scorn." And the misery foretold for Jerusalem is promised also to "Babylon", the Assyrian enemy who caused it: "she being desolate shall sit on the ground" (3:26 = 47:1).

The words of 47:6 were terribly true of the cruel Assyrians: "thou didst show them no mercy; upon the ancient (people; 44:7) hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke;" but not at all true of the Babylonian captivity, when Judaeans were able to "build houses and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; to take wives, and beget sons and daughters" (Jer. 29:5,6).

Thus, whilst difficulties pile up in the way of applying Isaiah 47 to Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, there is no lack of reasons for referring the prophecy to the Assyrian oppressor of Isaiah's own day. This has now been shown not to be out of harmony with Biblical usage. And the modernist view of "deutero"-Isaiah has lost one of its strongest arguments.

## 47 (2). The Queen City

Isaiah had already repeatedly denounced and derided the gods of "Babylon" itself. Reasons have been advanced (see previous chapter) why this "Babylon" prophecy should be read with reference to Nineveh, the queen city of the Assyrian empire, which in Isaiah's day was at the height of its tyranny and power.

Sennacherib had scoffed and jeered at the God of Jerusalem, but "the virgin daughter of Zion despised him, laughed him to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem shook her head at him" (37:22). This prophecy is an expression of that contempt which, even in the darkest hour, men of God (like Isaiah and his prophet contemporaries) were capable of.

"Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground, there is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans." From the time that Sennacherib and his minion Rabshakeh mounted their campaign of tirade against the God of Israel, the doom of Nineveh was sealed. The queen city was to become a slave, grinding meal at millstones, going into bondage in nakedness and shame (v.2). The repeated imperatives "sit...sit...sit...stand...stand" (v.1,5,8,12,13) emphasize the pointed humiliation.

The title "virgin daughter" is an evident misnomer as applied to the literal Babylon. This designation, so apt with reference to inviolate Jerusalem when besieged by Sennacherib, and also the confident claim that "I shall not sit as a widow" (v.8), was hopelessly unsuited to Babylon, for in Isaiah's time that city was captured by the Assyrians over and over again. In one of Sennacherib's campaigns against it (B.C. 689) — they were all of them successful — the city came in for specially rough treatment. Yet it is not possible to read this prophecy with reference to that experience, for the language simply does not fit the Babylon of Isaiah's day.

### Similar language

But sinister echoes of the treatment meted out to God's people during the Assyrian campaign are constantly met with here. Indeed this chapter is full of sardonic allusions to that experience and to Isaiah's prophecies regarding it (a further demonstration that the Assyrian application is the right one).

## Isaiah 47

2.	Pass over the rivers	43:2
3.	Thy nakedness, thy shame	Mic. 1:8,11
5.	Into darkness (captivity)	42:7
6.	The ancient (people) The yoke	44:7
	The yoke	10:27; 14:25
8.	Dwell carelessly (securely)	37:10
	Not a widow	54:4
11.	Evil come upon <i>thee</i> .	Nah. 1:11
12.	from thy youth...not able	Gen. 10:11*
8, 10	I am, and none else beside me.	46:9
9.	Loss of children	49:21
14.	Not a coal to warm at, nor a fire to sit before	44:16
	as stubble	33:11

## Triple condemnation

Three outstanding reasons are given why summary judgment must fall on the pagan enemy.

First, when used as instrument of retribution against God's people, its power was wielded with utterly unwarranted brutality: "I was wroth with my people, I profaned my inheritance, and gave them into thy hand: thou didst show no mercy; upon the ancient people thou hast very heavily laid thy yoke" (v.6).

Any attempt to apply these words to the literal Babylon either in Isaiah's day, or in the time of an end-of-Babylonian-captivity "Isaiah", fails completely (see ch.47 on this). But every word here is marvellously true regarding the Assyrian terror. Therefore "I will take vengeance, and I will not meet thee as a man" (v.3), but with angelic judgment (37:36).

Secondly, because of the oppressor's pride and blasphemy: "I shall be a lady forever...thou that art given to pleasure, that dwellest confidently, that sayest in thine heart, I am, and there is none beside me (cp. 46:9; here is the supreme blasphemy); I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children (i.e. of conquered territories)" (v.7,8,10).

"Therefore (because of this blasphemy) shall evil come upon thee...thou shalt not be able to put it off" (v.11).

And thirdly, because of the exaltation of a man-made religion full of pretentious hocus-pocus: "for the multitude of thy sorceries, and for the great abundance of thine enchantments (v.9, and again in v. 12)...Thy wisdom and thy knowledge hath perverted thee (v.10)...Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators stand up, and save thee..." (v.13).

## Calendar in collapse

In his remarkable and fascinating book "Worlds in Collision" (p.336), Velikovsky quotes these words with reference to his thesis that *in Isaiah's time* both the month and the year became permanently dislocated through a perturbation of the earth's

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\* In the time of Nimrod ("thy youth") Calah was an important part of the city of Nineveh. This Hebrew word for "able" makes a play on Calah.

orbit brought about by the close approach of the planet Venus. He could well be right.\*

Such an amazing phenomenon would reduce the astrological religion of Assyria and Babylon to chaos, and would involve considerable feverish activity on the part of the priest-astronomers before they were able to get their religious calendar tidy once again.

### Isaiah and Nahum

Nahum's familiarity with Isaiah 47 is very marked:

- v. 3 Thy nakedness shall be uncovered (3:5)
- v. 9 For the multitude of thy sorceries (3:4)
- v.14 As stubble (1:10)
- v.15 Thy merchants (3:16)
- v. 5 Get thee unto darkness (1:8)
- v. 3 I will take vengeance (1:2)
- v. 11 Evil shall come upon thee (because of 1:11)
- v. 13 The multitude of thy counsels (1:11)
- v. 6 Thy yoke (1:13)
- v. 14 The fire shall burn them (3:15). Clearly there is identity of subject here.

Then, since by common consent, Nahum spoke about Nineveh, so, also, Isaiah 47.

With allusion to his earlier tirade against the fashioning of idols (44:16), Isaiah promised that the proud city and its gods would share the same fate: "Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them...there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before" (v.14). It was nearly a century before Isaiah and his contemporary Nahum were proved true prophets.\*\*

A query arises here. If, indeed, Isaiah's prophecies are so strongly rooted in his own time, is not this 47th chapter, being a prophecy of Nineveh's destruction a century later, out of place with the rest? All at once the *contemporary* emphasis has got lost.

Does Jonah provide a clue regarding this? "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" — long after the time of Jonah Nineveh lorded it over a mighty empire. It was the dramatic, though not long-lasting, repentance which brought deferment of judgment (Jonah 3, especially v.9,10).

It looks as though Sennacherib learned his lesson in Jerusalem, and accorded more wholesome respect to the God of Israel. He certainly left Judah alone for the rest of his reign, and he sent back home that great multitude of Judaeans captives.

Perhaps this change of heart explains why Sennacherib himself survived the cataclysm which destroyed his army. For more details on this, see H.Gt., p.80.

### N.T. allusions

Yet another feature of Isaiah 47 is the pointed use of it made in the Apocalypse.

"For she (the Babylon of the Apocalypse) saith in her heart, I sit a queen and am

\* Nobody except Velikovsky has ever explained why the ancient Babylonian year had 360 days (and not 365'4); Dan. 7:25; Rev. 12:14,6; and the Babylonians were pretty accurate astronomers.

\*\* If this destiny was foretold by a "deutero"-Isaiah in the time of Cyrus, he was a false prophet, for several details in this chapter were never true of Babylon.

no widow, and shall see no sorrow" (18:7) — this is Isaiah 47:8. And the allusion to "the merchants of the earth" (18:11) is matched in 47:15. Also the plague of darkness in the beast's kingdom (16:10) has its counterpart in 47:5.

In recent years the easy assumption that the Babylon of Revelation is the Roman church has been seen to rest on rather precarious foundations. On the other hand copious Bible evidence has been adduced ("Rev": ch.34) pointing to equation with apostate Jerusalem.

At first sight any parallel (which it is certainly reasonable to look for) with Assyria seems right out of question. Yet the parallel is there. In the first century the great enemy of the gospel was not Rome but Judaism. The NT evidence for this is massive. Thus, just as Assyria sought to destroy Hezekiah and his faithful remnant but was itself destroyed, so also the bitter antagonism of Jewry to the cause of Christ led to the horrors of A.D. 70 and the end of the temple. Jerusalem the queen city became a slave\*, and will yet again before Messiah's coming. Self-confidence and false religion will alike be found futile. The supreme blasphemy of Jewry today is the claim that Israel is her own redeemer: "I am, and there is none else beside me." This pride will be rebuked. "I will take vengeance."

Another N.T. allusion is the warning that "when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them" (1 Th. 5:3). This is reminiscent of Is. 47:11: "Desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know."

But God will also save. Verse 4, re-punctuated, reads: "A Man is our Redeemer, the Lord of hosts is his Name, the Holy One of Israel."

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\* This very idea was commemorated in a coin of Vespasian's.

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## 48 (1). Saving an Unworthy People

Isaiah 48 divides itself neatly into halves — v.1-11, 12-22 — thus: Verse 1: "Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel." Verse 12: "Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called."

Right through there are constant echoes of the phraseology and ideas in ch. 40-47, and especially (as will be shown) in ch. 44,45. So it becomes a foregone conclusion that what that preceding part of the prophecy is about will be found to be the theme of ch. 48 also.

### Modern interpretation

The modernists run into more serious problems here. Completely sold on the hypothesis that "deutero"-Isaiah was written in Babylon in the time of Cyrus, they find in this chapter a vexing accumulation of details which just won't fit. An auxiliary theory now invents another prophet later than "deutero" who has sought a strange kind of immortality by working oddments of his own writing — verses 1,2,4,5,7c,8b,9-11,17-19 — into what the earlier Cyrus enthusiast had bequeathed to him! Evidence for this? merely the subjective insight of a 19th or 20th century Hebraist, such as Cheyne.

Over against this fantasy is the satisfying understanding provided by the events of Isaiah's own time, the reign of king Hezekiah. What has explained ch.40-47 in greater detail than any other theory will be found equally useful here. The key fits the lock each time it is used.

### Unregenerate Israel

The bitter reproaches made here against Israel are no new feature (cp. 42:25; 43:24; 45:9), and later in the prophecy these are found to intensify (in ch. 56-59,65,66).

The reason for this is not hard to find. The great reformation pushed through by Hezekiah was neither complete nor enduring\*. An entire nation does not turn over a new leaf overnight. The contemporary prophecy of Micah shows clearly enough a religious state of affairs markedly similar to that reflected in Isaiah.

Many of the people were ready to "swear by the name of the Lord, and to make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness" (v.1 )The same hypocrisy carried through to the time of Jeremiah: "though they say, The Lord liveth; surely they swear falsely" (5:2; cp. also Zeph. 1:5). In another place Jeremiah pleaded for a spirit of sincerity (4:2), putting points to his entreaty by quoting Isaiah's words about this very evil.

Yet at the same time they put an almost superstitious reliance on the holiness of their city and of their calling as God's elect nation — a strange inconsistency!: "They call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel" (v.2). So also Micah. A withering censure of heads, priests and prophets ends with: "Yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us" (3:11). What a contrast with Isaiah's exhortation: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed (s.w. 48:2) on thee" (26:3).

Isaiah spoke bluntly about "thy neck an iron sinew (which refused to shrink; Gen. 32:32; Acts 7:51), and thy brow brass (instead of the gold of holiness; Ex. 28:38; cp. Jer. 3:3b)" (v.4).

When things went well, many in Israel were marvellously ready to say: "Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them" (v.5). So Isaiah's repeated tirades against the folly of idols were not aimed only at the Assyrian oppressor. Israel's serpent of brass *had* to be dubbed Nehushtan (2 Kgs. 18:4).

This Jacob was "called a transgressor from the womb," so named before he was born: "one who grabs another by the heel." In due time the patriarch became Israel, but the nation which came from him showed small prospect of a like transformation, nor does it!

Yet now and then the words of the prophets were not without effect. In the time of the Assyrian invasion, a well-deserved retribution brought upon a nation still mostly unregenerate, God's anger was deferred and Judah was not cut off (v.9).

And it was to happen again when a deputation came to Jerusalem from Merodach-baladan, king of Babylon, seeking an alliance against Assyria. Influenced by the bad men of his court, Hezekiah agreed, and then was trounced by the prophets for such a lamentable lapse into dependance on an arm of flesh. "Thy sons shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon," Isaiah foretold. And Micah: "Zion shall be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps" (3:12).

Hezekiah, wholesome man that he was, took heed, and so also did the men of Jerusalem (2 Chr. 32:26; Jer. 26:18,19). This repentance had its effect. Again God deferred His anger, and did not cut off His people there and then (v.9).

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\* And so also in the time of Josiah, as the prophecies of Jeremiah show only too clearly.

**God at work**

This mildness was "for his name's sake" — the emphasis comes four times in v.9,11\* — the Name which had been proclaimed to Moses after the sin of the golden calf: "merciful and gracious, long-suffering...keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Ex. 34:6,7).

But discipline there must be. Only thus could their God "teach Israel to profit" (v. 17; cp. Heb. 12:10). In their earliest days He had "chosen His people in the furnace of affliction" in Egypt (v. 10; Dt. 4:20). And so also in Hezekiah's day, and that not for the last time.

It was an affliction intended not to destroy but to purify. And the God of Israel made this plain by declaring the fact beforehand, thus demonstrating by fulfilment that He is a God of Purpose and Power, a God in control. It was the same argument which Isaiah had already used repeatedly (41:22; 42:9; 44:7,8; 45:21; 46:9,10), and which he now re-asserted yet another four times in the present argument.

"I have declared the former things from the beginning...I did them suddenly, and they came to pass" (v.3; and also v.5,6,7).\*\*

Most probably, the reference is to the dramatic devastation of the Assyrian camp outside Jerusalem, foretold by God's prophets and accomplished in a night by God's angel (37:33-37). Indeed, in the very "beginning" (v.5,6,7 s.w.), before the Assyrian campaign began, its vindication of the God of Israel was declared (14:25; 17:14 etc.).

But the third and fourth repetitions (v.6,7) emphasize "new things...even hidden things...lest thou shouldst say, Behold, I knew them."

Here is intimation of a drastic new development in God's purpose with Israel, another deliverance — compared with which all the marvels and blessings of Hezekiah's time will pale into insignificance. \*\*\*Yet —an added wonder!—all that the prophet had spoken concerning those pregnant events of his own day, all that God did for His faithful servant then, would be re-enacted on a grander scale, with Messiah, the Suffering Servant, at the centre of it all.

**Link with earlier prophecies**

The linguistic similarities which abound between Isaiah 48 and the preceding chapters are very marked. This is specially true of the links with ch. 44,45.

**Isaiah 48**

5.	Declared from the beginning.	45:21
13.	Heaven and earth.	45:12; 44:23
14.	Assemble yourselves.	45:20
	I have loved him.	45:1
	He will do his pleasure.	44:28
15.	I have called him.	45:3,4
16.	I have not spoken in secret.	45:19
	The Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me.	44:26
17.	the Lord thy Redeemer	44:2,24.

It surely follows, then, that these parts of the prophecy have the same theme. If this chapter is about Messiah and his prototype Hezekiah, then so also is the so-called "Cyrus" prophecy —

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\* Cp. Ez. 20:9,14,22,44; and in each place contrast the preceding verse.

\*\* Why, in these verses, should the prophet's Hebrew swither between masculine and feminine?

\*\*\* The development of these ideas deserves a fresh chapter — ch.26.

and conversely. Other features of the prophecy confirm this conclusion. There is no other hypothesis than the one now being worked out, which imparts so much meaning to the details.

### Heavens and earth

"Mine hand hath laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens." If Velikovsky's remarkable thesis is correct, that in Isaiah's time there were sensational cosmic events involving the planet Venus or the close approach of a comet to the earth\*, it is easier to understand the prophet's frequent allusions to the marvels of heaven and earth, all in the hand of God (13:13; 34:4,5; 37:16; 40:12,11; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12,18; 48:13; 50:3; 51:6,13,16; 64:1; 65:17,22). Against such a background, the unwavering message of a God in control would be specially impressive.

The cataclysm which reduced the cocksure Assyrian to shame and silence (in his record of the campaign, cp. Taylor prism) meant also the deliverance of that multitude of captives who had been deported to Babylon: "The Lord\*\* hath loved him (Hezekiah): he will do his pleasure on (or, in) Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans" (v. 14).

### A New Exodus

"Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans" (v.20). All the language (v.20, 21) is that of another Exodus, like that led by Moses out of Egyptian bondage.

	<b>Exodus</b>
"Flee ye"	14:5
"A voice of singing"	15:1
"Utter it"	13:8 s.w.
"Redeemed"	6:6
"Waters out of the rock"*** (cp. 41:17,18)	17:6
"The Lord God hath sent me" (v.16)	3:14

The key to the situation was one man who stood specially high in God's esteem: "I, even I, have spoken (about him); yea, I have called him: I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous." This was Hezekiah, whose birth and character and achievements had all been foretold in earlier days (7:14; 9:6,7; 11:1-12).

So important did the prophet deem this part of his message that he re-asserted a divine inspiration behind the writing of it: "The Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me" (v.16; cp. 34:16). "I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way thou shouldest go" (v. 17). Through Isaiah God was the instructor of both king and nation (30:20; cp. Jer. 32:33) as well as Redeemer (*go'el*), ransoming the people from their apparently hopeless bondage.

The tribulation of that time, which also was God's instruction and discipline (Heb. 12:10), would have been unnecessary if only "thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river (a vast smooth-flowing Euphrates or a tranquil gentle Jordan; contrast 57:20), and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea (the winsomeness of the sea

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\* "Worlds in Collision" and "Earth in Upheaval".

\*\* This Covenant name comes six times in v. 14-22.

\*\*\* In Isaiah's day, the Siloam conduit (2 Chr. 32:30; 2 Kgs. 18:17; Is. 8:6)?

of Galilee, so the Hebrew text suggests)." And instead of the depopulation and ravages of war, "thy seed had been as the sand" of the seashore (v.19).

The prophecy's conclusion — "There is no peace, saith the Lord, to the wicked" (v.22) — reads as though out of context (cp. v.20,21). But the recurrence of this refrain in 57:21 (no peace for the wicked) and 66:24 (no wicked!) makes the insertion appear to make a division of "deutero"-Isaiah into three parts of nine chapters each.\*

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\* In Is. 53 this becomes important.

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## 48 (2). "The Lord God, and His Spirit, hath sent me"

The scene changes. Once again, it is no longer Isaiah remonstrating with the irreligious and the falsely religious in his own generation. It is Jesus, in controversy with men who took pride in being "the house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the bowels\* of Judah" (v.1). The introduction of this key word (hinting at a virgin birth?) from the great promises made to Abraham and David (Gen. 15:4; 2 Sam. 7:14) seems right in view of the later unmistakable allusion (v.19) to the Messianic promise in Gen. 22:17.

But these men, who proudly assert their descent from Abraham's promised Seed (Jn. 8:33ff), "remembered\*\* the Memorial Name, but not in truth or righteousness" (v.1). They "stayed themselves upon the God of Israel" (v.2), but it was a false confidence:

"Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind..." (Rom. 2:17,18,19a).

As in Isaiah's day, these Jews worshipped idols of their own fashioning, (v.5), but their false religion was a perversion all the more subtle because it was the outward forms of their religion which they worshipped. Even Christ's disciples came near to being infected (Mk. 13:1). Today the idolatry is transferred to the political state of Israel which, in the face of unbelievable discouragement and difficulty, has been fashioned out of a desert of Arab animosity.

### Fresh Acts of God

The Almighty, who in the past had foretold — and performed — mighty acts on Israel's behalf (v.3,5), now promised "new things, hidden things which thou hast not known" (v.6). This is the gospel to the Gentiles, which Paul called "the revelation of the mystery, kept secret since the world began" (Rom. 16:25), "the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things (in the New Creation) by Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:9).

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\* Many commentators prefer this reading, with one letter different (in Hebrew) from the usual text.

\*\* AV here disguises the close connection, so *common* in the O.T. between the name Jehovah and the word "remember" (Ex. 3:15).

This purpose of God with the Gentiles transformed into Jews involved other sensational developments to be revealed in the Apocalypse; and accordingly the introduction of that prophecy quotes Isaiah 48:6 LXX: "the things which are about to come to pass" concerning Israel and the New Israel (Rev. 1:1,19).

### **Messiah's Work**

The prophecy swings from Israel to Israel's Messiah and to the New Israel, so that it is not easy to be sure what the intention is — perhaps so that all be shown as integral parts of God's redeeming Purpose.

Examples of this are to be found in v.10,11: "I have chosen thee the firstborn of affliction (this is a valid re-pointing of the Hebrew text)...I will not give my glory to another" — yet God has given His Glory to Christ (Jn. 5:23), but Father and Son are so completely One that the words stand true nevertheless. Thus, the special divine name which guarantees this prophecy: "I am the first, I also am the last" (v.12), is rightly claimed in the Apocalypse by the Glorious Son also (Rev. 22:13).

### **A New Creation**

And when Jesus prayed that his disciples might "behold my glory which thou hast given me...before the foundation of the world" (Jn. 17:24), the idiom once again was that of Isaiah: "My glory will I not give to another...Yea, mine hand hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand (uplifted in solemn oath, as in the promise to Abraham; Gen. 22:17) hath *spanned* the heavens" (v.13). Yet it was not the foundation of this universe of vast extent and glory that the prophet's words celebrated, but the wonder of the New Order in Christ. That word "spanned" was surely well-chosen, for it uses the idiom of New Birth — the child "of a span long" (e.g. Lam. 2:20). "When I call unto them, they stand *together*" — heaven and earth united (as in the song of the angels; Lk. 2:14) at the call of the gospel.

However fitting some of this language might be regarding the pious Hezekiah, there can be no manner of doubt that it really belongs to the Messiah — who else?: "The Lord hath loved him...I have spoken (about him); yea, I have called him: I have brought him forth, and he shall make his way prosperous" (v.14,15).

### **Another Babylon**

Because "the Lord hath loved him," "he will do his pleasure on 'Babylon'" (v.14). Here the Book of Revelation comes to the rescue of the bewildered man of faith by teaching him to see faithless persecuting Jerusalem as the counterpart to the 'Babylon' of Isaiah's day.\* The call here to "go forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans" (v.20), is taken up concerning the Babylon of the Apocalypse: "Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins" (Rev. 18:4). There never were any of the Lord's people in the papacy — such a reference is utterly meaningless. The words are a command to separation from apostate Jerusalem and the elaborate system of justification-by-Judaism which it stood for. And since, in both 1st and 20th centuries, Jerusalem is doomed to destruction, a literal flight from the city is imperative also for all who belong to Christ: "Let them which are in the midst of her depart out" (Lk. 21:21).

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\* Again, see Rev., H.A.W, ch.34.

At verse 16 there is clearly a change of speaker. As in Psalm 2 (at v. 7), the Messiah now "declares the decree" — "the Lord God and his Spirit hath sent me" (cp. 61:1; 11:2). If indeed there is any doubt, the words are given their proper reference in John's gospel: "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God; for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him" (3:34, and by all means compare 7:33,37-39). He is Immanuel, speaking of his own mission and work (as also in 49:1-6 and 50:4-9).

"I have not spoken in secret" were the very words of the very Christ when browbeaten by Annas (Jn. 18:20). All through his ministry he "spake openly to the (Jewish) world." All the nation had heard him.

Yet this appeal made by "the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel" evoked little response: "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea" (v.18; cp. Dt. 32:29; Ps. 81:13). So Jesus wept over Jerusalem, and wept in vain. "How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" (Lk. 13:34). "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes" (19:42). Again, see "Rev." H.A.W. ch.34.

### Abrahamic Promises

But, for those who do "hearken", their righteousness is renewed for them again and again, like the ceaseless rollers of the ocean tides washing the beaches clean — it is a figure of the seed of Abraham, an echo of the promise God made to His faithful Friend: "Thy seed also had been as the sand, and the offspring of thy bowels as the grains thereof" (v.19; cp. Gen. 22:17). Here, evidently intent on supplying further interpretation, LXX has "dust of the ground", thus leading back to another Abrahamic promise: "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth" (Gen. 13:16).

### Another Exodus

The allusions (listed in the previous chapter) to God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt now find yet fuller meaning, and are to be taken up in the next prophecy: "With a voice of singing declare ye...say ye, The Lord hath redeemed his servant Jacob (the true Jacob, become Israel). And they thirsted not when he led them through the deserts: he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them" (v.20,21; cp. 49:9-12).

In 1 Cor. 10:1-13 Paul quotes the same experiences, and interprets: "These things were types of us" (v.6,11). The meaning of Isaiah's prophecy has not worn thin.

"He clave the rock also, and the waters gushed out." When Jews celebrated that wilderness experience at the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus appropriated it to himself: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me; and he that believeth on me, let him drink — as the scripture hath said, Out of him (Christ) shall flow rivers of living water. This spake he of the Spirit" (Jn. 7:37-39).

By contrast, "there is no peace unto the wicked" (v.22). Instead of "righteousness as the waves of the sea", there is only "mire and dirt" (57:20).

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## 49 (1). Failure and Success (v.1-7)

The blithe confidence of the modernists that Isaiah 40-66 is post-captivity does not falter when the exposition comes to the second section — ch. 49-57 — but indeed it ought. They are not blind to the difficulties — a Jerusalem which is already inhabited (52:1,2,8), enemies who oppress (49:26; there was a placid prosperous life in Babylon), a retreat of the enemy (49:17), a humbling of kings and peoples before the chosen of the Lord (49:7,23; 52:15,10), an expansion of Israel into Gentile territory (54:3), and yet alongside these phenomena some of Israel so apostate as to give themselves to idolatry in valleys and mountains (of which there are neither in Babylon's dead flat plain; and did not that captivity cure Israel of all idolatry? 57:3-7).

Even the efforts of Cheyne and others to evade these difficulties by shifting the date of this part of the prophecy yet further (B.C. 432!) does little to help.

But the biggest problem of all goes quite untouched — the question of how to assign real meaning to all the superb details of such magnificent prophecies as Isaiah 49 and the ensuing chapters. The modern commentaries wallow in vagueness. The expositors expose no worthwhile meaning. All is cottonwool.

But as soon as the real Isaiah is given the credit for penning these masterpieces, the prophecy needs no illumination, for the light shines out of it clear and bright. This is Messianic prophecy of the highest order, based (like the preceding section) on the character and experiences of good king Hezekiah and the sensational events of his reign. The first task, then, once again, is to examine how the prophet made graphic use of the events of his own day.

It becomes immediately obvious, in ch. 49, that by "Israel" Isaiah means sometimes the nation (as in v.5,6: "Though Israel be not gathered...the tribes of Jacob, the preserved of Israel"), and sometimes the nation's leader and representative — "He said unto me, thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (v.3; note v.1,2). Here, then, is confirmation of the distinction between Israel and "Israel" which has had to be insisted on already in the exposition of ch. 40-48.

### Immanuel

Every phrase at the beginning of ch. 49 requires reference to an individual. The Lord called Hezekiah from the womb (7:14); from the bowels of his mother (whom that earlier prophecy also specifically addressed). He made mention of his name Immanuel, and the Land of Israel was called "Immanuel's Land" (8:8). Hezekiah's mouth was made a sharp sword, he fervently exhorted the Levites to sanctify themselves and to cleanse the house of the Lord. That remarkable passage: "according to the commandment of the king in words of the Lord" (2 Chr. 29:15) might merely mean that Hezekiah quoted existing scripture as the authority for his imperative; but another possible meaning is that the king himself was divinely inspired as a prophet. He seems to have implied the same remarkable truth in the words: "Therefore we will sing *my* songs...all the days of our life in the house of the Lord" (38:20) — inspired psalms by Hezekiah (e.g. 102) are plainly traceable in various parts of the Psalter. \*

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\* The remarkable phenomenon — that certain of these Messianic prophecies are couched in the first person (49:1-6; 50:4; 55:1-3) — might even suggest that Isaiah is incorporating prophecies spoken by Hezekiah himself.

Moreover, he was hidden in the shadow of God's hand (the Hebrew phrase is reminiscent of "the shadow of death"; Ps. 23:4) when he was bidden by Isaiah: "set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live" (38:1). Yet he came out of this grim experience "a cleansed (not, polished) shaft" — cleansed, that is, from the vile disease afflicting him.\*

From this point, as though for special emphasis, the prophecy is constantly reintroduced with: "And he said...Thus saith the Lord..." etc. (v.3,5,6,7,8). Yet there is no disconnection, but a very marked continuity.

### Tribulation and Triumph

"Thou art my servant, O Israel (as in 41:9,10; 42:1), in whom I will be glorified" (v.3). This came impressively to pass in the recovery of Hezekiah, in the destruction of the Assyrian army, and in the marked Gentile respect which was now accorded to Hezekiah and the temple in Jerusalem as a result of these sensational events (v.7,23; 60:3-5; 2 Chr. 32:23).

But in the valley of the shadow Hezekiah was brought very low indeed: "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and in vain" (v.4; cp. 40:27). There were discouragements in plenty. Many scorned Hezekiah's call for national repentance (2 Chr. 30:3,6,9,10); many of those who responded failed to stay the course (hence such passages as 56:10-12; 57:20; 59:1-8; 65:1-7). And, when faced with the Assyrian threat, the king's exhortation to faith in Jehovah (2 Chr. 32:6-8) was disregarded in favour of a futile alliance with Egypt (30:1-5; 19:11-15).

Yet Hezekiah's faith, a dim flickering light, did not go out: "yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work (i.e. recompense; as in. 40:10) with my God" (v.4).

### The Gentiles

For this he was promised a yet greater exaltation — not only the high esteem of his God, but also the respect and honour of Gentile nations round about: "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord...I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles" (v.5,6).

One remarkable, indeed almost inevitable, outcome of the overthrow of Sennacherib's army at Jerusalem was that nations far and near, who had trembled helplessly before the growing power of this ruthless empire-builder, now realised that the God whom Hezekiah worshipped was to be feared and honoured more than the Assyrian wolf-pack. So, "many brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and precious things to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that He was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth" (2 Chr. 32:23).

Thus the man "whom man despiseth, whom the nation (*of Israel*) abhorreth" (v.7), because he was a stricken unclean leper, became a most desirable political friend: "Kings shall see and rise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful (in keeping His promises of protection and guidance), even the Holy One of Israel" (v.7). This impression made upon awe-struck Gentiles is a recurring theme in Isaiah's prophecies (49:22,23; 52:15; 60:3-11;14-16) and some of the psalms of this period (87:4; 102:15). It deserves to be. A more splendid climax to the reign of such a good man as Hezekiah it would be hard to envisage: "Listen, O isles, and hearken, ye people from far" (v.1).

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\* With a slight change in pointing: "he appointed me a cleansing affliction" — a truly remarkable reading, implying that his suffering was on behalf of his people (see ch. 53, where this is asserted *twelve* times).

## 49 (2). The Return of the Captives (v.8-26)

No writer of the Old Testament goes in for recapitulation more than Isaiah. The themes which excite him, and the haunting phrases in which he teaches them, recur over and over again. Here is the real unity of his book. The language positively requires that the same basic exposition be offered from start to finish. The prophecy is *all* about Israel and "Israel", the Lord's suffering Servant — not a complacent Jewish people in comfortable *galuth* in Babylon, but a people shattered by invasion and unexpectedly saved out of their calamity; not some unknown sufferer who impressed another unknown writer with his saintly character, but stricken king Hezekiah whose faith never let go; thus he not only saved his people but also inadvertently set before them an altogether remarkable and exact picture of the Messiah. Indeed, it is a not unworthy speculation that just as David knew himself to be a prophet prophesying by the pattern of his own life the great work of the Messiah, so also Hezekiah.

An outstanding example of Isaiah's blessed repetitiousness is provided by the similarities between chapters 49 and 42. Whatever ch.42 is about, ch.49 must be about the same thing.

	42	49
1. My Servant	1	3
2. The isles	4	1
3. Keep thee.	6	8
4. For a covenant of the people	6	8
5. For a light of the Gentiles	6	6
6. The prisoners	7	9
7. Them that sit in darkness	7	9
8. A Song	10	13

### The details fit Hezekiah

All through this part of the prophecy the Hezekiah reference runs with remarkable ease.

It was "in an acceptable time" that the prayer of the king was heard, and deliverance given, for this Hebrew word is very commonly associated with the worship and feasts of the Lord (e.g. 58:5 — the Day of Atonement; 60:7,10 — the Feast of Tabernacles; 61:2 — the Year of Jubilee). The allusions earlier in Isaiah (31:5; 30:29; 26:20; 33:20) encourage the idea that it was at Passover time when Sennacherib's army was destroyed outside Jerusalem (cp. the first Passover). In such a "day of salvation" God "heard" and "helped" and "preserved" Hezekiah, not only in saving his people but also by bringing back the king himself from the gates of the grave.

Thanks also to Hezekiah the people's covenant with their God was renewed — "I will give thee for a covenant of the people"; and with the hateful Assyrians chased away, the land was re-settled and the desolate heritages, brought to ruin by the invasion, were re-inherited (v.8).

### The return of the captives

This dramatic change of fortune was accentuated by the return from captivity of the hundreds of thousands of prisoners whom the Assyrians had deported. The

theme is developed with both zest and wonderment:

"That thou mayest say to the prisoners (*assurim* — a delightful play on *asshurim!*), Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew\* yourselves" (v.9).

There follows a sustained picture of God's care for these stricken people coming back home. The language is deliberately chosen to remind the reader of an Israel redeemed from Egypt and now provided for and guided by Jehovah in the wilderness:

"They shall feed in the ways (cp. 40:11)...they shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them\*\* (Israel were sheltered by the canopy of the pillar of cloud; Ps. 105:39): for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them (Ps. 23:2), even by the springs of water shall he guide them" (v.9,10; see again 48:20,21).

### Jubilee blessing

As a sign that it was God — and not coincidence or fluke — that was on his side, Hezekiah had been promised the extraordinary fruitfulness of a year of Jubilee (2 Kgs. 19:29,30). The unusually good rains by which God encouraged the natural uncultivated fertility of the ground would ensure for the returning captives an easy journey, untroubled by hunger or thirst.

So they came home in their thousands, not only those who had been dragged away to slavery but also others who had fled in all directions from the terror of the hard remorseless invader:

"And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted (40:4; 35:8). Behold, these shall come from far; and lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim" (v.11,12).

A good deal of exegetical imagination has been lavished unnecessarily on that last expression. Not China (this is pure fantasy!), but the wildernesses of Sin where Israel wandered (Ex. 16:1; Num. 33:11,15; and perhaps 10:17) — the earlier allusions to Israel's forty years in Sinai (v.10; 48:21) point to this conclusion; so also does Ps. 107:3, another psalm of the same period (for Sinim, this has 'the south').

Well might there be a spontaneous outbreak of gladness:

"Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth...for the Lord hath comforted his people (and redeemed Jerusalem; 52:9), and will have mercy upon his afflicted" (v. 13).

### Not forsaken but blessed

There comes in here a flash-back to the days of black despair when it seemed that all was lost (33:7; 37:1-3):

"But Zion said, Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me" (v.14). But how could He forsake or forget? was not "Jehovah" His *memorial*\*? was not His Covenant Name inseparably linked with unbreakable promises? And was not Israel God's firstborn (Ex. 4:22)? "Can a woman *forget* her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may *forget*, yet will I not *forget* thee" (v.15).

Zion was, and is, "graven on the palms of my hands" (v. 16). The slave carried the mark of his master tattooed on his hand (hence Rev. 13:16; Ex. 13:9; Is. 44:5RVm); but here Almighty God proclaimed Himself the slave of Israel, giving attention to their every need.

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\* A word of double meaning — it means also "go into captivity"! But there is no doubt which idea is the right one here.

\*\* Ps. 121:6, a psalm based on Jacob's return from bondage in Syria, and now with special reference to the Hezekiah deliverance mentioned here.

Thanks, then, to drastic divine action at a critical time, "thy children (those carried captive) shall make haste from thy destroyers (contrast 5:26), and they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee (in precipitate retreat)" (v.17).

The lovely metaphor is now developed of a poor widow, bereft of her children, who suddenly finds herself the mother of a large eager family. Where have they come from? "Who hath begotten me these?" Here now back in Israel is such a burgeoning family, lively, busy, all hard at work settling into a home which promises to be too small for them (v.18-21).

Nor need she feel this large family an embarrassment or liability, for the youngest children of all — those who would normally need a lot of looking after — already have their own unique nursemaids; Gentile princesses suckle the tiny ones, and the kings of all the nations round about take turns at baby-minding (v.22,23).

Such is Zion's incredible blessing. Yesterday — piteous, frail, helpless, miserable. And now all is changed. There is prosperity, confidence, and a happiness long unknown. This is what God has done for His people. Bringing home the captives He adds to them many a Gentile well-wisher who wants to belong to such a secure and favoured family. "God is in you of a truth," they say.

But then, very suddenly, the figure changes to stark reality.

What is the hope of coaxing a brutal brigand to disgorge his plunder and hand over those whom he has led away to oppression? None at all, except that tyrant suddenly find himself in the masterful grip of an enemy mightier than he (v.24,25).

Then what is the simple logic of the situation when an Assyrian king, as hard and imperious and powerful a ruffian as the world has ever known, quietly surrenders the booty of a vast victorious campaign? Who is it who is so much more mighty than he, that such a swaggering bully should "come quietly"? Who is this King of Glory!

Now these callous monsters, who have shed blood in rivers, who drowned all neighbouring peoples in misery, shall know the meaning of blood shedding. This time it shall be their own misery (v.26).

And outside the walls of Jerusalem, it was.

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\* See the concordance for an astonishing number of links between this Name of God and the words "memorial, remember, remembrance, forget."

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## 49 (3). Labour in Vain? (v.1-7)

As long as the spotlight continues to play on Hezekiah, the task of exposition is less than half done. The real purpose of the prophecy was not to glorify a man who, for all his fine qualities, had palpable weaknesses, but to illuminate and acclaim the work of One born to be Redeemer of both Israel and Gentiles.

There can be little doubt that, just as David wrote of his own experiences and yet knew himself at the same time an inspired prophet of the Lord proclaiming Messiah to his people (Acts 2:30,31), so also Isaiah saw the lesser figure of Hezekiah casting grand Messianic shadows across the centuries.

### Virgin Birth

Here, then, first of all and appropriately, is the declaration of the virgin birth of the

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Lord Jesus: "The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name" (v.1).

This splendid and necessary truth had already been repeatedly insisted on by Isaiah in this part of his prophecy (41:9; 43:1; 44:2,24; 45:4; 46:3), but nowhere as clearly as this. Of course, all these magnificent passages look back to Isaiah's earlier explicit prophecy concerning a royal Immanuel, born of a virgin (7:14).\*

"The Lord...hath made mention of my name." Here the father names the child. And so also when Jesus was promised to the virgin Mary: "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus...the Son of the Highest" (Lk. 1:31,32).

The prophecy of a preaching mission, ending in suffering — "my mouth like a sharp sword\*\*; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me" (v.2) — is matched by the details of a later prophecy: "I have put my words in thy mouth (cp. 48:16), and I have covered thee in the shadow of my hand" (51:16), this experience being necessary if God's New Creation is to come into being: "— that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people" (51:16).

The Saviour's resurrection was to provide a dramatic vindication; "He hath made me a cleansed shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me" (v.2; Col. 3:3) — this last phrase foretells the ascension.

To this is added an assurance of yet greater achievement: "Thou art my Servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (v.3) — glory to God in the highest when Christ has brought peace on earth.

#### Gethsemane

But the servant saves only through suffering. And why should he suffer if it prove to be all to no purpose? "But I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought (*tohu*; Gen. 1:2), and in vain (here is the name Abel!)" (v.4). This was Christ's plea in Gethsemane: "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (cp. also Ps. 116:10,11). Not that he was unwilling to endure death as a sacrifice; but if Israel were hostile or indifferent, and his own disciples undiscerning, where was the point of it? What *could* his death achieve?

"Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work (or recompense for a task fulfilled) is with my God" (v.4). The prayer of the Man in Gethsemane evidently oscillated between one extreme and another — faith that all *must* work out well, and acute discouragement that toil and suffering seemed alike pointless. ("Gospels", ch. 212).

"In vain!" this poignant expression (*kenos*, in LXX) is echoed by Paul in one of his masterly passages about the suffering and glory of Christ: "he *emptied* himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7) — the context borrows not only the word "servant" from Is. 49:1-4, but also other key words: "name, glory, salvation (Jesus)."

However, in Gethsemane near-defeat was turned into victory: "there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, *strengthening* him" (Lk. 22:43). Gabriel, the Strong

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\* O.T. prophecy concerning the Virgin Birth is more copious than is usually imagined. The following passages deserve study: Ps. 22:9,10; 71:6; 89:26,27; 110:1,3LXX (Mt. 22:44); 132:11; Gen. 3:15; Mic. 5:2; 2 Sam. 7:14; Gen. 49:25; Jer. 31:22; Pr. 30:19; and the type of the birth of Isaac.

\*\* "The Word of God (Jesus) is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12). Two-edged" is, literally, two-mouthed; now see Mt. 25:21,26,32-34,41.

one of God, rallied the failing forces of him who was El Gibbor (Is. 9:6) with the wonderful words written centuries before for Messiah's aid and benefit.

"And now, saith the Lord that formed\* me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered\*\* (Mt. 23:37), yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my *strength*" (v.5).

### The Gentiles

"Glorious...God glorified" — these alluring words, later linked by Isaiah with a redeemed people and a redeemed land (60:21; 61:3; contrast 52:5), become the key to an understanding of important NT. passages, especially in John's gospel.

An outstanding instance is the occasion when Greeks — Gentiles! — pleaded to be brought to Jesus. The Lord's thankful response was: "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified" (Jn. 12:20,23). From this point the words "glory, glorify" dominate the chapter (v.28,41,43), with the sad inescapable theme that in contrast with Gentile eagerness, there was indifference or unbelief in Israel — the very picture presented by Isaiah 49:

"Though Israel be not gathered...I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth" (v.5,6). No wonder this prophecy begins with the ringing cry: "Listen, O isles...and hearken, ye people from far."

### Peter in the Temple

It is not inappropriate here to draw attention to the similarities between this prophecy and Peter's speech in Jerusalem after the healing of the lame man.

	<b>Isaiah 49</b>		<b>Acts 3</b>
3.	My Servant, in whom I will be glorified.	13.	The God of our fathers hath glorified his servant Jesus.
5.	My God shall be my strength.	16.	His name...hath made this man strong.
6.	To raise up the tribes of Jacob.	7.	He raised him up.
8.	For a covenant of the people.	25.	Children of the covenant.
6.	My salvation unto the ends of the earth.	25.	All kindreds of the earth blessed.
9, 10, 13	Pastures... springs of water etc.	19.	Seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.
18.	All these gather themselves together, and come to thee.	11.	All the people ran together unto them.

That the first of these correspondences was intended is past dispute. If the rest are valid, then the third item invited the Jews of Jerusalem to see themselves as like a lame man in God's sight, unfit to go into the temple, and needing the healing of Christ. If the crowd saw the point of Peter's allusions to Isaiah 49, then they would surely draw the conclusion that, should Israel not suffer themselves to be "gathered" into the name of Jesus, the great salvation would go to the Gentiles. It was a neat way of proclaiming to unwilling Jews the importance of this big new gospel development, now impending.

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\* Gen. 2:7,8 — once again, the New Creation; cp. Is. 45:18,7.

\*\* Heb: *Joseph-ed* the one who became a servant, a slave, to gather his people to safety.

The promise: "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles," found its fulfilment in the work of the apostles. Necessarily so, for in his earthly ministry the Lord was "not sent, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Accordingly Paul and Barnabas did not hesitate to appropriate this prophecy of Messiah as though it were written about themselves: "Seeing ye put the word of God from you...lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded *us*, saying, I have set *thee* to be a light to the Gentiles...And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad (see 49:13), and *glorified* the word of God" (Acts 13:46-48).

It is now easier to appreciate better the boldness of Paul in his unabashed use of Isaiah 49, so certainly true of Messiah, with regard to himself. Besides the instance just cited there are also these additional examples:

- a. "God, who separated me from *my mother's womb*, and called me..." (Gal. 1:15; this is v. 1).
- b. "that I have not run in vain, neither *laboured in vain*" (Phil. 2:16; this is 49:4, which has already been alluded to in 2:7).
- c. In 2 Cor. 6:2, immediately after that ominous phrase: "in vain", Is. 49:8a is quoted verbatim with reference to Paul's preaching in Corinth: "I have heard *thee* (the Messiah) in a time accepted..."

The assurance of response to the gospel in unexpected ways is now repeated: "Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship" (v.7). These words should have been true of Pilate, Herod, Annas and Caiaphas, but they were not. But the apostles bore witness "before kings and governors" (Lk. 21:12). The real fulfilment, however, will be in the days of Messiah's glory. Then "kings (who have hitherto scorned him) shall shut their mouths at him (in awe)" (52:15).

They will be the more thunderstruck because they are called upon to submit to one 'whom man (now) despiseth, whom the nation abhorreth' (v.7; cp. 52:14). But then, what a contrast with the rejected Jesus!

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## 49 (4). Zion's New Family (v.8-26)

If it was in a time of acceptable sacrifice that the God of Israel came to the rescue of king Hezekiah, how much more was this true regarding Jesus!

That seeming dereliction on the cross was no dereliction: "In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee." It was a Passover providing a greater deliverance than that from Egypt (see v.9,10).

Here, too, the sacrificial blood of a new and better covenant — the new knowledge of the Lord and forgiveness of sins; the new covenant which meant the shedding of blood "for many, for the remission of sins" (Mt. 26:28). "A day of salvation," truly! What greater?

How the contradiction in this prophecy must have bewildered its pious readers, until the fulfilment came! "To *preserve* thee...for a *covenant* of the people." But a covenant victim dies, or there is no covenant. This promise to "preserve" made no sense at all until the morning of the Lord's resurrection — except perhaps for one or two readers of unusual spiritual insight.

"To establish (or, confirm) the Land, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages" — this is Exodus language once again. This Servant of the Lord is not only a new

Moses saying to the prisoners, "Go forth" (v.9), he is a new Joshua also.\* The Exodus figure intensifies, now describing Messiah as the Shepherd of God's

New Israel leading them in the way from bondage to inheritance: "They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be on all bare heights (where no pasture is to be expected). They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for...by springs of water shall he guide them" (v.9,10). Here, in concise pregnant sentences, is allusion to the manna and the smitten rock, to the sheltering canopy of the cloud of Glory, and to wells of water springing up into everlasting life when they reach their Land of Promise.

### **A New Pilgrim Israel**

With more pointed emphasis on the Lamb as Shepherd, the Apocalypse applies all of this to the great multitude who are the spiritual Israel, worshipping the God of the living creatures in a heavenly sanctuary, and making steady pilgrimage to mount Zion where God wipes away all tears from their eyes (Rev. 7:16,17; 14:1). In the promised inheritance there is to be "a fountain of water of life" and indeed "a pure river of water of life" (Rev. 21:6; 22:1).

The one who promises such blessings calls forth his "prisoners" not only out of the clutches of master Sin, but also out of "the pit wherein is no water," the dungeon of Death: "Lazarus, come forth!"

There is a superb double meaning (besides that already suggested in ch. 28) in this part of the prophecy. First, the call of the Gentiles to share Israel's finest blessings. And then, the restoration of God's ancient people as He brings them home, not as political Zionists but as a nation realising at last its true destiny through faith in the promised Messiah. The two themes are inextricable. The mind has to be carefully attuned to heaven's counterpoint.

The redeemed of Jehovah come "from far...from the north and from the west...from the land of Sinim" (v. 12). Jesus took up the idea. He too foretold that when many in Israel thrust the gospel from them, "they (Gentiles) shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God" (Lk. 13:28,29).

Yet, one day, Israel too with a changed heart will come from the four points of the compass to inherit by Messiah's gift what they have vainly tried to guarantee by their own effort and cleverness.

Then, such a song will be sung as mount Zion has never heard, for it will celebrate God's consolation and comfort for his afflicted people (v. 13).

This, too, is echoed in the Apocalypse: "Rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them," for "now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ...they overcame by the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 12:10-12).

### **"The Consolation of Israel"**

The message itself, apart from its fulfilment, was an inexpressible comfort to God's faithful, men like the aged Simeon, even when their only sight of Messiah was a tiny baby. The gospel story of that fine old man steers the mind back to Isaiah 49 over and over again:

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\* A remarkably similar combination of ideas is traceable in Zech. 9:9-11: Peace to the Gentiles, inheritance for Israel, the blood of the covenant bringing forth prisoners. Perhaps even more remarkably, Heb. 13:20 combines Zechariah's "blood of the covenant" with Isaiah's "God of peace" and "Shepherd of the sheep."

<b>Isaiah 49</b>		<b>Luke 2</b>	
13.	Comforted his people	25.	The consolation of Israel
1.	Called me from the womb	23.	Every male that openeth the womb...holy to the Lord.
6.	A light to the Gentiles	31.	A light to lighten the Gentiles.
22.	Can a woman forget her sucking child...the son of her womb?		
23.	They shall not be ashamed that wait for me	25.	waiting for the consolation of Israel.
6.	A day of salvation	30.	Thy salvation.
7.	Princes shall worship, kings shall see and arise.	34.	The fall and rising up of many in Israel.

However, the gospel going forth to eager Gentiles, at a time, too, when Israel's land was made desolate, provoked many misgivings in Israel:

"Jehovah hath forsaken me, and the Lord hath forgotten me" (v. 14).

Was it true? Is it? "Hath God cast away his people? God forbid!...God hath *not* cast away his people which he foreknew" (Rom. 11:1,2). No woman can be indifferent to the baby at her breast (v.15). No more can Jehovah turn away from His people, for Zion is engraven on the palms of His hands\*. And if — Paul's argument in Romans 11 — seven thousand faithful could save the nation from ruin in Elijah's time, so also in the day when Elijah comes again (Mal. 4).

### **A New Family**

At that time "thy children shall make haste" to come again to the Land, and also (in a higher sense) to return unto the Lord, whilst those who lay Zion waste for the last time (Zech. 14:2) "shall go forth of thee."

So dramatic will be the transfiguration from desolation to joyous prosperity that Zion will scarcely find room for all her new-found children. Just as the boundaries of Jerusalem had perforce to be extended (by a theological fiction of the rabbis) because it was physically impossible to contain the great crowds of Passover worshippers within the city walls, so now the city of God's holiness must spread itself to take in and transform the "waste and desolate places" (v. 19).

At this point there comes in the moving figure of Zion as a mother who has somehow been deprived of all her children, but who suddenly finds herself blessed and cheered more than she or any other would have deemed possible. The black outlook of loneliness and misery is suddenly transformed into the happiness and irrepressible energy of a multitude of healthy children:

"All these gather themselves together and come to thee (contrast v.5 and also Mt. 23:37)...The children which thou shalt have...shall say again in thine ears, The place\*\* is too strait for me...Then shalt thou say, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate" (v. 18,20,21).

This is surely the re-gathering of Israel, not only physically back to the Land, but also spiritually back to their God. Zion will recognize her children by their likeness to their Father! And not only sons but also daughters (v.22), for in Christ Jesus "there is neither male nor female" (Gal. 3:28).

\* Contrast the Ten Commandments "engraven in stones" (2 Cor. 3:7) which could be smashed.

\*\* Since this word so frequently signifies a "sanctuary, holy place, or temple," there is perhaps here a hint of the inadequacy of the temple and its Judaistic service.

In this century the political return of Jews to Israel has been made in the face of concerted obstruction from Gentile nations acting in a grossly inhuman fashion out of blatant self-interest. But the days come — so Isaiah foretells — when those who exercise political power will gladly dedicate their resources and "their best endeavours" (the Balfour Declaration, sadly falsified hitherto) in aiding stricken Israel back to their true inheritance.

### Waiting for the Lord

But the fulfilment of this exalted Messianic purpose calls for patience, for the mills of God grind slowly. "They shall not be ashamed that wait for me" (v.23).

Here is one of the really grand words of Isaiah's prophecy. There are indeed times when a man must be up and doing in the service of his Lord. There are others when his best — and hardest — duty is simply to wait: "Stand still, and see the salvation of God." "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." This is one of Isaiah's best themes. He persists in it.

1. "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee" (26:8).
2. "The Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him" (30:18).
3. "O Lord, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee: be thou...our salvation also in the time of trouble" (33:2).
4. "Men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him" (64:4).
5. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles..." (40:31).
6. "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (25:9).

Thus Isaiah anticipates Paul's grand gospel of salvation by *faith*, for this is what "wait" implies. Indeed, Isaiah himself so interprets it:

"They shall not be ashamed that wait for me" (49:23) — with this compare: "He that believeth shall not make haste (shall not be ashamed; Rom. 10:11)" (28:16).

It is a gospel easy to enunciate, but perplexingly difficult to live out in practice, keeping "the word of my patience" (Rev. 3:10).

### Power against the Enemy

There is reinforcement for faith by a simple but telling argument, which the Lord Jesus seized on to refute the reputed denigration of his enemies: "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive be delivered?" (v.24). Is it possible to snatch a victim from the jaws of a lion?

Answer: Yes! but only if the invincible beast be slain, only if the mighty Adversary be vanquished.

So when, with curling lip, they sneered: "He casteth out devils by the prince of the devils", that is, here is a man in league with the powers of evil, he rounded on them with an appeal not only to the *quality* of his miracles but also to the logic of such achievements: "How can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house" (Mt. 12:29) — as who should say: If by my miracles I snatch my men away from the power of Sin and its ruthless consequences, then am I Sin's friend or his mortal enemy?

Here were Jesus and Isaiah in alliance against the powers of evil.

The outcome of the contest was also foretold by them both:

"I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Saviour\* and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob" (v.26).

The figure could hardly be more gruesome. Whatever else, it portends self-destruction — the final demonstration by Sin of its own sinfulness: "Thou hast given them blood to drink" (Rev. 16:6) from "the great winepress of the wrath of God" (14:19). The self-punishment of the world will be the final masochism (Ez. 38:21; Hag. 2:22; Zech. 14:13; Joel 3:11,12), as in the day of Midian (Jud. 7:22; Is. 9:4).

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\* Here are the names of both Isaiah and Jesus

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## 50. "Not rebellious"

The last section of Isaiah's prophecy ended with a picture of Israel the prey of the terrible, and yet delivered.

Now, with a change of figure, there comes the enquiry: "Why have such unhappy experiences come about? Israel is lonely and helpless as a divorced woman so that Zion says: "The Lord hath forsaken me, my Lord hath forgotten me" (49:14; cp. 54:1,6). But why? for there is no bill of divorcement. Her sons are in bondage; yet they have not been sold off for the discharge of debt. God is not so hard up.

Then why should such calamities come upon them, as they did, almost literally, in Hezekiah's time, and again repeatedly in later ages?

To this there is one blunt simple answer: "Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away" (v.1). "Ye have sold yourselves for nought" (52:3).

This was a deliberate choice on the part of a wayward people. But in later days Paul pushed this language to an extreme application when, longing with heart and soul to be freed from the power of sin, he lamented: "But I am carnal, sold under sin...what I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that do I" (Rom. 7:14,15).

There is only one answer to this problem of slavery — one who is a near-kinsman and who has the resources to redeem the helpless out of their bondage.

Such a Redeemer is at hand: "Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?" (v.2). The expostulation was justified in Hezekiah's day. It was equally true, in a more fundamental sense, in the time of Paul: "O wretched man that I am! who shall *deliver* me from the body\* of this death? I thank God (that He will) through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:24,25).

### A New Exodus

It is a deliverance comparable to, but greater than, that which God brought to Israel through Moses. Accordingly, the language of the prophecy is that of Israel in Egypt and wilderness:

1. "At my rebuke I dry up the sea."\*\*
2. "The rivers a wilderness; their fish stinketh" — waters turned to blood.

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\* A double-meaning word here in Greek: "out of (being) a slave of this death".

\*\* Contrast the futile boast of Sennacherib: 37:13.

3. "I clothe the heavens with blackness" — the plague of darkness.
4. All the phraseology of bondage and redemption fits Israel in Egypt (e.g. Ex. 3:7-9).
5. "My hand shortened?" These were the very words of Moses when the people murmured about lack of food (Num. 11:23).
6. A new Moses, but without his reluctance, is called for (v.4,5).\*
7. The inadequacy of the old life — "they shall wax old as a garment" (v.9) — gives place to divine provision: "Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee" (Dt. 8:4).

There was literally a new Exodus from Assyrian bondage in Isaiah's day (see the commentary on ch. 49). And there will be another new Exodus when at last Israel is re-gathered under the hand of the Lord from all their final dispersion. But even now this great deliverance is possible for any man of faith. Anyone who believes in the power of Christ is forthwith delivered from Egypt and set on the pilgrim road to a Land of Promise.

Yet, in another way, God has to expostulate: "Wherefore, when I came, was there no man?" A great freedom is offered, and there are no takers! "When I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear" (66:4; cp. Pr. 1:24,28).

The words are not strictly true but only generally, for in the time of the Assyrian tyranny there was a faithful remnant who continued to share the inspired faith of Hezekiah. (And even though the Lord Jesus remonstrated: "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not" (Jn. 5:43), he too had his small following who hung on regardless. But regarding the nation as a whole, the words were a tragically accurate diagnosis).

### Current Fulfilment

At this point it is worthwhile to pursue the reference of this prophecy to Isaiah's own time.

Who is this new Moses who is "given (by God) the tongue of them that are taught", who, unrebelling, gives his ear morning by morning to the divine message (v.4,5)? This is either Isaiah himself, with the inspired Word of God, or Hezekiah whose zeal for God was so outstanding. The allusion in verse 10 to "the servant of the Lord" decides in favour of the latter, for in all other places the prototype of the Lord's Suffering Servant is Hezekiah. This fact, already evident enough, is put past all argument when the details of chapter 53 come under consideration.

The words just quoted from verses 4,5 seem to imply more than a personal zeal for the Word of God, for here is not only a hearkening to the message from God but also the communication of it. A personal inspiration seems to be implied (cp. Zech. 4:1) such as that which was doubtless in operation in Hezekiah's song of thanksgiving (Is. 38) and in such psalms as 102 which surely came from his pen.

But was it true of this worthy man that he "gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair"? Did he really endure "shame and spitting"?

Literally, no! But such a prospect, and worse, was his when he made an irate enemy of the Assyrian king. In all human history there has never been such fiendish cruelty as the Assyrians meted out to their captives, and — humanly speaking — there was nothing that could save Hezekiah from the worst treatment Sennacherib

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\* The critics are emphatic that there is an abrupt break or discontinuity in the prophecy at the end of v.3. This shows how mistaken they are.

could think of. Yet this man of faith did not flinch. He had committed his cause to the God of Israel, and he would not "turn away back".

More than this, he became the spiritual backbone of many of his fellows: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord? let him heed the voice of his servant: he that walketh in darkness, and hath no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God" (v. 10).

By contrast, "all ye (Assyrians) that kindle a fire, that gird (my city) about with firebrands\*: walk ye in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled (this said sardonically!). This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow" (v.11). When the destroying angel of the Lord went forth (37:36), those words had grim fulfilment.

Correlation such as this between the prophecy and the dramatic events of the time may be instructive and even exciting, but to stop there is to miss the main intention of the message, for its true focus is *Christ* and the deliverance which God has wrought for his sake.

### **Messiah's obedience**

He, as no other, was given "the tongue of those that learn (cp. 49:2), that he should know how to speak in season a word to him that is weary\*\*\*" (v.4). And what a word it was! "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28).

"Morning by morning" God wakened His Son (see, for example Mk. 1:35). The word Jesus spoke was not only the fruit of a matchless acquaintance with the Scriptures written about him but also of personal communion with the Father. \*\*\*

"The Lord God hath opened mine ear" to be his servant (Ex. 21:5,6; Ps. 40:6-8) — after the pattern of His servant Samuel (1 Sam. 9:15) and His servant David (2 Sam. 7:27) — and he was not rebellious.

"Not as I will, but as Thou wilt," he humbly prayed (Mt. 26:39). "As the Father gave me commandment even so do I" (Jn. 14:31). "He took on him the form of a servant...he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:7,8). "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body (a slave) hast thou prepared me" (Heb. 10:5). "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience" (Heb. 5:8).

A precious catena of testimonies, truly!

### **Messiah's suffering**

What a contrast with Israel, the people who, though having ears, were deaf (43:8); "they rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit" (63:10). Like a "stubborn and rebellious son" (Dt. 21:20), they deserved the hardest discipline, and yet found it laid instead on One who was all meekness and obedience (21.22,23).

Willing to suffer, all undeserving, Jesus "gave his back to the smiters (Mt. 26:67; 27:26), and his cheeks (to the smiters also; Mic. 5:1; Jn. 18:22) and to them that plucked off the hair (here is a sordid addition to the compression of the concise gospel narrative): he did not hide his face from shame and spitting (Lk. 18:32; Mt. 27:30)" (v.6).

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\* It was Passover time (31:5; 30:29), and the nights cold (cp. Jn. 18:18,25), and Assyrian camp fires ringed the city, both for comfort and bravado.

\*\* Translation is defeated here, "weary" (*ayaph*) is twisted into "speak in season" (*ya'aph*, which literally means 'twist'). This is just one example of the kind of verbal trick that is common in Isaiah's Hebrew. In this way he implies many a secondary meaning. Here he as good as says that this is his method.

\*\*\* Cp. Jn. 7:16; 8:16,17; 12:49; 14:24; 17:3.

With the certain prospect of this suffering before him, Jesus nevertheless "set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:51). The words frame almost exactly the grim dourness of Isaiah's phrase (LXX): "therefore have I set my face like a flint — and I know that I shall not be ashamed" (v.7). The mind goes ranging back to the flinty rock which poured forth water of life for God's redeemed bondslaves (Dt. 8:15).

### Vindicated

But all at once the figure changes to that well-trying favourite in this part of Isaiah — the court of law\*. A quick succession of legal terms protest the faultless life of this servant of the Lord:

"He is near that *justifieth* me, who will *contend* with me? let us *stand up* together: who is mine *adversary*? let him come near to me...Who is he that shall *condemn* me\*\*?" (v.8,9).

This is where Paul learned his own superb rhetoric on the same theme: "If God be for us, who can be against us?... Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Shall God who justifieth? Who is he that condemneth? Shall Christ...who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us?" (Rom. 8:31-34). In such a court of law no pleading disciple need be nervous, for God is both judge (v.8a) and counsel for the defence (v.9a).

### Self-Righteousness Self-Condemed

But for those who despise such graciousness and rest their case for self-vindication on a catalogue of good works, there is only brusque condemnation: "Lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up" (v.9b; cp. 59:6a).

Jews proud of their Judaism wrote Jesus off: he suffers, they argued (v.6); therefore he is rejected of God (53:4b). Therefore *their* dereliction shall furnish the demonstration of *their* own worthlessness. These who "walk in the light of their own fire...shall lie down in sorrow" (v.11).

So it was with the entire Mosaic system: "That which decayeth and waxeth old is (now) ready to vanish away." Hebrews 8:13 uses the very words of Isaiah. "The heavens (of Judaism) did vanish away like smoke, and the earth waxed old like a garment...the moth shall eat them up like a garment" (51:6,8; cp. Ps. 102:26).

But what of the man "that feareth the Lord"? "Let him hearken to the voice of his Servant! He that walketh in darkness and hath no light\*\*\* (the disciple that is mystified and bewildered by present evil circumstances), let him trust (have faith) in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God" (v. 10). And he will not trust in vain! The political and personal experiences of Hezekiah proved this conclusively to his generation. The resurrection of the Lord has furnished even more decisive demonstration that dependance on the Name of Jehovah — He who was, and is, and shall be — will always carry a man through.

But when a disciple joins an over-confident Peter in the kindling of a fire and tries to walk in the light of that fire (Lk. 22:55), he lies down in sorrow, as Peter did to the most miserable sleepless weekend that ever a man spent. "This shall ye have at mine hand."

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\* 41:1,21-29; 43:8-13,26; 44:7; 45:20-25; 50:8.

\*\* Peter echoes the LXX phrase here: 1 Pet. 3:13.

\*\*\* This remarkable word always signifies the Shekinah Glory Of God.

## 51 (1). "Hearken unto me" (v.1-8)

"Who is among you that feareth the Lord? let him hearken unto the voice of His Servant" (50:10). That exhortation was now reinforced with a three fold "Hearken unto me" (51:1,4,7).

On the face of it the call might seem to have been addressed by the Servant of the Lord, Hezekiah, to the faithful among the nation — those who had responded with real self-dedication to the king's call back to God. In spite of the enthusiasm with which Hezekiah's reformation is described in 2 Chronicles 29-31, the sad truth remains that most of the nation was either unaffected by this new surge of righteousness or was content to be borne with the tide, "going through the motions" of godliness (52:5; 55:2; 56:10-12; 57:1-11 etc.). Indeed, it seems likely that "ye that follow after righteousness, that seek the Lord" are this very section of the nation, apostrophized in irony.

Whilst it is difficult to be sure, this was apparently how Paul read the words for he gave them unambiguous application to a similar class in his day — "Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the Law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone" (Rom. 9:31,32).

### Interesting contemporary allusions

There is, maybe, a certain ambiguity also about the figure of speech now introduced. In AV Abraham and Sarah were represented as "the rock (whence) ye were hewn" and "the hole of the pit (whence) ye were digged" — in other words, emulate the fine faith and example of those splendid characters. But the verbs can be read differently. W.A. Wordsworth insists on this, and traces in the context several subtle references to the waters of the Siloam tunnel — "the rock ye hewed, the hole of the pit ye digged." Indeed, he goes further than that and suggests that the excavators, working from opposite ends, called their respective halves of the project "Abraham" and "Sarah". An interesting but quite unverifiable speculation! If correct, the prophet meant that the beleaguered city was to rest secure not in their own efforts but through faith in God like that of their forebears — "the waters of Shiloah that go softly" (8:6).\*

It is Jehovah, and He only, who can "comfort Zion, comfort all her waste places." Jehovah only can "make the wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord" (v.3). This duly came about in the unmatched blessings of the Year of Jubilee which God promised to the faithful king (2 Kgs. 19:29-31). A country reduced to the depths of despair and given over to seemingly irreparable devastation, was filled with "joy and gladness, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody."

Well might the people of Jerusalem be bidden: "Fear ye not the reproach of men (the scorn and invective of Rabshakeh!), neither be ye afraid of their reviling" (v.7), for those who spoke so boastfully against Hezekiah and his God would find themselves engulfed in a God-sent cataclysm: "The heavens shall vanish away like smoke\*\*, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die like a louse" (v.6; 40:22).

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\* The allusion to Sarah could be one of Isaiah's *double-entendres*: "a prince (Hezekiah) that is in travail for you" (cp. 53:11).

\*\* Such phrases as this make Velikovsky's hypothesis of cosmic upheaval in the time of Hezekiah more plausible.

The effect of this mighty deliverance on surrounding Gentile nations would be sensational: "The isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust" (v.5).

### Messiah's Salvation

And now the exposition begins afresh, focussed this time on Christ. The Servant of the Lord has a right to bid men: "Hearken unto me", for God opened *his* ear, and he was not rebellious (50:5). He calls alike to those in earnest and to those whose lives are a religious sham: "Ye that seek the Lord — hearken unto me!" He is not the Suffering Servant now (as in 50:6,7), but is the One through whom God offers salvation.

But this salvation is for those who seek God's kingdom and God's righteousness, not their own. "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain (no speaking in pretence, nor seeking in pretence): I the Lord speak righteousness" (45:19). It is the generation of them that seek God's face which receives the blessing of righteousness from the God of their salvation (Ps. 24:5,6).

Here there comes in another fascinating double meaning. All true men of the true Israel thankfully acknowledge their personal justification by faith, after the pattern of the faith of Abraham, the rock whence they have been hewn; they look unto Sarah the hole of the pit whence they have been dug. "If ye be Abraham's seed (by faith), then are ye Christ's and heirs of the Promise"\* (Gal. 3:29).

But the words may mean: "Look unto the rock which ye hewed, and to the hole of the pit which ye digged." This is precisely what Joseph of Arimathea and his fellow-believers did on the third day after Christ was buried! All his life Joseph had pursued the acquisition of a righteousness of his own. Then the amazing happenings of the day of crucifixion stood his long-held convictions on their head, and he became the disciple of a corpse. His own new tomb, in which he himself has now lain for nineteen centuries, became for him the symbol of a conquest over death lasting far more than nineteen centuries. God has shown that He is able out of those stones to raise up a Son unto Abraham (Mt. 3:9).

The Father of the faithful and the wife who bare him the promised seed were both quickened by God "I called him when he was but one, and blessed him\*\*", and made him many\*\*\*\*" (v.2).

Like father like Son! Here is clear implication that the Servant of the Lord would likewise be quickened and made into a multitude.

In this context, and in this interpretation, the promise of comfort for Zion calls for a spiritual application. Paul recognized in this passage the equation of Sarah with Zion and of both with the New Israel in Christ. Two women, Hagar and Sarah — two mountains, Sinai and Zion — two covenants, bondage and promise (Gal. 4:22-31).

For this Zion, the Lord's faithful ones, there is assured comfort (as in 40:1; 52:9), and for the "waste places"\*\*\*\* of spiritual deprivation which they now deplore, this drought is to become "like Eden," this desolation "like the garden of the Lord" in which One Man will be fruitful and multiply, the one becoming many.

\* The words are just as true this way round.

\*\* Or: met him (with reference to Gen. 14:14,19).

\*\*\* The one and the many is an inescapable theme in connection with Abraham (Ez, 33:24; Gal. 3:29,27; Heb. 11:12). Both "many" and also "Comfort" (v.3) make a play on the name of Abraham.

\*\*\*\* 'Zion' means 'dry', and 'waste' (44:26; 52:9; 58:1 2; 61:4; Ez. 36:10,35) means 'dried up'. So God gives water out of the rock; v.1; 2 Chr. 32:30; Ex. 17:6.

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At this point the Servant of the Lord turns in appeal to "my people" Israel, with words of warning that the Mosaic order in which they take such pride is to pass away, and themselves too, as God's elect, whilst Gentiles come to put their trust in the God of Israel (v.4-6):

"Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away (Heb. 8:13) like smoke\*, and the earth shall wax old like a garment" (v.6). It is the idiom of the passing of an old out-moded order (cp. Ps. 102:26, interpreted, with reference to the Mosaic System, in Heb. 1:12).\*\*

In its place there is the regeneration Messiah brings — in token of which, there follow three quick allusions to the servant prophecy of 42:1-7: "a law shall go forth from me...judgment...for a light of the peoples...my righteousness...the isles shall wait for me."

The Messianic phrases pile up: "On mine *Arm* shall they *trust*." This is the "salvation-righteousness \*\*\*" which Messiah brings, never to be abolished like the old "heavens and earth" — it is justification by faith (trust), the kind of righteousness which God esteems above all other. Men best learn this righteousness by leaning on the Arm of the Lord.

But now a difficulty: "Mine arms shall judge the people" (v.5). How can this plural refer to Messiah? Since Isaiah nowhere else uses such a plural in a Messianic context, there is every likelihood that this exception is to be read as an intensive plural: "my mighty arm".

### Third Appeal

The third imperative or appeal: "Hearken", is a call to the Lord's faithful, "ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law" (v. 7). In this they are imitators of Him who calls them: "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:8). Thus they share the blessings of the New Covenant: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" (Jer. 31:33) — thus they "know the Lord" (v.34) and "know (his) righteousness."

For such, inevitably, there is "the reproach of men". The context shows that this reviling comes from entrenched obstinate Judaism: "the moth shall eat them up like a *garment*" — it is the very phrase used in the previous verse to picture the decay of the "heavens and earth" now vanishing away.

James neatly combined an allusion to the Sermon on the Mount with a glance at this passage (LXX) when he trounced his Sadducee contemporaries: "Go to now, ye rich men...Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten" (5:1,2).\*\*\*\*

An incomparably better garment is that which Christ provides: "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). Thus those who "know (his) righteousness" share his righteousness. It is their salvation: "The gospel of Christ...is the power of God unto salvation to every one that has faith...For therein is the righteousness of God (that which God provides) revealed on the basis of faith (and not works) to the man who has faith".

This equation of God's righteousness with God's salvation, precious to Isaiah

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\* Literally: "salted with smoke", an allusion perhaps to the salted sacrifice of burnt offering being utterly consumed.

\*\* The same idea comes in v. 16; 50:3,9; 54:10; 65:17; 34:4,5(8); Mt. 24:35.

\*\*\* Five times in v. 1-8.

\*\*\*\* This section — James 5:1-6 — cannot possibly apply to early Christian believers. Read it as part of the funeral oration at the burial of Stephen; Acts 8:2. (For further detail, see "Five Apostolic Epistles", H.A.W.)

because it spelled his own name, was precious also to Paul, and valuable in his unceasing witness against Judaist reliance on self-achievement.

To this day the lesson is hard to learn. Well-intentioned human nature is always set on knowing its own righteousness rather than that which is the gift of God. Yet that is the only true salvation.

## 51 (2). "Awake, Awake" (v.9 — 52:12)

After that triple imperative: "Hearken", there comes a ringing threefold summons: "Awake, awake (51:9,17; 52:1). The second and third of these are addressed to Jerusalem, the first to "the Arm of the Lord" in Jerusalem. Since, in so many places, the Arm of the Lord is the Messiah and his prototype Hezekiah, this is how the title must be read here.

### Deliverance in Hezekiah's day

In those hard testing times, Hezekiah's faith in Jehovah was the only bulwark left to the beleaguered city. And even he quailed at the barrage of propaganda unleashed by the renegade Rabshakeh: "My Name *continually every day* is blasphemed" (52:5), so that men "feared *continually every day* because of the oppressor ready to destroy" (51:13).

So the prophetic expostulation became necessary: "Who art thou that thou shouldest be afraid of a man (Sennacherib) that shall die?" (51:12). And so it came to pass that Sennacherib died, under the shadow of the god he worshipped, and by the hand of the son of man he had begotten (37:38).

"The cup of fury, the cup of trembling, which thou (Jerusalem) hast drunk at the hand of the Lord...thou shalt no more drink it again. But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee" (51:17,22,23). The death-warrant of Nineveh was signed by a prophet of the Lord.

But before deliverance came, "Jerusalem drank at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury...the dregs of the cup of trembling...desolation, and destruction, and the famine, and the sword." At that time, "there was none to guide her among all her sons whom she had brought forth, neither any that took her (hezekiah-ed her) by the hand" — for one simple reason, that the only man capable of giving a sound lead to the nation in such a terrifying crisis was laid aside with an incurable disease (38:1). "These two things" — invasion and the king's dire disease — "are befallen thee (together; cp. 38:5,6); who shall be sorry for thee?" (51:17-19).

"None to *guide her*"? No *man!* But the God of Israel would not lightly let go His holy city: "The Lord saved Hezekiah...from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and *guided* (s.w.) them on every side" (2 Chr. 32:22).

Hezekiah himself was restored: "I have put my words in thy mouth (inspiration; 50:16), and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand (49:2)". The nation was given a fresh start: "that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth" (v. 16).

Zion shall "put on strength", and Jerusalem shall don the "beautiful garments" of "the holy city", for "henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean" (52:1). Back in the days of Tiglath-pileser III, weak decadent Ahaz had bought peace of a sort

at the cost of humiliation: "Ahaz took away a portion of the house of the Lord...and gave it unto the king of Assyria: but it helped him not" (2 Chr. 28:21). That infamous craven policy of accepting an Assyrian garrison into mount Zion, into the temple area itself, had been the greatest shame of all\*. Henceforth it must never happen again.

### **Captives sent home**

God's people had "sold themselves for nought" gaining nothing from the cowardly subjection they had accepted. They were to be "redeemed without money" (52:3) — Sennacherib's 200,000 Jewish captives were packed off back home almost as soon as they had arrived in their distant land of bondage, and this without any effort at escape on their part. They had paid tribute in plenty to these rapacious Assyrians and had gained only a broken treaty (33:1). Their redemption from captivity cost them not a penny. It was the free gift of their God.

This astonishing reversal of fortunes was not a furtive escape, but a dignified departure: "Ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight\*\*" (52:12). The watchmen of Jerusalem would be heard lifting up their voices in an ecstasy of gladness when they saw in the far distance the incredible sight of a long caravan of God's redeemed now coming happily home. And the "waste places of Jerusalem", the ravaged and devastated area all round the city, would "break forth into joy" at the sight of Zion's children returning home.

### **Another Exodus**

This was to be a deliverance comparable to that under Moses which ended the dark days of Egypt: "My people went down aforetime into Egypt to sojourn; and the Assyrians oppressed them without cause" (52:4) — the earliest and latest captivities.

Phrase after phrase recalls that imperishable Exodus experience: "Art thou not he that cut in pieces Rahab (the OT. nickname for Egypt), and wounded the dragon (the Nile crocodile)? Art thou not he which dried up the sea...that made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" (51:9,10). "The Lord will go before you (in a pillar of fire); and the God of Israel shall be your rear-ward (in a pillar of cloud)" (52:12; and cp. v. 15; Ex. 14:20).

"The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail" (51:14). Here a matchless passage from an earlier Isaiah prophecy is repeated with gusto: "therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away" (51:11, from 35:10). There had been nothing like it since Moses, nor will be until the day when Messiah fulfils this prophecy as he gathers in his Diaspora.

### **Problems for the Modernist**

The moderns would like to apply all these passages to the return from Babylon under Ezra and Nehemiah. But what difficulties they get into in the process! For instance, the catalogue of sufferings: "desolation, destruction, famine, sword" (51:19), is hopelessly irrelevant to

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\* Other Scriptures bearing on this: Mic. 5:5; 2 Kgs. 16:8,18; Ps. 74:3-8; Is. 63:18; 64:11; 11:9a; 26:2.

\*\* The Hebrew text here seems to be making a play on names: haste (Hephzibah); flight (Manasseh); "the Lord will go before you" has the idea of Immanuel; and "rearward" echoes Joseph. A remarkable coincidence — if it is!

those who had had seventy years of settled prosperity in Babylon. And if the reference be to Jerusalem, then only the first of these four items was relevant in the time of Cyrus. In his day it was full seventy years since the sons of Zion had been "full of the fury of the Lord" (v.20).

Other phrases present the same difficulty. "Thou hast feared continually every day because of the oppressor" (v.13). This was simply not true of that comfortable prosperous existence the Jews led in Babylon. The picture (v. 14) of the captive fearful lest he die in the pit, lest his bread should fail, is foreign to the ease and plenty in Babylon. And the allusion to Egyptian and Assyrian captives (v.4) makes the reader wonder why Babylon goes unmentioned, if these words were being written in Babylon. Neither can the picture of watchmen on the walls or towers of Zion (v.7) be fitted into the period of Cyrus, for then Zion had neither walls nor towers nor watchmen.

The imperative: "Go ye out from *thence*" (52:11), requires to be read (with a great effort of imagination!) as an apostrophe addressed from an empty desolate Zion to those in far-off captivity. Certainly nothing of this kind happened in the days of Cyrus.

Strange that these simple details should go overlooked in the eagerness to establish a theory. But all these features of the prophecy — and many more — fit into place like a hand in a glove when they are read against the proper background — the time of Isaiah, and not a pseudo — or deuterio — Isaiah.

## 51 (3). Deliverance, as from Egypt (v.9-23)

The Scripture already discussed at some length (51:9 — 52:12) has further ramifications of a kind only to be expected in a book of divine inspiration. There are indications that no less than three other schemes of interpretation are to be considered:

- a. The preaching of the gospel; the New Creation in Christ;
- b. The blessing of the saints at the (yet future) coming of the Lord;
- c. Israel's deliverance in the Last Days.

The third of these is closely related to the others, for Israel's repentance in the end time will bring them the blessings of the New Israel.

The call to the Arm of the Lord to "awake, awake" (v.9) may be a poetic apostrophe to a God who can deliver, but in some places this is a title of Messiah: "Behold, the Lord God will come with a strong hand, and his Arm shall rule for him" (40:10; cp. also 53:1; 63:5). This call for help — that God will "awake, as in the ancient days" — is soon answered by the assurance: "I, even I, am he that comforteth you" (v.12) and by "the Arm of the Lord revealed" (53:1).

### Salvation then and now

In ages past had not God come to the rescue of His people "with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments" (Ex. 6:6; cp. 15:16)? The Arm of the Lord which could save from the thralldom and might of Egypt doubtless could and doubtless would save His New Israel from their enemy. "Art thou not he\* that did cut Rahab in pieces, that pierced the crocodile?" (v.9).

\* The Hebrew word is feminine, to go with "arm" also feminine.

That ancient deliverance, culminating in God "making the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over" (v.10) would dwindle in importance when compared with the Lord's dramatic act of compassion — the redeemed coming to Zion with everlasting joy upon their head (v.11).

### Joy and gladness

This lovely picture of a rescued people was well worth repeating from Isaiah's earlier prophecy (35:10). The moderns, unable to see (in ch. 51,52) anything but restoration from Babylonian captivity, promptly assign Isaiah 35 also to another utterly ignorant and pagan Cyrus! Deliverance in Christ or a final restoration of a lost Israel can only be read into these moving words by a believer's purblind piety or untutored enthusiasm, can it? So be it! But it is for such that there is "gladness and joy", even now — the rejoicing which filled the home of the prodigal on his return (Lk. 15:32 s.w. LXX).

It is possible, or even probable, that that fine phrase "everlasting joy upon their head" should be replaced by one even finer: "everlasting joy because of their Head." In Him there is comfort and release from all fear: "I am he that comforteth you...sorrow and mourning flee away" (v.12,11). "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Mt. 5:4).

### Fear?

"Who art thou that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die?" Here faith puts the problems of life in perspective. Fear — whether of men or of circumstances — is the negation of faith. It is a sin, the point-blank infringement of a thrice-repeated commandment: "Fear ye not therefore" (Mt. 10:26,28,31).

Then "who art thou that thou shouldest be afraid"? This was Moses at his most faithless: "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh?" (Ex. 3:11). There is a better Deliverer who has not shrunk from meeting the Tyrant in the human arena, the place of his power.

Fear only comes in when there is forgetting: "Thou forgettest the Lord thy maker, that stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth" (v.13). Thus all testing situations are put in their proper perspective. Isaiah loved the force of this sublime argument and never tired of it (40:22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; and also Ps. 104:2, a psalm of Isaiah).

With such grounds for reassurance why should any of God's people "fear *continually*"? There is something sardonic about this use of a word which so often describes the continual burnt-offering of Israel — constant fear consuming a man to ashes, like the fire of the altar. Could paralysing fear be a man's best and unceasing offering unto the Lord (cp. also 52:5)?

Yet, "where is the fury of the oppressor?" (v. 13). In due time there will be recompense enough for those who delight in tyranny (v.22,23). "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven" (2 Th. 1:6,7).

### A New Moses

The parallel with the Exodus is resumed. "I have put my words in thy mouth"

(v. 16) is almost a verbatim quotation of the passage promising a prophet like unto Moses (Dt. 18:18). It is one of the first qualifications of Messiah that he will love the word of God and make it his constant utterance (49:2; 50:4,5; 59:21). And, like Moses, he is "covered in the shadow of God's hand" (cp. Ex. 33:22; Is. 49:2).

This personal experience of Christ is a necessary preliminary to the founding of a New Creation (contrast v.13): "...that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people" (v. 16). It was at Sinai (Ex. 19:5,6) where God first said to His rescued nation: "Thou art my people". But now here is a New Israel rejoicing in a greater deliverance.

"Plant the heavens" is such an unusual expression that doubts have been expressed about its validity, especially since a one-letter change of the Hebrew word would give: "stretch out the heavens," a reading followed by the version of Symmachus.

Yet "plant" is not an absurd reading, for the prophecy goes on to describe Messiah as "a tender plant, a root out of a dry ground". And since the verb is that used of "the Lord God planting a garden eastward in Eden" (Gen. 2:8), there is perhaps a hint here of Paradise restored.

When the Arm of the Lord awakes again to action, this will be no mere future prospect, but very truth fully realised.

The prophet's second and third "Awake, awake, stand up" are addressed to Jerusalem (v.17; 52:1). This in itself suggests that the first apostrophe (v.9) to "the arm of the Lord" is not a call to the power of God in heaven but to His Messiah in Jerusalem. In the second of the three (v.17), LXX pointedly uses two outstanding NT. words for resurrection.

It is a picture of a city rising up bright and fresh after being dead drunk — drunk not from self-indulgence but from judgment. The cup of God's wrath has been emptied to the dregs. There is no more judgment to drink, none at all.

Nor is there help or restoration to be looked for from any of her sons. All their cleverness and dedicated energy has been given to human effort without faith in God, and see now the result of it in the Last Days: "desolation, and destruction, and the famine, and the sword" (v.19).

But Isaiah's phrase is: "these *two* things" — that is, looking back to verses 17,18 with their twin pictures of judgment to the uttermost, followed by complete helplessness and dereliction when there is no friend or rescuer "that taketh her by the hand."

For "thy sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets" (v.20). This is a picture of tragedy repeated in Revelation — the death of the witnesses (11:8), a vision which combines Ps. 79:2,3 (an Isaiah psalm) with this other passage by the same prophet.

How very necessary is the later prophecy (59:16), that "when there was no man...therefore his arm brought salvation"!

Now, thanks to the aid of a God who has judged but not forsaken, deliverance is at hand:

"Thus saith thy Lord Jehovah, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people..."

This is the end, the final end, of all struggle and frustration, of all misery, pain, and woe. The days of holocaust and pogrom are gone at last. "The cup of trembling...thou shalt no more drink it again" (v.22). Israel, relax! For you there is now nothing but the beneficent smile of your God and the comforting presence of your Messiah.

And that cup, which has meant so much bitterness, the drunken stupor of tribulation and helplessness, is now to be filled again. But this time it is for "them that afflict thee", the lately-triumphant adversaries who have proudly said: "Bow down, that we may go over."

For Israel those days of horror are ended.

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## 52 (1). "Good Tidings of Good" (v.1-12)

The contemporary reference of this third "awake" to the great change in fortune, God-wrought, which came about in Hezekiah's day, has already been indicated (see ch. 34). In addition to this, there are sufficient NT. quotations of this section to require further reference to the era of the preaching of the gospel. Even then the meaning is not exhausted, for a yet more thorough fulfilment awaits in the setting up of Messiah's kingdom. These second and third meanings of an attractive but extraordinarily difficult prophecy now call for attention.

### The New Zion

The exhortation to Zion: "awake, awake, put on strength", is now to be read with reference to the New Zion, "Jerusalem which is above", the community typically identified by Paul (and Isaiah; 54:1-8) with Sarah, the true wife. She puts on a God-given strength. "Beautiful garments" of divine righteousness are provided for her, a cleanness (v.11) which does not come naturally. At Sinai the people were bidden make themselves clean; they were to "wash their clothes" themselves (Ex. 19:10) in preparation for the covenant God was about to make with them. Now, for this New Covenant specially beautiful garments are provided, new raiment fit for priests. The high priest himself shares this experience. Joshua-Jesus, arrayed in filthy garments, is clothed afresh suitably to his office (Zech. 3:1-4) in garments "for glory and beauty" (Ex. 28:2). The same is true for those who derive their holiness from him (Ex. 28:40).

"The uncircumcised and the unclean" (v.1) have no part here. Jews undeservedly appropriated to themselves the status of an elect people when in fact "their circumcision was made uncircumcision" (Rom. 2:25) by their transgressing of God's law. But into this "holy city" community (v.1) there come no such.

Nevertheless, technical uncleanness and lack of physical circumcision are no disqualification. When Christ rose from the dead "many bodies of saints which slept arose and came into the holy city, after his raising of them" (Mt. 27:53). And it was through the death of Christ that there was provided a place in the holy city "to bury strangers in."

### Slavery — Freedom

No wonder there is an exhortation to "shake thyself from the dust" — from the curse on Adam (Gen. 3:19) and all that that entails. Instead: "arise, and sit (Targum: on a throne of glory)."

"The bands of thy neck", the evident tokens of slavery, are loosed (v.2). This was enacted in symbol when Peter, in prison and destined soon to die, was bidden by the angel: "Rise up quickly" (Acts 12:7; cp. v.1 here), and "his chains (s.w.) fell off", so that he was able to go forth to freedom.

Using this figure and the spirit of this scripture, James exhorted the council of Jerusalem not to reverse the process and "put a yoke on the neck of the disciples" (Acts 15:10). To this day the warning is needed, for there seems to be a fatal fascination about rules and regulations for the spiritual life.

Jewry was specially in need of release from such a wrong attitude to life. Their dedication to the minutiae of a rabbinic regimen was a bondage: "Ye have sold yourselves for nought" (v.3; cp. Ps. 44:12). "For your iniquities have ye, sold yourselves" (50:1).

The apostle Paul reviewed his former life critically and found Isaiah's phrase very apt: "I am carnal, sold under sin...who shall deliver me?" (Rom. 7:14,24). Isaiah's answer is: "Ye shall be redeemed without money" (v.3), this word "redeem" signifying the act of a near kinsman — hence Paul's conclusion: "I thank God (that I am delivered) through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:25).

"Redeemed without money" is meant to go beyond its face value even though there are plenty of men who think they can use money to ensure "everlasting habitations" for themselves. The phrase emphasizes how completely men's salvation depends on God: "Being justified *freely* by his grace." Yet it is only an Unjust Judge who justifies sinners! And He doesn't need to be bribed or bullied into doing it: "redeemed without money."

Until *this* salvation is known and received, Hallelujahs are no better than howlings (v.5) — the prophet has here a mordant parody of the familiar temple shout. The wrong attitude of God's people hinders not only their own salvation but that of others also. The Jew made his boast of the Law and yet by demonstration of his own non-redemption he dishonoured his God by causing the name of God to be blasphemed among the Gentiles (Rom. 2:23,24\*), as it is written (in Is. 52:5). Thus, Paul argues, Jewish circumcision is reckoned by God as uncircumcision (Rom. 2:25-29) — for does not Isaiah say that Jerusalem is full of the uncircumcised and the unclean (52:1)?

### "Eye to eye"

However, amongst them are those who truly deserve to be called "my people". These are the New Israel, the faithful remnant, who "know My Name" (v.6). They are as slaves happily acknowledging a new Master. They have his name written in their foreheads (Rev. 14:1). And they recognize their Master's voice: "in that day they shall know that I am he that doth speak: behold, it is I" (v.6). God had said to His own nation who sought Him not: "Behold, it is I" (65:1). But the New Israel, mostly made up of Gentiles, was ready and eager. This phrase, as turned by LXX, was therefore appropriately used by Jesus at his second coming to the blind man: "and he it is that speaks with thee" (Jn. 9:37). *Very* appropriately, since the man makes a superb type of the enlightenment of the Gentiles, and in Isaiah the text goes on to promise: "they shall see eye to eye when the Lord returneth to Zion" (v.8).

### Gospel Preachers

The beautiful words about "the feet of him that *bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace...that publisheth salvation, that saith to Zion, Thy God reigneth*" (v.7), describe Christ's preaching. One of the familiar passages in the gospels is

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\* James (2:7) appears to use the same Scripture in the same way, with reference to Jews socially and religiously important, who were hostile to the gospel.

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marvellously similar (especially in Greek): "he went throughout every city and village (the feet!), preaching and shewing the *glad tidings of the kingdom of God*" (Lk. 8:1). So also Peter's review of the gospel to Cornelius: "...*preaching peace* by Jesus Christ...That word...which was *published throughout* all Judaea." (Acts 10:36,37).

But the apostle Paul goes further than this, boldly changing the pronoun in this passage and appropriating the words to himself and his fellow-preachers (Rom. 10:15). The development of ideas in that place is remarkable.

Joel's: "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Joel 2:32; Rom. 10:13) is linked with this quotation from Is. 52:7 by an inexorable progression:

1. To be saved they must call on the name of the Lord.
2. To call on the Lord they must first believe in Him.
3. To believe in him, they must learn about Him (see 10:19).
4. To know Him, they must hear the message.
5. To hear, they must have a preacher.
6. To be a preacher one must first be commissioned by the Lord.

At this point Paul quotes: "How beautiful are the feet of *them*..." (Is. 52:7; Rom. 10:15), his mind being steered there by Isaiah's context: "therefore my people shall *know my name* (Joel just quoted)...that I am he that doth speak (the preacher!)"

Then the immediate mention of "the arm of the Lord" (52:10) takes the apostle's mind on to the next occurrence of that pregnant phrase "to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" (53:1). Hence his other quotation from the same verse: "Who hath believed our report?" (Rom. 10:16).

### "Him...them"

But an integral part of Paul's argument is the switch in his earlier Isaiah quotation from "the feet of him" to "the feet of them...". Was he justified in this?

Other examples show that this was a normal element in his concept of the gospel. Just as in the O.T. what God does, operating through man or angel, is spoken of as an act of God Himself, so also in the N.T. the work of the gospel set forward by the apostles is deemed to be the work of Christ himself. Examples:

1. "For so hath the Lord commanded *us*, saying, I have set *thee* (the Messiah) to be a light to the Gentiles" (Is. 49:6; Acts 13:47).
2. "*We* then, as workers together with *him*, beseech you...For he saith, I have heard *thee* (the Messiah) in a time accepted..." (Is. 49:8; 2 Cor. 6:1,2).
3. "For he hath said (to Joshua, prototype of the Messiah), I will never leave *thee*, nor forsake *thee*. So that *we* may boldly say, The Lord is my helper..." (Heb. 13:5,6; Josh. 1:5).

### Peace with God — for all people

The pile-up of equivalent phrases in Isaiah's enunciation of the gospel can often be lost through sheer familiarity with the words: "good tidings...peace...good tidings of good...salvation...Thy God reigneth (or, with re-pointed Hebrew, the King of thy God)". The parallelism highlights the truth, so fundamental, that salvation is essentially peace with God. This is the only peace the Bible talks about. To give the word a different slant is to miss a theme of great beauty.

This gospel of peace with God means both comfort and redemption to those who feel desolate — "ye waste places"; and not only is this good tidings for Jerusalem but also "in the eyes of all the nations; all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God" (v.10). Here with a play on his own name Isaiah foretells the divine Jesus, the salvation of God proclaimed to the ends of the earth.

Luke rounds off his epitome of the ministry of John and Jesus with these very words: "And all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (3:6), words which come also in his quotation of Isaiah 40:3-5 LXX. Matthew and Mark achieve the same effect by supplying a catalogue of the places contributing their quota to the great crowds round Jesus.

**Mark 3:7,8**

Galilee  
 Judaea  
 Jerusalem  
 Idumea  
 Beyond Jordan  
 Tyre and Sidon

**Matthew 4:24,25**

Galilee  
 Judaea  
 Jerusalem  
 Beyond Jordan  
  
 Decapolis  
 All Syria

**Separateness**

But this call to join the new Israel of God meant a clean separation from the defilement of "Egypt" and "Babylon":

"Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord" (v.11). This becomes the insistent call of the New Testament — that those consecrated to serve God in His temple show the stamp of something more than a technical consecration: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord (in Isaiah 52:11), and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Cor. 6:17), and — through the sacrifice of Isaiah 53 — will clothe you in "beautiful garments" (v.1).

The "vessel" of the Lord to be cleansed is, of course, one's own life: "That every one of you know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour," writes Paul in a context which could not be more appropriate to an immoral sex-ridden century (1 Th. 4:3-6). In another "temple" context Paul exhorts: "If a man therefore purge himself from these (unworthy men and ideas), he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use...Flee also youthful lusts" (2 Tim. 2:21,22).

This new Israel will have no need for haste or flight (v.1 2), like that ancient exit from Egypt, but there will be the same incomparable assurance of a divine presence — the Glory of the Lord going before in a pillar of fire and behind in a pillar of cloud (v.12; Ex. 14:19). Did not Jesus say: "Lo, I am with you, always, even to the end of the world"?

## 52 (2). "Thy God reigneth" (v.1-12)

This prophecy now has to be conned once again, this time with reference to Israel and saints in Christ in the last days. The two can be considered together for there will be no final fulfilment of these words until there is at least a faithful seven thousand in Israel who no longer bow the knee to Baal (T.E. ch.2).

Then, indeed, Jerusalem will put on "beautiful garments" appropriate to a new priestly work (Ex. 28:2,40) and fit for a holy city; the new Jerusalem prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:2). And not only the garments but also "strength", the attribute of a king (Ex. 15:2; 1 Sam. 2:10), one who is a Messiah (Mic. 5:4).

There is no place here for the unclean or the uncircumcised (v.1). The people of unclean lips are now touched by a live coal from the altar of the Lord, so that they gladly join in the chorus: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts" (6:4-6). And the way to Zion is now a way of holiness; the unclean do not pass over it (35:8).

Zion is no longer desolate, sitting on the ground (3:26); no longer sharing the dusty curse of the serpent (v.2; Gen. 3:19); no more does she bow down that scornful enemies may go over (51:23). Instead, she shakes herself from the dust, and arises to sit in glory, loosed for ever from all captive bands (v.2).

"Sold for nought", God's ancient people are now bought back at the same bargain price (v.3). "He (the Messiah) shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward" (45:13), for their Near Kinsman has long ago paid all that was needful.

This startling salvation comes about at a time when "my people is taken away for nought; they that rule over them (now, their vicious enemies) make them to howl" (v. 5). Here is the final tribulation of Israel when they are ground between the upper and nether millstones of the wrath and love of God. It is "the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it" — saved only because there are among them those "that know my name" (Rev. 14:1)... "in that day they shall know that I am he that doth speak" (v.6), a God who predicts *and* fulfils, who promises that "the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion" (51:11) and who keeps His promise, so that "sorrow and sighing flee away".

### Zion's watchmen rejoice

The lovely words, already fulfilled in the preaching of the gospel, now find such a transcendent meaning as to set all the Lord's true watchmen singing. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him (the Messiah) that bringeth good tidings." Since Isaiah goes on to rejoice in God's *comfort* of His people (v.9), making a play on the name Nahum, it seems likely that the words just quoted were themselves cited from Nahum 1:15 where the context is that of judgment on the invincible enemy of Israel. There is here an encouragement to read that prophecy also with reference to Israel's final travail and sensational deliverance.

### The Lord is King

Now, with the Messiah enthroned in Zion, the words are true as never before: "Thy God reigneth." "Behold, your God" is the cry to the cities of Judah (40:9). And there is repentance in Israel — "the moon confounded, and the sun ashamed" — when "the Lord of hosts shall

reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients of glory (men like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, now raised from the dead)" (24:23).

Psalms of Isaiah's time (some of them written by Isaiah himself) tell the same glad story: "God is King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding. God reigneth over the nations: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness" (Ps. 47:7,8). And Psalms 93-100, with their recurring theme: "The Lord reigneth," are to be read as written by Isaiah with reference to (a) the great deliverance in Hezekiah's day, and (b) to the final assertion of God's authority in Israel in the end time. Here are two clues making a considerable difference to the force and worth of these much-neglected psalms. The second of them is reinforced by NT. usage: "As the voice of many waters (Ps. 93:4)...saying, Hallelujah, for *the Lord* God omnipotent *reigneth*" (Rev. 19:6). This is the praise and rejoicing when "the marriage of the Lamb is come."

### Unquenchable gladness

When signs of this fulfilment crowd in thick and fast the watchmen of Zion will lift up their voice in singing (v.8). But watchmen are prophets (21:6,11,12; Jer. 6:17; Ez. 3:17; Hab. 2:1), so in these words there may be an implication of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the time of the end, as foretold by Joel (2:28). At that time the highest privilege of prophecy will not be to behold the similitude of the Lord (Num. 12:8), but to know the Lord face to face, as a man speaketh to his friend (Ex. 33:11; Dt. 34:10): "They shall see eye to eye when the Lord returneth to Zion\*" (v.8) — not "through a glass darkly, but face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12).

No wonder the "waste places of Jerusalem break forth into singing" (v.9), for now the holy city is redeemed, and God's people comforted. These glad songs of Zion meant much to Isaiah; in his prophecy there are no less than 21 separate passages which lift up the voice in praise, thanksgiving and joy.

Here especially is unquenchable gladness, for "the salvation of our God" (the meaning of Isaiah!) — the Jesus of our God — is seen by all the ends of the earth (40:5), for "the Lord hath made bare His holy arm (the arm of His Holy One?)"

The link up here with Psalm 98 is most marked: "*O sing unto the Lord a new song...his right hand and his holy arm hath wrought salvation for him...all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God...break forth and sing for joy... make a joyful noise before the Lord who reigneth.*" Evidently Isaiah was so excited by the prospect that he simply had to sing his song of gladness twice over.

### More allusions to the Exodus

This prophecy ends by harking back once more to the excitement of the Exodus. The call to forsake the old life now takes on a new and fuller meaning: "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing...ye that bear the vessels of the Lord" (v.11). As the people of Israel were called to forsake all that they had known in Egypt, and go forth to freedom, so also one day the call will come to those who await their Lord.

But the people were bidden ask (not "borrow", as AV) "*jewels* of silver, and *jewels* of gold" (Ex. 11:2). Were not these an "unclean thing"? No, for the same word reads: "*vessels* of the

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\* Here is another echo of the wilderness journey (Num. 10:36). The Glory of the Lord, which has been away from the camp, now rests once again in the midst of His Israel.

Lord" (Is. 52:11). The sanctuary of the Lord was furnished with matchless riches in gold and silver because the unclean things of Egypt were now dedicated to the service of the sanctuary\*.

There is to be, however, one important difference from that ancient Exodus under Moses. "The Egyptians were urgent upon the people that they might send them out of the land in haste" (Ex. 12:33). But now, "ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight" (v. 12), for those left behind will know nothing about it, and those who are taken will go with a quiet confidence in the Lord who has come to save them.

And how will they go? "The Lord God will go before you (as with Israel, in a pillar of fire); and the God of Israel shall be your rearward (in a pillar of cloud)" (v.12; cp. 58:8). Paul says the same: "caught up together with them in clouds (the Glory of the Lord), into the air in order to meet the Lord (at Jerusalem)" (1 Th. 4:17). What a climax of experience for a saved people!

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\* So also all the other sanctuaries of the Lord were equipped with dedicated Gentile wealth: Solomon's temple, Ezra's, Herod's, the Lord's spiritual temple of believers, and the temple yet to be.

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## 53 (1). The Shadow of the Substance (52:13 — 53:12)

The greatest of all the "Servant Songs" is the one which also provides the most convincing evidence that the foundation for all these impressive Messianic prophecies is the almost equally impressive experience of Hezekiah. In "proto-Isaiah" (7-35) inspiration guided the prophet to foretell Hezekiah and his work as well as Christ. In "deutero-" (40-66), the problem is not readily resolvable whether the same is true here, or whether Hezekiah is being deliberately used as an already-known prototype of Messiah. Perhaps it doesn't matter much. The main thing is to recognize that the two go inseparably together, like a man and his shadow (Messiah being the Man!). Here is the explanation of the past tenses in v. 1-10, one far more satisfying than the slick invocation of "calling those things which be not as though they were." As with so many other Messianic prophecies, the details often fit Messiah more than his prototype. But not infrequently it happens the other way round. The reader has to be on the alert for both possibilities. Here, first, the search concentrates on the amazing seamliness of the language with reference to Hezekiah.

It has long been recognized that "the boil" which brought the good king to his deathbed (38:1,21) was a form of leprosy. The same word describes Job's leprosy (2:7; note the description in 19:13-21). It is "the botch of Egypt" (Dt. 28:27; Ex. 9:9-11). And the same word four times describes Biblical leprosy (Lev. 13:18-23).

The catalogue of appropriate details in this prophecy is truly impressive:

1. "His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men" (v.14). Contrast the king's recovery: "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty" (33:17).
2. "So shall he sprinkle many nations" (v.15). Commentators, mystified by this Hebrew word, try to turn it into "startle" (as RVm); but this is wrong. In all other 23 places its meaning is quite patently "sprinkle". These include 4 occurrences in the leprosy chapter (Lev. 14:7,16,27,51). Thus, the unclean leper sprinkles Gentiles in order to cleanse *them!* The Messianic meaning here is very beautiful.

3. "No form nor comeliness" (v.2).
4. "Acquainted with grief" — literally, "caused to know sickness", the same word as in 38:9 (Hezekiah), Ps. 41:3 (David), 2 Chr. 16:12 (Asa), 2 Chr. 21:15,19 (Jehoram). Uzziah also was a leper (2 Chr. 26:21). It looks as though the sin of David started a streak of rottenness in the royal family (note especially the details in Ps. 38 and 51:7).
5. "We hid as it were our faces from him" (v.3) can read equally well: "he hid as it were his face from us" (RVm and Targum). This can now be seen as a clear allusion to the leper covering his face and crying, (Unclean, unclean! (Lev. 13:45). Also, the strange word translated (or rather, paraphrased) "hid" comes in 38:11.
6. "Stricken" (v.4) — this Hebrew word is used with reference to leprosy no less than 57 times in Lev. 13,14. The Vulgate reads: "stricken as a leper."
7. "Smitten of God" — note 38:1, and observe that all the lepers (Moses, Miriam, Gehazi, Uzziah, Job, David) received their stroke from God.
8. "The chastisement of our peace" (v.5) echoes Hezekiah's words: "For peace I had great bitterness" (38:17).
9. "Stripes" (v.5) has the same word as Ps. 38:5, and also Isaiah 1:6 which describes the leprous nation. Here, then, is the point of Hezekiah's leprosy: the nation's sin and its retribution were exemplified in their leader and representative, himself all undeserving. Hence: "A Man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest" (32:2).
10. "Healed" (v.5) is used regarding the cured leper (Lev. 13:18,37; 14:3,48) and also of Hezekiah (2 Kgs. 20:8; 2 Chr. 30:20); see also Num. 12:13; Dt. 28:27.
11. "Who shall declare his generation?" (v.8). The words are specially relevant to Hezekiah inasmuch as he had no son at the time of his disease (cp. 38:5 with Chr. 33:1). Compare also his own words: "Mine age (generation) is departed and is removed from me" (38:12); and note the glad contrast: "The father to the children shall make known thy truth" (38:19). Also: "he shall see his seed" (v.10).
12. "He was cut off out of the land of the living" (v.8) is matched by: "the cutting off of my days" (38:10) and "the land of the living" (38:11).
13. For "it pleased the Lord to bruise him" (v. 10); LXX reads "the Lord decided to *cleanse* him of his *plague*", evidently reading in the Hebrew a clear allusion to leprosy.
14. "His soul an offering for sin" (v.10) is, properly: "a guilt offering" (RVm). Note the frequent mention in Lev. 14 of the guilt (trespass) offering.
15. "He shall prolong his days" (v.10) — Hezekiah's fifteen extra years.
16. "The pleasure of the Lord shall *prosper* in his hand" (v.10) — Hezekiah "*prospered* in all his works" (2 Chr. 32:30).
17. "The travail of his soul" (v.11) cp. "the bitterness of my soul" (38:15).
18. "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant cause many to be righteous" (v.11). Hezekiah's reformation (2 Chr. 30) would certainly be resumed with increased fervour after his great deliverance.
19. "He shall bear their iniquities" (v.11) had already been exemplified before this sickness (2 Chr. 30:18-20), and found further illustration in the personal sufferings of the righteous king.

20. "therefore will I divide Rabbim to him as a plunder, and he shall share out the strong as a spoil" (v.12). Rab-shakeh was probably only one of a number of Assyrian generals who felt the wrath of the Lord at Jerusalem (cp. Jer. 39:3).
21. "He made intercession for the transgressors" (v.12) — again, cp 2 Chr. 30:18-20.
22. And now it is permissible to return to v.13; "exalted...extolled...very high", and v.15 "kings shall shut their mouths at him." This is in step with the history: "And many brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah; so that he was *exalted* in the sight of all nations from thenceforth" (2 Chr. 32:23).

What sort of a man was this Hezekiah that he should be selected by God to be the shadow, seen beforehand, of his Messiah?

## 53 (2). Who is this Suffering Servant?

A thousand years and more before Isaiah wrote, Abraham had been taught that his God-given son was not the promised Seed of the woman. The offering of Isaac could not take away sin. Instead, Abraham — when he "lifted up his eyes and looked" — perceived "*behind* him" another sacrifice of God's providing. And with it came a promise: 'Not *your* only-begotten son, but mine, shall bring the forgiveness of sins. And through *him*, you, Abraham, shall be the father of a multitudinous seed.'

Now, through the ministry of Isaiah, the curtain was drawn aside again, and revelation taught the Lord's faithful to see in good king Hezekiah a picture of the Righteous Servant of God upon whom would yet be laid the iniquity of us all. This Man, dying for the sins of others, would nevertheless "prolong his days" and "see his seed", the "many" who would be made righteous through him.\*

### The Day of Atonement

There is, then, a good deal of fitness about the way the phraseology of this chapter echoes the ritual of the great day of Atonement, on which day one specially significant sacrifice was offered for the sins of the people.

<b>Leviticus 16</b>		<b>Isaiah 53</b>
21. He shall lay his hands upon the head of the live goat and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel and all their transgressions, even all their sins.	6.	The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.
22. The goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities.	11.	Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.
14. He shall sprinkle of the blood seven times.	12.	He poured out his soul (life, which is in the blood) unto death.
But there is one significant difference:		
15. The goat of the sin offering.	7.	As a lamb to the slaughter.

\* After the pattern of Genesis 22,24, Isaiah 54 continues with references to marriage and the growth of the divine

The emphasis here on the Servant's suffering for the sins of others is really tremendous. No less than twelve times this is asserted.\* And the pronouns in the Hebrew text add to the emphasis:

"He hath borne our griefs" (v.4).  
 "He shall bear their iniquities" (v.11).  
 "He bare the sin of many" (v.12).

### The very heart of the Prophecy

Understandably, this eloquent prophecy has become "the bad conscience of the synagogue." Over the centuries many a Jew must have wished most fervently that these words were not in his Holy Scriptures. That wish shows itself in the studied omission of Isaiah 53 from the Haphtarah synagogue readings. The sections that come before and after it are both used, but not this!

However, such a policy does not get rid of it. Then what *do* the Jews make of this amazing Scripture?

They read it as a prophetic picture of the sufferings of Israel, the Messianic race. Here, they claim, is the agony of the persecuted Jew through the ages — "no form nor comeliness...despised and rejected of men...a man of sorrows...oppressed, afflicted...as a sheep before her shearers...doing no violence, and with no deceit in his mouth." (No deceit in the mouth of the Jew?).

Thus the Jew becomes the perennial expiation for the sins of the Gentile world: "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all...he shall bear their iniquities...he bare the sin of many...with his stripes we are healed." Not so convincing there!

But there is great satisfaction to the Jew in all this: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied...he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand...he shall be exalted, and extolled, and be very high."

Thus, whilst the soul of every true believer is brought down to the dust by a reading of this prophecy, the Jew is taught pride of race!

All this is very impressive.\*\* But it is only as long as there is deliberate selectivity that the case can be made. A more careful examination of *all* the details exposes this Jewish exegesis for what it is — a *pis aller*, the fruits of a determination to evade the plain message of the prophecy.

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### Difficulties

1. "The servant of the Lord" is hardly ever a Biblical title of the nation of Israel. But about sixty times it is applied to David or, in Isaiah, to Hezekiah, David's successor on the throne of the Lord. The primary reference to Hezekiah has already been set out in detail.
2. In an eloquent passage (43:3,4) Isaiah tells how God gives Gentile nations for the saving of Israel. But this Suffering Servant gives himself to save Gentiles.
3. Far too many details in the prophecy simply do not fit the thesis: (a) "He was cut off out of the land of the living" (v.8). But the Jew is imperishable. (b) "For the transgression of *my people* was he stricken" (v.8). Sinless Jewry dying for sinful Jewry? This makes no sense, (c.) Everything here emphasizes a voluntary sacrifice. Yet in all generations Jews have only endured suffering because it has proved unavoidable. (d) This Suffering Servant is

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\* Verse 4 (twice), 5 (four times), 6,8,10,11,12 (twice).

\*\* And has been known, alas, to convert at least one true Christian believer back to Judaism!

it has proved unavoidable. (d) This Suffering Servant is unresisting — "as a lamb to the slaughter." Yet whenever they have been able, Jews have fought their foes with ferocity and grim tenacity. Masada! Warsaw! 'Yom Kippur, 73! (e) Most evident of all is the truth that this Righteous Servant of the Lord is a *man*, and not a nation (v.3).

4. Biggest difficulty of all is Isaiah's unflagging exposure of the *sinfulness* of Israel: "She (Jerusalem) hath received at the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (40:2). "The Lord...against whom we have sinned; for they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient to his law" (42:24). "I was wroth with my people..." (47:6). "Jacob...Israel...Judah, which make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness" (48:1; see v.4,5,9,10). "For your iniquities have ye sold yourselves..." (50:1). One great passage after another makes a sharp distinction between Israel, the Righteous Servant of the Lord, and Israel, the heedless nation (49:3,5,6). Cp. also 1:4,5; 43:8,22-28; 46:8, and the testimony of the other prophets, e.g. Jer. 17:1-4; and especially Dan. 9:5-16; a comprehensively honest and utterly ruthless confession; and their own historian: "Nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world" (Josephus B.J.5.10.5).

Even amongst the rabbis there are those that bear witness. Jonathan ben Uzziel referred Isaiah 53 to the Messiah. And the Babylonian Talmud has this comment: "The Name of the Messiah is the Leprous One (v. 14), the Sick One (v.4)."\* Also, the current liturgy for the Day of Atonement uses the words of verse 4 with reference to the Messiah.

But, with very occasional exceptions, "the blind people that have eyes" are apparently incapable of seeing the radiant truth of this great Scripture.

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\* It is just possible that these were ambiguous allusions to Israel as the Messianic race.

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## 53 (3). The Suffering Servant in the New Testament

It may be taken as fairly certain that there is no OT. Scripture which is woven into the NT. to the extent that Isaiah 53 is. Besides the 8 explicit quotations, there are about 20 allusions traceable — indeed, in some places the distinction between quotation and allusion is not easily drawn.

This study attempts a brief review of a fairly complete list.

1. **Acts 8:32,33** (= Is. 53:7,8). For a proper understanding of the incident, it is important to recognize that the Ethiopian eunuch was not a black man but a Jew. If the former, then Philip was anticipating Peter's divine dispensation to preach the gospel to Gentiles. If it be argued that the man was a proselyte to Judaism, then it may be questioned whether Jewish thinking was so elastic as to accept into fellowship one who was both a eunuch and a black man. On the other hand, if this man were a Jew excluded from full religious privilege because of his physical disability (Dt. 23:1) the Isaiah passage provides the key to the whole situation. Debarred at the temple from entering the court of the men and offering sacrifice, he travelled sadly home reading about one who was himself "cut off" without family so that none could "declare his generation". "But that describes me too," said the eunuch to himself, "only, this Righteous Servant of the Lord is somehow to 'see his seed' — and for me that is not possible!" But then the preacher of the gospel came into his life, so that "which he had not heard, he now considered." The outcome was that "he went on his way (the Way) rejoicing," and reading on in Isaiah of the promise to "eunuchs that...take hold of my covenant" that they shall have "in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters...an everlasting name that shall not be cut off" (56:4,5).

2. **1 Peter 2:22-25**

Peter falls back on a long series of questions about the Suffering Servant in order to emphasize to servants (slaves) the need for a meek and patient spirit under the ill-treatment meted out by an irascible master — "because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example (the word describes the copyhead for a child learning to write), that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Then follow no less than seven of these steps — partial quotes from Isaiah 53, and not at all in the right order:

22. Who did no sin (violence, in 53:9c). Neither was guile found in his mouth (9d).
23. When he was reviled, he reviled not again (7a,b).
24. He bare our sins (4a, 11a).  
By whose stripes ye were healed (5d).
25. Ye were as sheep going astray (6a).

But are now returned...(a deliberate contrast with: 'turned every one to his own way'; (6b). In the middle of these there is another allusion much more difficult to recognize: "he bare our sins...on *the tree*." This may, just possibly, be a reference to the hanging of criminals (Dt. 21:22,23) or even to the Tree of Life in Eden. But it is certainly remarkable that "He was taken from prison and from judgment" (v.8a), when re-pointed may also be read: "From the tree he received exalted judgment," or "From the exalted tree he received righteous judgment." This part of Isaiah has plenty of double meanings of this sort. The context of the seven other references to Isaiah 53 makes it possible to see another one here, especially since the phrase: "him that judgeth righteously" comes in the previous verse in Peter.

3. **Mt. 8:17**

This is one of Matthew's notable "misapplications" of the OT. Isaiah 53:4 — "He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows" — seems so palpably to describe the Lord's sin-covering sacrifice. Then why did Matthew drag the words in here with reference to the miraculous healings done by Jesus? The first and obvious answer only serves to weaken confidence in Matthew: the Hebrew words really do mean "infirmities" and "sicknesses". It begins to look as though Matthew picked up this passage regardless of context or basic meaning simply because the words, taken literally, fit very nearly the healings he is describing. Most modernists very happily settle for this approach, the more so since it gives them a nice feeling of superior judgement over this gospel-writing apostle. But there is another way of reading this quotation in this gospel context — i.e. as meaning that the wonderful healings done by the Lord Jesus are to be seen as acted parables of the more profound healing which was his more important work. The examples considered in paragraph 4 show that this must be the right approach here. There is another implicit allusion to Isaiah 53 in the phrase: "he healed *all* that were sick" (v.16) — "the iniquity of us *all*" (53:6).

An alternative way of regarding this mode of quotation is to see such examples as reminders that the greater includes the less. If Jesus was raised up to deliver men from the power of sin, he could certainly deliver them also from these lesser evils, the physical disabilities which beset them.

There is another awe-inspiring implication behind Matthew's use of these words. The Lord's conquest of sin was not lightly achieved. The context in Isaiah 53 is at pains to emphasize the bitter hardship and sore travail with which redemption was wrought. Then was not Matthew wishing his readers to learn that the same was true (though, again, in lesser degree) when Jesus saved men from their physical afflictions? How did Jesus "perceive that virtue was gone out of him" when a woman surreptitiously sought and found health from the briefest of personal contacts with his garment?

#### 4. Luke 22:37; Mark 15:28

Herein is a marvellous thing, that not only Matthew but also Luke and Mark were blind to the obvious meaning of a simple OT. prophecy! These two also "misuse" a phrase from Isaiah 53, and in completely different ways: "He was numbered with the transgressors" (v. 12). The misapprehension was not really Luke's but his Lord's whose words he reports in a context where the meaning seems fairly clearly to be this: Before long my disciples will be reckoned as outlaws, the scum of society, and I along with them. Mark makes more factual use of the proof-text. Here is Jesus on the cross with a revolutionary on either hand, a crowned rebel between two other rebels. "Numbered with the transgressors" — could any phrase be more apt, could any prophecy be more exact?

But is that what Isaiah's words were intended to mean? Even the immature need no pause in their thinking to discern that "counted with a clutch of criminals" is not the *real* meaning. Everything in the context in Isaiah shouts an emphasis on Christ's sharing human nature in order to save human nature — taking on himself the worst miseries of Paradise Lost in order that transgressors might be blessed with Paradise Regained. But, of course, Luke and Mark saw the simple physical facts as an eloquent symbolic expression of the Almighty's sublime one-man rescue operation. These gospel compilers, and Matthew with them, knew what they were doing — and there was power behind their pens.

#### 5. Romans 10:16

If Isaiah 53 is about the gospel of redemption, then of course its opening words are about the preaching of that gospel; and, accordingly, in Romans, Paul twice harnesses them to that purpose. In ch. 10:13-15 there is an a-b-c sequence of ideas reinforced by a remarkable catena of OT. passages, with Is. 53:1 in the middle of them. The sequence goes like this:

- a. Men must be sent with the message of salvation.
- b. They must preach it.
- c. Those to be saved must hear it (they must listen).
- d. Then they must understand it.
- e. They must believe it.
- f. They will then be led to call on the Lord.
- g. And thus they will be saved.

and (b) are covered by the quotation (v.15) of Isaiah's jubilant word about preachers of "the gospel of peace...the glad tidings of good things" (52:7 —this is specially appropriate because it says (v.9) that the message is for Israel and (v. 10) for the nations of the world. But "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the spoken word" (v. 17). Have Israel heard? Indeed they have. The call of the gospel has been as universal and unmistakable as the silent message of the night sky\* (v. 18). But the trouble is that "they have *not all* believed the gospel" (sinister understatement for 'hardly any!'). And Isaiah foretold that it

would be like that: "Lord, who hath believed our report?" (53:1). Is it possible then, that Israel has failed to believe because they failed to *understand* the message. "Surely Israel didn't understand" (v. 19). No! that explanation won't work, for Moses, foretelling the evangelisation of the Gentiles, called *them* "a nation void of understanding" (v. 19: RV). So if *they* could grasp the gospel, Israel certainly could. Indeed, the Gentiles found God in the gospel when they were not looking for Him (v.20; Is. 65:1). So there is no escaping the conclusion that Israel are "a disobedient and gainsaying people" (v.21; Is. 65:2).

## 6. John 12:38

The context and purpose of Paul's quote from Is. 53:1 are perfectly matched by the commentary with which the apostle John rounds off his record of the Lord's preaching ministry. The last year of that ministry was a depressing tale of non-success: the men of power hostile, the nation withering, and the disciples bewildered. The Lord worked miracles before the great men of Israel, and "yet they believed not on him, in order that the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" The context here in John 12 has a surprising number of contacts with the prophecy of the Suffering Servant:

John 12	Isaiah 52,53
20. Greeks	15. Many nations (Gentiles).
24. A corn of wheat.	1. The arm of the Lord (in Hebrew = also the Lord's sown seed).
26. My servant.	11. My Righteous Servant.
27. My soul troubled.	12. Poured out his soul unto death.
32. If I be lifted up.	13. My servant shall understand, and be lifted up (LXX).
32. All men.	6. The iniquity of us all.
28. I have glorified...and will glorify.	13. And shall be glorified (LXX).
45. He that seeth me...	2. When he shall see him...

Thus the ultimate glory of the rejected Messiah is emphasized. So also is the dramatic contrast between his lifting up on the cross and his exaltation in glory.

7. Paul's critics were constantly putting him to the necessity of vindicating the policy of his own preaching to the Gentiles. In Rom. 15 this even meant explaining why his missionary zeal took him so far afield: "Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation (i.e. preaching done by some other evangelist). But, as it is written (in Is. 52:15), To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see" (15:20,21; LXX verbatim). The immediate context is useful as emphasizing that the message was for Gentiles, even for *kings* — a vindication of the courage with which Paul was willing to proclaim the Word even to men who had the power to crush

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\* Paul evidently saw a two-fold meaning in Ps. 19:1-6. Was he mistaken?

him. Could any of his detractors match that boldness? This concludes the review of the places where Isaiah 53 is used in specific quotation in the NT. There remains a considerable number of passing allusions in which the text is not directly quoted but where the verbal links are nevertheless readily discernible.

8. **Mark 15:5**

When Jesus was before the Roman governor he "yet answered nothing." This is immediately recognizable as the NT. equivalent of "he opened not his mouth" (53:7, repeated). Mark's next phrase is: "so that Pilate marvelled." This has the same word as 52:15 LXX: "Thus shall many nations marvel at him." The same verse continues: "Kings shall shut their mouths at him."

9. **Galatians 3:2,1**

Paul's phrase: "the hearing of faith" (*akoes pisteos*) is essentially the same as "believed our report" (v.1; *episteuse te akoe*). And the previous verse has this: "Before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth (Gk: written beforehand, programmed), crucified among you."

10. **Revelation 22:16,17**

"I am the root and *offspring* of David." These paradoxical ideas come together in v.2. He is "a root out of a thirsty (LXX) ground;" but he is also "a tender *plant*." In Rev. 22, the next verse has this: "Let him that is *athirst* come." An accidental connection? And "tender plant" is the same (in LXX) as "the child" (Lk. 2:40). Another accident?

11. **Luke 20:13,11**

In the parable of the vineyard Jesus steered his hearers back to Is. 53. "It may be they will reverence him *when they see him*" is a sardonic echo of "*when we shall see him*, there is no beauty" (v.2). And "treated shamefully" is the same as "despised" (v.3 LXX). Jn. 8:49 "I honour my Father, and ye do *dishonour* me" also has the same word.

12. **Hebrews 12:11,25**

"No *chastening* for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the *peaceable* fruit of righteousness..." Is this a reminiscence of: "the chastisement of our peace" (v.5)? Could be! Later another key word creeps in: "much more shall not we escape, if we turn *away* from him who (has now spoken) from heaven." Here is the same verb as in "we *hid* our faces from him" (v.3 LXX). The same word is used by Paul with caustic power: "all they of Asia be turned away from me" (2 Tim. 1:15) — as who should say: This was the treatment meted out to my Lord, so of course those who closely follow him may expect the same.

13. **Revelation 14:5**

"In their mouth (the 144,000 on mount Zion) was found no guile." This expression *might* look back to Ps. 32:2, or even more probably, to Zech. 13:3. But what settles that the allusion is to 53:9: "neither was any deceit in his mouth", is the mention of the Lamb (v.4 and 53:7), and the ensuing phrase: "without blemish", which invariably refers to an acceptable sacrifice. That is why they are on mount Zion — because a Lamb without blemish has been offered on their behalf, and they have sought to emulate his sacrifice.

14. **Ephesians 1:5**

"...the adoption of *children* by Jesus Christ...according to the *good pleasure* of his *will*." The words here seem to echo phrases in Is. 53: "the *pleasure* of the Lord shall prosper in his hand...It pleased (it was the *will* of: LXX) the Lord to bruise him...he shall see his *seed*." Compare also v.9: "according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in him"

(and declared in Is. 53)

15. **Matthew 20:28**

Jesus was teaching the way to greatness: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your *servant*" (Mt. 20:19) — and that last word took his mind to the prophetic description of himself: "My Righteous *Servant* shall justify many...he poured out his *soul* (life) unto death." So he went on: "Even as the Son of man came...to give his *life* (soul) a ransom for *many*."

16. **Romans 5:19**

"...so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." This is surely 53:11: "...shall my Righteous *Servant* justify many (make many righteous)." But *there* it is: "by his knowledge," not "by obedience." Why the difference, Paul?

17. **Luke 11:21,22**

The Lord's vigorous mini-parable about the armed strong man being plundered by one who is stronger than he, is usually referred to Is. 49:24,25. But Jesus seems to have had his eye on 53:12; for his final phrase: "and he divideth his spoils", is very close indeed to LXX there: "he shall divide the spoils of the strong ones." The Hebrew text might even read: "He shall divide strong ones as a spoil." It becomes important, then, to identify the "strong ones," and this is not easy. The context in Luke suggests an assertion of the superior authority of the Son of God over that of the angels of evil (B.S. 16.01). And Col. 2:15 comes in here as being remarkably similar: "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them by it (by his cross)". \* Is there any alternative explanation which is more convincing? One is reluctant to be convinced by those who assert that the mini-parable is not intended to be interpreted! What a contrast Jn. 19:24 presents!

18. **Mark 14:11 etc.**

In LXX, the last phrase of Is. 53 reads: "and he was *delivered* for their iniquities." It is the same word which the gospels employ (about 60 times) for the betrayal of Jesus (see para. 22 below).

19. **Hebrews 9:28**

Here, "to bear the sins of many" is a straight quotation from 53:12. And if the writer of Hebrews were not committed to using the LXX version in his OT. quotations, he would doubtless have gone on to quote the next phrase: "and made intercession for the transgressors," for the context in Heb. 9 is so emphatically that of priesthood. However, strangely enough, LXX translation loses this idea (see para. 18 again).\*\*

20. **John 1:29**

When John the Baptist acclaimed Jesus with the words: "Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," he was surely expressing a Biblical idea familiar to his readers. But which? Many moderns plump for the Passover Lamb, or even the lamb of the daily burnt-offering. But almost certainly this is the Baptist's summary of the great theme of Is. 53:5-7, for everything else in his teaching came out of Isaiah.

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\* Reference of this passage to human rulers goes clean against the context, and makes nonsense of Paul's argument. See B.S. 16.05.

\*\* It may be that in Rom. 8:27 Paul is alluding to 53:12. In that case, "according to God" means "according to God's purpose already declared in Isaiah 53."

21. **Matthew 26:28**

At the other end of his ministry the Lord Jesus himself bade his disciples see him henceforth as the Righteous Servant of the Lord: "For this is my blood of the new covenant (Jer. 31:31, inescapably) which is shed *for many for the remission of sins.*" Who can doubt that Is. 53 is the original of these words?

22. **Acts 3:13,14**

It is difficult to be sure whether, in this speech after the healing of the lame man, Peter was harnessing Is. 49 or 53 to his theme. But certainly the verbal contacts with ch. 53 are intriguing: "his servant (AV: Son)...glorified (52:13)...whom he delivered up (v.12 LXX; see para. 18)...why marvel ye? (52:13,15, LXX)...shewed by the mouth of all his holy prophets, that the Christ should suffer..." There are similar possibilities about Acts 22:14 and context.

23. **John 1:1**

"The Word was *with God*" is an expression which has had many readers groping. Some have even got as far as wishing the words were not there! But this is the exact equivalent of "he shall grow up *before him.*" It is another indication that the opening verses of Jn. 1 are not about a woolly philosophical Logos idea, but about Jesus the Man, who wholly lived a God-ward life and was in truth a manifestation of God, "the arm of the Lord."

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## 52 (3). "Behold my Servant (v.13-15)"

There are still many details in this remarkable prophecy which call for examination. Its opening words: "Behold my Servant..." (v. 13), identify the Servant of chapter 42, the One who with quiet unobtrusive character lives close to the God of Israel, who opens the eyes of the blind people and sends a message of salvation to benighted Gentiles. The Lord is well pleased with him. Now, in this new prophecy, the message is essentially the same although the words are different.

Four remarkable words describe this despised Servant of God — he deals prudently and he is exalted and lifted up and is made very high (v.13). The first of these is used about David's circumspect behaviour at the court of Saul (1 Sam. 18:14) and also regarding the Messianic King, Son of David, foretold by Jeremiah (23:5). But these first two verbs could also read: "he gives understanding, he teaches them". (Isaiah's double meanings once again!)

Even if it be insisted on, that the second of these words be read as "exalted", there is still a double meaning to consider — uplifted in crucifixion and also in glory (cp. Jn. 12:32 and Is. 6:1, referred to in Jn. 12:41). Cp. also Is. 57:15, Ps. 89:27 s.w.

Alternatively, it has been suggested that the four verbs indicate a progression:

Deal prudently — the Lord's ministry.  
Exalted (lifted up) — his crucifixion.  
Extolled — his resurrection.  
Very high — his ascension.\*

And yet the parenthesis in the next verse emphasizes that the one so blessed had first to endure humiliation: "His visage was so marred more than any other man."

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\* And in that case v. 14a, 15 describe the gospel being proclaimed to unbelieving Jewry and to Gentiles.

These words have their symbolic meaning, doubtless, but they should certainly be read also as meaning just what they say. The man this prophecy describes was repeatedly handed over to the rough buffoonery and cruelty of Roman soldiers and temple guard. It is probably correct to think of the Son of God as appearing before the mob not only with a lacerated back (Mt. 27:26) but also with a mass of contusions on his face (Mt. 27:30; 26:67), with a black eye and teeth knocked out, and certainly with a long red weal across his face (Jn. 18:22mg; Mic. 5:1). "Behold the Man!"

Strangely enough, the Dead Sea scroll of Isaiah reads: "Thou hast anointed his visage more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." In that case, the words are a close parallel to the Messianic Psalm 45:7: "Thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (another Hezekiah psalm!). However, it is difficult to decide in favour of this variant for all the other evidence appears to support the received reading.

"As *many* (Jews) were astonished at thee...so shall he sprinkle many nations (Gentiles)." The translation "sprinkle" is certainly correct.\* It conjures up a remarkable picture of one accounted leprous becoming the priest who cleanses and sanctifies Gentiles.\*\* Here is the answer beforehand to the question in the next verse: "Who hath believed our report?"

"Kings shut their mouth at him" in awe and astonishment (cp. Job 29:9; 40:4). Another of the "Servant Songs" has precisely this idea: "Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship" (49:7, and cp. v.23),

This is the effect of the gospel — for what *he* has not told them\*\*\* (being sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel) shall they see: and that which they had not heard shall they consider" — "for since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for thee" (64:4; a passage which Paul expounds in connection with the preaching of the gospel).

Thus this great prophecy begins and concludes (53:12) with assurances that the sufferings of Christ shall lead on to a glory that shall follow.

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\* Even though it is tempting to compare Mic. 7:16.

\*\* The Hebrew word for "so" echoes the word for "priest", but even without that the idea is certainly there.

\*\*\* Hebrew re-pointed.

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## 53 (4). "Who hath believed our report?" (v.1-3)

Although the theme of this prophecy is one — the Suffering Servant of the Lord — it is both impressive and helpful to note how each of the 5 three-verse paragraphs moves to a different aspect of that theme. Each of these sections is admirably summed up in its opening words. Thus:

- 52:13-15: "Behold my Servant" — the two-fold aspect of Messiah in suffering and glory.  
 52:1-3: "Who hath believed our report?" — the appeal of Christ heard by Israel, and rejected.  
 52:4-6: "He hath borne our griefs" — why the Lord suffered.  
 52:7-9: "He was oppressed and afflicted" — what his sufferings involved.  
 52:10-12: "It pleased the Lord" — the divine purpose behind Messiah's suffering.

Throughout v. 1-6, the plural pronoun refers to the people of Israel. But "Who hath believed our report?" does not mean "what we have reported", but "what is reported to us." The parallelism confirms this: "And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"

The "report" is, of course, the invigorating "good tidings of good" proclaimed to Zion that "Thy God reigneth, the Lord is returning to Zion" in the person of One who is "the Arm of the Lord" — "the Lord hath made bare his holy arm" (52:7-10). "Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him...He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, and gather the lambs with his arm" (40:10,11). And so, indeed, it would have been, had not Israel stubbornly decided otherwise — "ye would not". Instead of a message of gladness, there unfolds a sad story of "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

### The Arm of the Lord

In ancient days, the arm of the Lord was Moses — so Isaiah himself declares: "Therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me...Then he remembered the days of old, Moses and his people. Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock...that led him by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm...?" (63:5,11,12).

So also in an earlier appeal to God to redeem His people: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab (Egypt), and wounded the dragon (the Egyptian crocodile)? Art not thou it that hath dried the (Red) sea, the waters of the great deep...a way for the ransomed to pass over?" (51:9,10). Cp. also Ps 77:15-89:10; 136:12.

But now the enquiry: "*To whom (al-mi, literally, upon whom) is the arm of the Lord revealed?*" is answered by *almah*, the Virgin whom Isaiah had already foretold (7:14) as the mother of a divine child (and cp. v.2 here). And sharing the nature of those whose sins he takes upon himself, this Arm of the Lord is described as leprous, like the arm of Moses (Ex. 4:6) whose experience with leprosy and serpent threat pre-figured Christ's redemption.

"He shall grow up before him (before God) as a tender plant\* and as a root out of a dry ground" (v.2). Several ancient versions introduce this with: "We announced that..." It does not read like a scribal addition or invention. If authentic, the allusion is clearly back to the announcement in Isaiah 11:1: "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots" — the Messiah who will rule and guide with heavenly wisdom and power will first know the meaning of obscurity, weakness and discouragement — as a shoot out of a dry ground.

### Not desired

For, alas, the "dry ground" of Jewry (Heb. nearly = "the Land of Zion") gave no encouragement: "he hath no form nor comeliness" — neither human nor divine attractiveness, so the words imply. It can be argued from these words that the Christ of the painters is altogether unreal, that neither in physique nor features was there anything in Jesus to draw men to himself. But such a conclusion depends on these words only and no others; so, at best, this conclusion should be tentative (c.f. Lk. 2:40).

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\* This phrase makes certain that when Isaiah wrote "arm of the Lord" he *intended* a double meaning: "whom the Lord has sown."

His enemies saw to it that "his visage was marred more than any man." But even before that the strain of the ministry was such that he was prematurely aged — men mistook this man of 33 for one nearly fifty (Jn. 8:57).

But it was in a more basic sense that "when we see him, there is no beauty (no divine glory) that we should desire him." Even "an Israelite indeed in whom was no guile" was full to the top with prejudice: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (Jn. 1:46)\*. And to that there was only one answer: "Come and see" — and that was usually a failure.

Here, then, was one "despised and rejected" (v.3). An earlier Servant prophecy said the same: "him whom man despiseth, whom the nation abhorreth" (49:7). Now the minatory words of Moses' law take on a new meaning: "Because he hath despised the Word of the Lord...that soul shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be upon himself" (Num. 15:31), instead of laid upon him who is the Word of the Lord and His Suffering Servant.

It was this rejection by his own people which more than anything else made Jesus "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." This was his greatest sorrow and grief, so that he wept over Jerusalem. In this twentieth century "acquainted with grief" reads as deliberate understatement, but the word really means "caused to know;" it was not self-sought, but brought upon him by *men* — the Hebrew form is a very unusual plural, as though to emphasize that it was the chief men of the nation who were set on rejecting the Son of God. "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?" they demanded roughly. Yet there in their midst was one as able as the best of them, a silent uncommitted disciple (Jn. 7:48-52).

God had said to Moses concerning Israel, His firstborn: "I know their sorrows" (Ex. 3:7). Then how much more was it true of His Firstborn Son! "They went both of them together" — the Father and the Son (Gen. 22:6,8) — all the days that Jesus set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem.

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\* Yet the name Nazareth echoes Is. 11:1: "Branch".

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## 53 (5). "He hath borne our griefs" (v.4-6)

Of the 12 impressive assertions that Christ suffered for others, no less than 7 come in this group of three verses. They begin with the word "Verily", as though to counter strong disbelief.

The word "griefs" is, strictly, "sicknesses", but the same word is used in parallel with "iniquity" (33:24), so there can be little doubt that the spiritual meaning is the right one here. The immediate emphasis on "transgressions, iniquities" (v.5) settles this.

The words are written not as an expression of faith from thankful believers but as an interpretation of the attitude of an unbelieving Israel. This Suffering Servant is deemed to be "smitten of God." They so "esteemed him" i.e. imputed this to him. A passage in the Talmud puts Jesus of Nazareth in hell along with Balaam, the false prophet, and Titus, the destroyer of Jerusalem. Reprobation could hardly go further than that.

### The Suffering of Death

Yet in truth Jesus suffered a hell of torment — wounds, bruises, chastisement, stripes (v.5) — not for his own sins but because of the worthlessness of others: "for

our transgressions, our iniquities," to bring about "our peace, our healing."

So it was not just the death of Jesus which made atonement but his dying, "the *suffering* of death" (Heb. 2:9). Theologically, the fact that he died is central. But a theology which encourages neglect of the shame and torment is out of balance. In Gethsemane Jesus sweat *as it were* great drops of blood. Not that he actually exuded blood, but rather that the sweat of that struggle is to be seen as the beginning of his sacrifice at Golgotha. And so, too, one may be sure, that miserable night spent in being shuttled between Annas and Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, enduring remorseless interrogation, spitting, buffoonery and beating, and being weighed down by an almost intolerable fatigue. All this, too, was "for our transgressions, for our iniquities."

### **Bruised, crushed**

In a wide variety of ways God's appointments for Israel's tabernacle of the congregation forced upon their attention this inescapable element in their religious life. The golden candlestick and the cherubim of glory were of beaten work; with their daily sacrifice there must be oil beaten out; the memorial Shewbread must be baked from flour made fine by long grinding and sieving, and the meal offering of their firstfruit must be of corn first bruised and then parched with fire; the manna, their bread of life, was useless to them except they first "ground it in mills, or beat it in a mortar."

The true Israel must not fail, then, to appreciate that not only the sacrifice but also "the chastisement of our peace" was upon him. Without this, no covenant of peace with God (see 54:10), no fellowship — the Hebrew word for "stripes" actually echoes "fellowship"!

The pronouns in this central passage are very eloquent, pointing the contrast between *him* in his humiliation and wretchedness, and *us* in our sins and a different kind of wretchedness.

This contrast intensifies: "*All we like sheep have gone astray...and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*" That night in Gethsemane, the disciples, like a panic-stricken stampeding flock, "forsook him and fled" (Mt. 26:56). And next morning "he bearing his cross went forth to a place called 'the place of a skull'" (Jn. 19:17).

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## **53 (6). "Oppressed and Afflicted" (v.7-9)**

The prophecy moves on to picture afresh not the reason for this undeserved suffering but the horrifying fact of it.

The opening statement is a noticeably defective parallelism, and the ingenious suggestion has been made that since the word '*anah*' means both "answer" and "afflict" it originally occurred twice, in both senses, but that because of the repetition one '*anah*' has been dropped in transmission. If this is correct, then there was originally a characteristic Isaianic play on words: "He was oppressed, and he answered not; and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth." This is linguistically satisfying, but it actually adds nothing to the message.

### **No Rebuttal**

"Answerest thou nothing what these witness against thee," demanded Caiaphas

roughly. But Jesus held his peace (Mt. 26:63). "Herod questioned him in many words; but he answered him nothing" (Lk. 23:9). "Whence art thou?" asked a ruffled, puzzled, frightened Pilate. But Jesus gave him no answer (Jn. 19:9). Was this because Jesus was intent on fulfilling what he knew to be a Messianic prophecy? Or was it because, whether the words were written or not, this was his character: "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (v.7)?\*

Somewhat remarkably, Jeremiah appropriated this passage to describe the way in which the men of his own village (priests, like himself) set themselves to compass his destruction: "I was like a pet lamb\*\* that was led to the slaughter." These men were saying: "Let us cut him off from the land of the living" (11:19).

Jeremiah must have recognized the Messianic character of Isaiah 53. Then why did he use such a striking passage about himself? Most probably because, like David and Hezekiah and others, he *knew* himself to be a prototype of Messiah.\*\*\* So the words belonged to him as well as to the Christ.

The description: "taken from prison and from judgement", is not without its difficulty, unless the assumption is made that for part of the night of his trial Jesus was thrown into a dungeon. But that phrase could read: "taken from the assembly," i.e. the Sanhedrin, "and from the judgement (of Pilate)." There is then a perfect parallel with Ps. 22:16: "For dogs (i.e. Gentiles) have compassed me: the assembly (the Sanhedrin) of the wicked have inclosed me."

### No Family

But why does the prophecy go on to lament: "And who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living"? Presumably because to mete out such unjust condemnation to a young man must mean the extinction of his line. This is the end of all hopes of being honoured by his posterity, for there can be no posterity.

The superb correction of this seemingly inevitable outcome follows in verse 10: "He shall see his seed." And again there is a splendid parallel in Ps. 22: "A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be (new-)born, that he hath done this" (v.30,31).

But that phrase: "cut off out of the land of the living," is not without its difficulty; for, strictly, it means: "cut in two" (e.g. 1 Kgs. 3:25; Ps. 136:13). The similar prophecy in Isaiah 49:8 resolves the problem: "I will give thee for a covenant of the people" — and a covenant was ratified by severance of the covenant victim (Gen. 15:10). So here, less directly than in the explicit declarations already made, is an intimation that the victim described is so appointed to confirm a New Covenant: "for the transgression of my people was he stricken."

Here, again, is yet another of Isaiah's *double entendres*, for, whilst this doubtless is the meaning intended, the words can also be construed to read: "because of the rebellion of my people, a plague is on them" — Israel came to be reckoned a leprous race. And yet they are "My people" — the expression: "My Righteous Servant" (v.11) proves God to be the speaker.

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\* A further small textual correspondence: "*brought* as a lamb" has the same word (in LXX) as Lk. 23:1,32.

\*\* AV: "ox" is a mistake readily accounted for. Another possible meaning is: chief of the flock.

\*\*\* The correspondences are considerable. See "Of whom the world was not worthy", H.A.W., ch. 45.

This Servant of the Lord was so stricken "*because* he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth" (v.9a is a parenthesis). It was only by his utter separation from human sin that Jesus qualified for this high role of becoming an all-sufficient offering "without blemish."

There was both shame and honour in his dying: "He made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death." That last word is not singular (see AVmg), so it must be read as an intensive plural (a common phenomenon in OT. Hebrew\*) meaning: "his terrible death." But this does not preclude a further interpretation: a death in which many others have a share symbolically.

The details here are wonderfully accurate. For Jesus died between two malefactors (the word "wicked" is plural), and he was buried in the tomb of a wealthy man ("rich" is singular). More than this, the literal translation is not "he made" but "he gave" or "he appointed". The first of these possibilities is meaningless. The second could not be more fitting, for it was God who appointed that His Son should be "numbered with the transgressors" and yet have a burial fit for a king. Remarkably, on the human level also, the very man who signed Christ's death warrant was also the one who granted his body to Joseph of Arimathea for prompt and honourable interment. If only unbelievers would face facts such as these!

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\* 1:15,18 (bloods, scarlets); 45:24 (righteousnesses); Ps. 116:7,13 (rests, salvations); 2 Chr. 16:14 (sepulchres); Jer. 14:1 (deaths); Dan. 2:1,5 (dreams); and in the N.T. 1 Thess. 4:17; Jude 13; 2 Pet. 3:11. There are many more.

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## 53 (7). "It pleased the Lord" (v.10-12)

There are many Scriptures which assert that the death of Christ was central and utterly necessary in God's redemption of fallen mankind.

It was by "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). "The Son of man *must* (GK: it is necessary that he) be lifted up" (Jn. 3:14).

That it should "please the Lord to bruise him" is a thing hard to be understood. When Jesus set his face to go steadfastly to Jerusalem, so also did the Father. As with Abraham and Isaac, "they went both of them together." The suffering of His only begotten Son was no light thing to his Father in heaven. This may be taken as certain. Yet Omniscience, foreseeing the outcome of this travail, rejoiced in ultimate victory: "He shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand."

Such words, written concerning a man going to ignominious death can only mean his resurrection.

The Fifth Commandment spoken at Sinai gave assurance that "thy days will be prolonged" by obedience to parents. Here is one who prolonged his days by honouring both Father and mother and who in turn "sees his seed" who honour him.

Thus the tale of shame and sufferings ends not in oblivion but in a multitudinous happy family: "thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles" (54:3). "Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth" (Ps. 45:16).

### Appeal to the Reader

But there is a problem about the accompanying phrase: "when thou shalt make

his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed." Many read this as a parallel to "it pleased the Lord to bruise him." But then the change of person from "the Lord" to "Thou" calls for explanation.

It is more satisfactory, more consistent, and also more satisfying to read these words as the prophet's apostrophe to his reader: "When *thou* shalt make his soul an offering for (thy) sin..." The merits of this vicarious sacrifice do not pass over to others automatically, but only when they are appreciated and sought for with heart and soul.

The eunuch from Ethiopia evidently grasped this truth, for his reaction was: 'In Jerusalem I was shut out from participation in sacrifice, and this not by my own choice. Then am I likewise hindered from making this Man's soul an offering for my sin?' The emphatic answer was: 'One thing, and one thing only, debars a man from sharing this redemption, and that is disbelief. If thou believest in Christ with all thine heart, thou mayest be baptized.'

Each time there is this positive response, the prophecy finds further fulfilment: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." This was "the joy set before him" (Heb. 12:2) — the prospect of knowing a multitude of sinners redeemed, through faith in himself. What happier outcome from that long haul of the cross to Golgotha?

It is at this point that the Dead Sea Isaiah scroll has one of its few remarkable variant readings (partly supported by LXX): "After all his pains he shall be bathed in light." This, if it can be sustained (which is a little doubtful), becomes a more emphatic declaration of resurrection; it also adds to the completeness of this superb prophecy by the mention of the glory and ascension of the risen Christ.

### How to know the Father

In what sense is it true that "by his knowledge shall my Righteous Servant justify many"? First, in that he is not only servant but also teacher: "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary" (50:4). "Learn of me (for I am meek and lowly in heart\*), and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Learn of me, "for no man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him" (Mt. 11:29,27).

It is possible that "his knowledge" is really "knowledge of him" (cp. "my knowledge" in Pro. 22:17) — that is, "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord...that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings" (Phil. 3:8,10). It is "by the knowledge of him" that God gives "a spirit of wisdom and revelation" (Eph. 1:17), for "in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3; cp. also 2 Pet. 2:20).

It has been plausibly suggested that by the slightest possible emendation to one letter (the kind of error which crops up fairly frequently in the Hebrew text) the passage would read: "In his adversity my Righteous Servant will justify many," thus providing a fairly good parallel to: "the travail of his soul," and chiming in more obviously with the main theme of the prophecy.

There are two remarkable explanations behind this pro-evangelium: "my Righteous Servant shall justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities." First, the grim truth that it is only by such vicarious bearing of their iniquities that men can be

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\* It is important to remember that in the Bible "heart" is not an emotional word, as it is in modern speech. "Mind" is a much closer equivalent.

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justified, accounted righteous — and by no other way; such is the intractability of human nature.

Secondly, the prophet insists that it is "only in the Lord" that there is righteousness and strength... "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified" (45:24,25). "Their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord" (54:17). Then who is this Humble Servant who bears iniquity and so justifies many?

### **Servant...servants**

This is the last of the twenty references in Isaiah 40-53 to the Servant of the Lord. Hereafter, in chapters 54-66, there is only the plural: "servants", eleven times. This is obviously by design and either goes a fair way towards proving Isaiah 40-66 to be by one author; or by two, with a division at the end of 53 (which no-one has argued for yet). The modernist sub-division, 40-55, 56-66, can do nothing with an awkward fact of this kind.

There remains the final climactic verse in which a three-fold repetition of the tale of suffering is framed by a triple triumphal declaration of a glorious and happy outcome.

"He poured out his soul unto death." The verb also means "made naked." Thus in a word there is the shame of crucifixion and also the agonizing surrender of life symbolized in the end by a gush of blood after the casual thrust of a spear.

### **Numbered with the transgressors**

Not only in his death but also in his life Jesus was "numbered with the transgressors." This was openly expressed at his baptism when he insisted: "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Mt. 3:15). The "us" there does not signify the baptizer and the baptized. It links Jesus in his baptism with those others who came to be "baptized of John in Jordan confessing their sins" (3:6). In Luke's record this conclusion is inescapable: "Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass that *Jesus also* being baptized and praying, the heaven was opened..." (Lk. 3:21). Thus he openly declared the precious and essential truth that the sinless Saviour and the saved truly are one. The entail of selfish and sinful propensities which are the inheritance of every man came through to him also and yet were consistently disowned at every moment.

In the Law of Moses it was commanded that at every numbering of the people each man must pay half a shekel of silver, "to make atonement for your souls" (Ex. 30:12-16). So Jesus, "numbered with the transgressors", shared the atonement which they needed. More than that, he paid the atonement price for himself and for all the rest (Mt. 17:27).

### **The Many**

Thus he "bare the sin of many." It is a truth which is also illustrated when, at Kadesh, Israel faithlessly turned their back on God's promises. For this, "your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and shall bear your whoredoms" (Num. 14:33). The sins of these fathers were borne by their children as well as by themselves. Thus also Jesus bore our sins. But he bore them away.

"Therefore will I give him the many as his share of the plunder." The booty accruing from his agonizing struggle was "a multitude which no man can *number*" except he who has paid the atonement price.

Remarkably enough, this eloquent expression occurs in Jacob's prophecy to his sons — not, as might be expected concerning Judah, but with reference to Benjamin: "In the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil (with the strong)" (Gen. 49:27). At first Saul of Benjamin did "ravin as a wolf" among the Christian believers. But later he brought further fulfilment of these words in Isaiah, helping his Lord to divide "strong ones" of the Gentiles as a spoil.

Here there comes in yet another of Isaiah's double meanings. The words could be read: "I will give *rabbis* for his share..." The time came when men like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea read those words with deep satisfaction. One of them was "*the* teacher of Israel", the other was "an honourable counsellor." These men who had met with high dignity in the Sanhedrin met again in brave humility at the foot of the cross. Their faith, now no more to be repressed, asserted a conviction that the Man whom they sought to honour in his interment would yet make intercession for them and for all transgressors.

Thus he saves "to the uttermost" (Heb. 7:25). Like the Samaritan paying two pence (the exact equivalent of that half-shekel of atonement money) and promising all else that is needful, so the One who bare sin for sinners also "ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25) — "he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:27).

It is all "according to the will of God", all of it.

## 54 (1). Comfort for the Forsaken

The prophecy of the Suffering Servant has given firm assurance of ultimate triumph and blessing: "He shall see his seed" (53:10). Now this seed is mentioned more pointedly.

As with other prophecies in this sequence, the primary reference is once again to Hezekiah, whose name comes in the Hebrew text (v.2: strengthen); so also does the name of his wife Hephzibah (v.12, where Hebrew for 'pleasant stones' is very close to being 'sons of Hephzibah'); and the word "forget" (v.4) may be an allusion to Manasseh, their son.

But the prophecy speaks of *two* women, one of whom has children whilst at first the other has none but instead has to endure for a while what is virtual widowhood (v. 1-8).

### **Hephzibah's changed fortune**

It is important to recognize in the allegory which Isaiah now takes delight in that only one woman is being described, and not two. The experiences of both Hephzibah, Hezekiah's queen, and also of the nation require this reading — and so also does Isaiah's text, for otherwise apart from a bald mention of "the married wife" he does not have a word to say about her.

Let these eloquent verses (v. 1-9) be read as relating to the same woman throughout, and immediately there is relevance not only to the wife of king Hezekiah but also to his nation — and also as a parable of redemption in Christ all goes smoothly.

It may be taken as certain that Hezekiah married well before he reached the age

of 39, the time of his grievous sickness. Yet up to that time the marriage was not blessed with children. The king's affliction readily explains that. But evidently in those last fifteen years of happiness the royal family burgeoned. Whereas in the early days Hephzibah had been a "married wife" expectant of children and yet doomed through long years of disappointment to be "thou that didst not bear...thou that didst not travail with child," after the king's recovery there was a dramatic change to happy fruitfulness. In his marriage Hezekiah observed the principle of the year of Jubilee, and then Manasseh was born two years after his recovery.\*

### **Allegory of the nation**

The language of the prophecy (v. 1-9) fits these circumstances excellently, *and also the experience of the nation*. The Assyrian invasion not only reduced the Land to barren desolation but also great numbers of the people were either slain or carried off to a seemingly hopeless captivity. Yet at the very time when the king recovered there came a marvellous renewed spontaneous fertility of the countryside in the year of jubilee and also the utterly unexpected\*\* return of the captives. No wonder the language is so joyous: "Sing, O barren...break forth into singing, and cry aloud." Also, the refugees who had fled panic-stricken in all directions to neighbouring countries came streaming home in eager gladness. What nation ever had such an astonishing reversal of fortunes as this?

It is evident that this allegory of the nation's experience is what dominates the prophet's message here.

"Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations" (note the plural there)...*"Thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles (the eager friendship of neighbouring peoples has already been commented on), and shall make the desolate cities to be inhabited (busy re-building after the grim war-time devastation);...Thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth (the spiritual decadence of the previous reign), and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more (the utter helplessness and deprivation brought by the Assyrian 'flood')...Thy maker is thine husband (God reconciled with His people through the merits of their king)...The God of the whole Land shall he be called (thanks to Hezekiah's reforming zeal and the extension of his authority to cover both Northern and Southern kingdoms)."*

More than this, Philistines, Edomites and Moabites were gathered into Hezekiah's kingdom after the defeat of Sennacherib (this is implied in Is. 63:1-4; 11:14). Thus "thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles" had another dramatic and almost immediate fulfilment. The political resurgence of the kingdom was like a resurrection from the dead (Ezekiel's figure for a later and even greater experience).

After the pattern of the royal family the nation had been 'as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit...a wife of youth refused'. Yet only "for a small moment have I forsaken thee: but with great mercies will I gather thee" (that word 'gather' emphasizes reference to the people as well as the wife). "In a little wrath (the six months of Assyrian horror) I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy *Redeemer*."

"For this is as the waters of Noah unto me." The Assyrian invasion had been like a mighty flood of Euphratean waters (8:7,8; 17:12). Jerusalem had proved to be the

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\* It may be that 26:17,18 is relevant to the queen's earlier discouraging experience.

\*\* Except by the prophet!

only ark of safety (1:7,8). All else was swept away. The faithful who went to Jerusalem to keep Passover found their faith rewarded (like Noah and his family) with happiness in a cleansed rejuvenated Land.

"Tossed with tempest", truly, and yet renewed in splendour through the massive plunder taken from the Assyrian and the gifts and tribute which poured in from many a marvelling Gentile nation. At this time the temple of Solomon became more splendid than ever. "Sapphires, agates, carbuncles" and all kinds of wealth were among the gifts honouring the God of Israel.

### "Taught of the Lord"

"In righteousness shalt thou (Jerusalem) be *established*," There is here a double allusion to Jachin, one of the twin brazen pillars of the temple (1 Kgs. 7:21) and to the everlasting covenant made by God with David and his seed (2 Sam. 7:12,15) — "neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed" (v.10).

Hezekiah wanted all his people to be instructed in the ways of God. "I will lay thy foundations with sapphires" (v.11) sounds in Hebrew very much like: "in the Books" — "all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children" (v.13).

On an earlier occasion the king had spoken "to the heart of all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the Lord" (2 Chr. 30:22) encouraging them in such good work. So it may be taken as fairly certain that after his recovery, this fine movement picked up from where it had left off.

### Safe from harm

There had been "oppression...fear...terror." But now "it shall not come near thee." With the devastation of the Assyrian army, God gave the plainest possible proof that "whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall *for thy sake*" (v.15). One man carried the nation!

"The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee" (v.10) — the words are almost the same as in a psalm which celebrates the violent overthrow of the might of Sennacherib (Ps. 46:2,5-11).

If indeed weapons were fashioned against Israel — 'the smith blowing the coals in the fire, and bringing forth an instrument for his work' it was only because Jehovah had "created the waster to destroy" (v.16; 10:5). Nevertheless "no (Assyrian) weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue (such as Rabshakeh's) that shall rise against thee in judgement, thou shalt condemn" (v.17). Experience proved the words startlingly true — as long as the people leaned on the Lord their God.

## 54 (2). "Widowhood" ended (v.1-8)

Back in the time of Abraham there had been the problem of the two wives. Hagar — in status, concubine and slave — 'had the husband' and bore a son Ishmael. Sarah, the true wife, had no child until faith brought God's graciousness into her life. Then Isaac was born, a child of promise, and Hagar and her son were sent away.

Isaiah recognized that the situation in his royal master's life bore a close resemblance to that of Abraham's, and he read it as a parable of God's great

purpose with Israel and the Gentiles. Hephzibah, in her desolation and the happiness of her later married life embodied both sides of the Abraham-Sarah allegory. And the nation in its wretchedness and startling restoration also anticipated the Hagar-Sarah allegory. "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear." In his very first sentence on this theme there is a play on the name of Sarah. Too many literary devices of this kind crop up in the Hebrew of Isaiah for this to be accidental. And certainly Paul read his text of Isaiah in this way (doubtless with the help of Is. 51:2,3). For in Gal. 4:21-27 he proceeded to expound the complicated allegory of two women, two sons, two mountains, two cities — all of them with reference to two communities: the natural and the spiritual Israel.

The two mountains are Sinai, where the Law of Moses was given (a mountain in Arabia, Ishmaelite territory), and Zion where Christ died and the gospel was preached.

The two cities are the Jerusalem of the temple, wedded to the Law and destined to be destroyed, and the heavenly Jerusalem which will one day become "reality" as the capital of the whole world.

### **Mother and City**

This figurative use of "Zion" and her "children" is almost commonplace in Isaiah. For example:

"Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken" (33:20).

Instead: "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not; lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes" (54:2)\*

The first of these two passages goes on to use the figure of a ship out of control (33:23), whilst the second speaks of Zion as "afflicted, tossed with tempest" in a storm like "the waters of Noah" (54:9-11).

Zion, the holy city as the "mother" of God's family (49:14,15; 51:3; 60:10,7; 62:4,6; 66:7-14) is a theme traceable right through Scripture, literally from beginning to end.

When the Lord God took a rib from the side of Adam He *built* it into a woman (Gen. 2:22mg). In Ephesians Paul moves easily from the idea of the family of God being a holy temple (2:21) to that of human marriage being an even more apt figure of Christ and the redeemed (5:27).

No wonder, then, that in his Galatian polemic against the legalists, the apostle is ready enough to confuse his illustration about two families with another about two cities. In his thinking (as in Isaiah's) they are the same fundamental idea.

And so to Revelation, where another apostle hears proclaimed the manifestation of "the bride, the Lamb's wife." But when he looks, he sees "that great city, the holy Jerusalem" (21:9,10).

### **Why "tabernacle"?**

But if the family of God is also the City of God, why the emphasis here on "tabernacle...tent...cords...stakes", which all suggest impermanence? In this respect there is marked contrast with the "wall great and high", the solid foundations

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\* Are these two passages by the same Isaiah? Or is the second deliberately quoting the first from a thousand miles away and 150 years later? Which is the more likely explanation?

and massive gates, of John's New Jerusalem. And with good reason, for Isaiah speaks of the era of the gospel when the Word of Life is calling Gentile outsiders into God's family. At such a time, not only must the first-blessed people of Israel be prepared to lengthen cords and strengthen stakes, they must also be prepared to strike camp and move away from an earthly Jerusalem. Did the brethren in first century Jewry see the implications of this Scripture, one wonders? The need for an Epistle to the Hebrews suggests a strong reluctance to grow into these ideas.

Also, in the light of Isaiah's continuing message — "all thy children taught of the Lord" (v. 13) — it seems right to look for further symbolic meaning, for the "words of the wise are as goads\*", and as nails fastened..." (Eccl. 12:11). Then what are the "cords" and "stakes" in this tabernacle of the Lord? It is noteworthy that "the place (*maqom*) of thy tent" implies a Sanctuary. Jacob was promised at Bethel that he should "break forth" (Gen. 28:14mg) to the west, east, north, south. Now Isaiah renews the promise: "Thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left (i.e. both south and north)." Very significantly, LXX uses a word which implies the extension of protection.

Thus the seed of Israel can inherit the Gentiles, instead of holding aloof from them (cp. 55:5; 61:9; 65:1), and by this very means will find unexpected benefit: "Jerusalem inhabited...the cities of Judah built...the decayed places raised up..." (44:26).

### Modernist difficulties

It is difficult to know what the modernists, with their Babylonian Captivity theory, make of this repeated confidence in an accession of strength from the Gentiles, for nothing of the kind happened in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. And the phrase: "for a small moment have I forsaken thee" (v.7) seems a strange way of describing a captivity of seventy years (besides the twenty-two years of apostasy and chaos before that). With reference to the time of Hezekiah there is no problem; and in the present application the words describe Israel's final time of trouble (cp. 26:20 s.w.).

### Restoration

The assurance (v. 4) of recovery and rehabilitation could hardly be more emphatic.

1. Thou shalt not be ashamed.
2. Neither shalt thou be confounded.
3. Thou shalt not be put to shame.
4. Thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth.
5. Thou shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more.

Applied to Gentiles now received into a status of high privilege before God, these words look back to the shameful days of earlier ignorance and idolatry. But inasmuch as Jews have become Gentiles, divorced through unbelief from their spiritual inheritance, at a time when Gentiles have become Jews, these striking repetitious assurances are to be read also with reference to Israel at the time, yet future, when repentance and the coming Messiah bring their woeful history to a happy climax when Jews and Gentiles are one Israel of God.

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\* Probably: "sharp stakes" — "goads" spoils the parallelism.

Then "thy Maker will be thy Husband" (v.5). These words are actually intensive plurals, suggesting: "Thy Mighty Maker shall be thy glorious husband" — "as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee" (62:5). He is "thy Redeemer (the near kinsman who rescues from bondage), the Holy One of Israel", and now, in the fullest sense of the term, "the God of the whole earth" (v.5). The allusion here to the divine vision given to Isaiah in the temple is not to be missed: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the fulness of the whole earth is his glory" (6:3mg). The fulness of the Gentiles has come in, Israel is repentant and received back by her God who is now in truth the Lord of *hosts*. In His house there is now nought but holiness.

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## 54 (3). "The Waters of Noah" (v.9-17)

When Noah looked out from the ark over the wild waste of waters, it must have seemed to him — according to all normal judgement, at least — that here was a final end to life in the fair world he had known all these years.

So also was the prospect of hopelessness when Hezekiah saw his little kingdom swamped by the surge of savage Assyrian invasion. After such a disaster how could the great Promise of God to the house of David ever come to fulfilment?

And so also will be the even more bleak outlook in the days not far ahead when the valiant but God-less state of Israel is swept away by a raging tide of hate and devastation. There is yet to come a time when, instead of displaying an unquenchable sanguine spirit, they will say: "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost" (Ez. 37:11).

At such a time, for the faithful in Israel this will be like the Deluge over again — their "waters of Noah" being a cleansing experience bringing salvation at a time when those whom God does not want are swept away (cp. 2 Pet. 3:5-10)\*

### God's Covenant Removed?

Here, then, is the emphatic assurance of the God of Israel that His covenant of peace will not be removed. Mountains may depart, and hills be removed, swamped by a deluge of unique proportions, "but my kindness (the same word as in 2 Sam. 7:15; Ps. 89:28,33) shall not depart from thee" (v.10).

Superficial appearances have all been to the contrary. For long centuries it has seemed that Israel are a cast-off and spiritually derelict people — the covenant of God's peace *is* removed. Yet, in truth, not so at any time — for those with the faith to join ransomed Gentiles in the New Covenant which God never ceases to offer in Christ. For such, "the sure mercies of David" (55:3) *are* sure. "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good" (Jer. 32:40).

### Ark and Temple

This ship of salvation — "afflicted, tossed with tempest (cp. 33:23), and not comforted" (a play on the name of Noah!) — all at once transforms into a Temple\*\* of wondrous beauty, more fit to give men access to heaven than any

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\* In a similar context Is. 24:18 also uses the language of Noah's Flood (Gen. 7:11).

\*\* Perhaps the idea is this — that as the ark was the only means of salvation in Noah's day, so in Hezekiah's time the Temple in Jerusalem and so also the New Temple of which Christ is the foundation.

tower of Babel: "Behold, I will lay thy foundations with sapphires\* ...windows of agates...gates of carbuncles...borders of pleasant stones...and great shall be the peace of thy children" (v.11-13).

The word "windows" here is very unusual. It is, literally, "suns". Perhaps there is here a combination of intensive plural with metonymy, thus providing a highly poetic allusion to the great east gate through which the morning sun (and the returning Glory of the Lord) shone into the Temple area. But lest there be any temptation to see this glorified Temple of the Lord as a mere erection of stone and fine material, the word for "lay" is one which always describes the relaxation of living creatures!

Another Temple allusion comes in the next verse: "In righteousness shalt thou be *established*" (v.14). This is the name of one of the two majestic brazen pillars (Jachin) at the entrance to the sanctuary. Indeed, it is not out of the question that the word "suns", just mentioned, is also intended to refer to these two pillars.

Again, with double meaning: "thy children (or: thy builders) shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children (the Salem of thy builders)" (v. 13). It is only through divine instruction that any Temple can be built. Moses was shown the Tabernacle "pattern" in the mount (Ex. 25:40; cp. "in the Books" v.11), and Bezaleel and Aholiab were endowed with special wisdom and skill for their work (Ex. 31:3). David likewise had a revelation of the details of the new Temple (1 Chr. 28:19), and appealed to the nation for a fitting endowment of precious commodities (29:5). Ezekiel and John each had an angelic mentor for a like purpose (Ez. 40:3,4; Rev. 21:9,10).

### Gospel allusions

It would be strange, then, if the yet more important Temple of God, made up of redeemed sinners were not described in the NT. in similar terms and in similar fashion.

That little ship on Galilee, "tossed with tempest" through the night after the feeding of the five thousand was actually the Lord's ark of safety in a time of serious crisis\*\*. Yet its occupants were "not comforted", for they too found their Leader's attitude difficult to stomach; to them also his words were a "hard saying." They failed to realise that that small fishing vessel had been their ark of safety saving them from being swept away by the flood of nationalistic excitement which that day's miracle had let loose.

But then, following Isaiah, Jesus turned from the figure of an ark to that of a Temple. Next day in the synagogue at Capernaum, when challenged to show himself as great as Moses, Jesus set himself far higher by claiming to be the fulfilment of Isaiah's expectation that "all thy children shall be taught of *the LORD*" (Jn. 6:45). Truly, as Isaiah says, foundations must be laid "in the Books", but the Temple itself requires fellowship with and instruction from One who is The LORD, far higher than any angelic mentor of Moses or David or Ezekiel or John.

"Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father (in the Books) *cometh unto* me...(dwelleth in me, and I in him)" (Jn. 6:45,56). Jesus was continuing the allusion he had made to Is. 54: "Behold the strangers (proselytes) *shall come unto thee* through Me (the Father), and shall dwell with thee" (v. 15 LXX)\*\*\*

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\* Hebrew here is almost: "in the Books".

\*\* See: "A Crisis in the Ministry of Jesus", ch.94 in "Gospels", H.A.W.

\*\*\* AV is quite different here.

It was soon after this that Jesus, heartened by Peter's loyal confession of faith foretold the founding of his Ecclesia on "this Rock" — "I will lay thy foundations in the Books...and all thy children shall be taught of the Lord".

But the swing of Peter's pendulum had him making false use of Isaiah 54. When seeking to discourage his Master's "defeatism", his "Be it far from thee, Lord" — literally: "Mercy to thyself, O Lord" — he was actually quoting verbatim: "The mercy that is with me shall not forsake thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be at all removed; for He (God) saith, Be merciful to thyself, O Lord" (v.10 LXX). This was doubtless Peter's response from Isaiah 54 to his Master's detailed warning of impending sufferings based on Isaiah 53.

In another very different context, and without a sign of direct quotation there is a somewhat unexpected coincidence of ideas in John 14:26,27.

<b>Isaiah 54</b>	<b>John 14</b>
13. All thy children shall be taught of the Lord. Great shall be the peace of thy children.	26. The Comforter...he shall teach you all things.
14. Thou shalt not fear.	27. My peace I give unto you.  Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

This is all in harmony with the use Jesus had made of this prophecy earlier.

### **The Problem of Evil**

Finally, there is Isaiah's solution of the problem of suffering, in expansion of the principle already enunciated: "I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things" (45:7).

The craftsman who with forced draught brings his fire to white heat so that he may the more skilfully fashion a weapon of war has been given that skill by God who made him. And the savage brute who goes into action against the people of God, yes, God made him too, and gave him his frightening physique for the fight! God is in control of all these things.

But the obverse side of the coin is this — "No weapon formed against thee (the Servant of the Lord) shall prosper." Suffering, maybe; but ultimately the justice of an all-wise, all-powerful God will assuredly set the balance right. "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord."

The world has not yet seen this even-handedness in operation either in the experience of Christ or his disciples. But one day there will be no room for doubt. "Their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord."

## **55 (1). "Ho, every one that thirsteth!" (v.1-5)**

Isaiah 55 probably has fewer evident contacts with the crucial times of Hezekiah than almost any other chapter in this part of the prophecy. And yet even here the relevance of the message to those days is readily traceable.

### **Hezekiah and his times**

Even the opening allusion to thirst probably springs from the siege conditions

which Jerusalem had to endure, and to the waters of Siloam brought into the city by Hezekiah's tunnel and without which there could have been no surviving (for Zion means "a dry place").

The "sure mercies of David," with reference to God's "everlasting covenant" (v.3) that "David shall not want a man to sit on his throne," had become the sheet-anchor of Hezekiah's faith both against the threats of Sennacherib and against his own sickness and present childlessness.

The glorifying of Hezekiah (v.5d) with utterly unexpected victory meant that "a Gentile nation (Heb: *goi*) that thou knewest not" now realised the greatness of the Holy One of Israel (Heb: *am*) "that knew not thee" (because of its faithlessness\*) and was transformed in its attitude.

There is reference to the glad and equally unexpected return of the captives whom Sennacherib had marched away: "Ye shall go out (cp. 42:7; 49:9; 52:11,12) with joy, and be led forth with peace" (v.12). And the charm and blessedness of a Year of Jubilee of unimagined fruitfulness smoothed away all the anxieties of God's stricken land — rain and snow from heaven such as had rarely been known, causing the earth to bring forth and bud without the labour of cultivation, and providing food for the hungry inhabitants and seed for the next sowing (v.10). The entire countryside put on a warm smile of welcome as the people, now freed from fear, streamed back to their farms. Expecting to find their ground overrun with noxious weeds, they marvelled instead at the blessed God-given fecundity that was everywhere: "instead of the thorn the fir tree, and instead of the briar the myrtle tree...all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." It was a sure sign — the very sign promised (37:30) — that no adversity could cut off. It was sure as God Himself (v.12,13) — nothing but gladness everywhere.

### A Sign of Greater things

Yet how insistent the prophet is that merely to see this wondrous turn of fortune as a token that God was with them (even if they were humble enough to recognize that it was all for the sake of their pious king!) was to miss the main lesson which shouted to them from this unique experience: "It shall be to the Lord...for an everlasting *sign* that shall not be cut off" (v.13) — "I have given him (king Hezekiah) for a *witness* to the people" (v.4). In other words, those who revelled in the present goodness of God must see it all as foreshadowing a yet greater redemption which Jehovah promised to provide. Hezekiah, good man that he was, was only a Messiah in miniature. One day, Immanuel himself!

With what appropriateness, then, is it possible to trace in the opening verses of this prophecy a remarkable insistence on the basic principles of the gospel of salvation. Even when set down as a bare catalogue they are impressive.

### Basic Gospel Truth

1. The message is for those who thirst and know they have no other means of satisfying that thirst (v.1).
2. It is an offer open to "every one" (v.1). Gentiles are included along with the chosen people (v.5)
3. There is no price to be paid. The price has been paid already (v.1).

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\* The LXX phrase here is beautifully turned to hint at this.

4. indeed, a necessary condition is that a man recognizes that he hasn't the wherewithal to pay — "he that hath no money" (v.1).
5. In fact, the only payment to be made is a ready acceptance of blessing freely given: "Come ye" (v.1). A man must "hearken...and eat" (v.2)— that is all.
6. The basics of subsistence are offered — bread and water\*. But these miraculously transform into the wine and fatness of the Messianic feast (v.1; Is. 25:6).
7. These blessings are not to be gained by one's own efforts — "spending money...and labour" (v.2)
8. Indeed works of personal righteousness buy that which is "not bread".
9. A man must pin his faith in "the sure mercies of David" (v.3) — the ancient promise of 2 Sam. 7 now made into a New Covenant "for the remission of sins" — mercies! (cp. the parallelism in v.7cd). "I will make with you..." are the very words of Jesus (apart from a suitable change of tense) at the Last Supper: "I appoint unto you a kingdom" (Lk. 22:29) — the kingdom of his father David.
10. "Hear, and your soul shall live" (v.3) fairly plainly implies that except you hear, your soul shall die. But now there is "the blood of the everlasting covenant" (v.3; Heb. 13:20).

These items constitute the bare bones of the first three verses. There are plenty of other ideas to be explored here.

### Jesus used this prophecy

The opening interjection presents a difficulty, for in all its 48 occurrences except perhaps three (and those doubtful: 18:1; Zech. 2:6,7), its meaning is very plain: "Woe". Then is the intention to emphasize the woe of those who thirst but do not "come to the waters"? What a contrast with the Lord's "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Mt. 5:6).

The triple "Come ye" (v.1) is matched by a like insistence in the NT. After the feeding of the 5000, Jesus bade the multitude that they be "all taught of God" (Jn. 6:45, quoting Is. 54:13). He went on: "Every man therefore that hath heard (55:2,3) and learned of the Father, *cometh unto me*" (Jn. 6:45) — it is as though his thought ran on into Isaiah 55. Similarly, his assurance that "if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever" (Jn. 6:51) says the same as Isaiah's "eat that which is good...hear, and your soul shall live" (v.2,3).\*\*

There can be little doubt that at his next visit to Jerusalem, the Lord's Feast of Tabernacles appeal in the temple court was designed to send men back to Isaiah 55 and 43. It was the great day of the feast, when the impressive water-pouring ceremony was discontinued. That day Jesus staged a great open-air meeting in the temple court. He "stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me (this is Is. 55:1, without question); and he that believeth on me, let him drink — as the Scripture hath said (about the smitten rock which the water-pouring ceremony commemorated), Out of his belly (i.e. from the Messiah) shall flow rivers of living water" (Jn. 7:37,38; 19:34).

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\* A re-pointing and re-translation is necessary here: "Come ye to the wafers...break (*bread*) and eat...buy *wine* and *fatness*.."

\*\* It is also worth considering whether "hearken diligently unto me...hear, and your soul shall live" (v.2,3) is to be equated with "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life" (Jn. 6:47)

Since, as John comments (v.39), these enigmatic words foretold an out-pouring of the Spirit when Jesus was "glorified" (this is Isaiah 55:5), it may be taken as certain that another Isaiah passage should come in here: "I will pour waters upon him that is thirsty...I will pour my spirit upon thy seed..." (44:3).

But Isaiah 55 was the Lord's main text, especially its exhortation to "seek the Lord, while he may be found" (v.6). This word "seek" runs right through John's narrative of what happened that day (Jn. 7:11,18 twice, 19,20,25,30,34,36). Several of these places are doubtless allusions to Malachi's familiar word: "The Lord whom ye seek (sarcasm!) shall suddenly come to his temple" (Mal. 3:1; note Jn. 7:11,14,27,33). But in at least one place Jesus steered attention back to Isaiah 55:6: "Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me" (v.34). Very evidently this is: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

And it may be that his allusion was recognized by his adversaries, for their response was: "Will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?" (Jn. 7:35) — which echoes Isaiah: "Thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not" (55:5). And the continuing puzzlement of these critics — "What manner of saying is this that he said...?" (Jn. 7:36) — splendidly illustrates the truth: "My thoughts are not your thoughts...as the heavens are higher than the earth..." (55:8,9)\*

A remarkable corollary of this use of the prophecy is that in his preaching Jesus had no qualms about applying to himself a scripture which is explicitly about Jehovah\*\* A good theology gives a welcome to this use of the Divine name with reference to the Son of God.

The intense earnestness of the appeal to "hearken diligently unto me...incline your ear, and come" (v.2,3) contrasts strangely with the ruthlessness of Isaiah's earlier words: "Make their ears heavy...lest they hear with their ears...and convert, and be healed" (6:10).

But the reference of the words is different. Israel found itself shut out from the grace of God because it wanted that door shut (Jn. 12:37-41). But the New Israel, eager to "see Jesus" (12:21), are given all encouragement.

### **The Great Promise to David**

For these there is a New Covenant, better than Sinai's, and embracing the promises made to Abraham (54:1-6) and to David (55:3). The time came when the old covenant was "ready to vanish away." The new is "an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David" (v.3).

This mention of the great promise made to David is the very hub of this prophecy. All the key words look back to 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 89. "My *mercy* shall not depart from him...thy kingdom shall be established (*made sure*) *for ever* (2 Sam. 7:15,16)...ruler (*leader*) *over* my people (v.8)...made thee a great *name* (v.9)...for *thy word's* sake (v.21)." All these expressions are echoed in Isaiah 55. And Psalm 89's constant harping on "mercy and faithfulness (s.w. sure)" is tremendously emphatic (v.1,2,5,8,14,24,28,33,37,49), as also are its other even more pointed quotations from 2 Sam. 7 (see v.3,4,20,21,24-37). It is easy to see why David's Messianic promise should be called "sure mercies".

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\* Is it also worth mentioning that booths of fir (cypress) and myrtle (55:13) would be specially in evidence at this Feast of Tabernacles.

\*\* Cp. Is. 45:23,24, me, him = Phil. 2:11; Is. 8:13 = 1 Pet. 3:15; Joel 2:32 = Acts 2:21,36; Zech. 12:10; Jer. 23:6; Heb. 1:4,6,8; and many more.

Here (as in the parallelism of verse 7) "mercy" means forgiveness\*; and since God has confirmed the promise with an oath (Ps. 110:4), then in all human history there is nothing more certain. "Two immutable things"; (Heb. 6:13-20).

It makes an interesting enquiry why Paul, in his preaching at Antioch, should use this scripture about "the sure mercies of David" as a prophetic evidence that God "raised up Jesus from the dead, now no more to return to corruption" (Acts 13:34). The connection, most probably, is via the repeated phrase: "for ever", in the promise of 2 Samuel 7:13,16. Except there be an eternal king, exalted above all the weaknesses of mortality, how could these words ever have meaning? And "sure *mercies*" prepared the way splendidly for Paul's climax: "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" (v.38).

### Two Speakers

Before going further it is useful to sort out the speakers in this prophecy. In this the pronouns and the NT. allusions are big helps:

- v.1-3 Messiah's appeal.
- v.4 God proclaims him to the nation.
- v.5 God now speaks directly to Messiah.
- v.6-13 Messiah's appeal is renewed.

### A Faithful Witness

"Behold, I (Jehovah) have given (or appointed) him a witness to the people" (v.4). In his "good confession" before Pilate, the Lord Jesus built on these words. "Art thou a king then?" asked Pilate, torn between personal inclination and duty to Caesar. To this enquiry, he received a plain "Yes" — "Thou sayest I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the (Jewish) world (during the past 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> years' ministry) — not to be a king but — that I should bear witness to this truth (that I am God's appointed Messiah)". Pilate recognized that "truth" was now being used as a technical term outside his ken. "What is (this) 'truth'?" he kept on asking, and doubtless got an explanation which satisfied him that there was no present threat to Caesar's authority. "Truth", like "mercy", is constantly associated with God's covenants of promise\*\*.

Again making use of Isaiah, the Lord Jesus repeated the claim:

<b>Revelation 1:5</b>	<b>Isaiah 55:3,4</b>
1. The faithful witness	1. Sure (faithful) mercies... A witness to the people.
2. The first begotten from the dead.	2. An everlasting covenant.
3. The prince of the kings of the earth.	3. A prince (LXX s.w.) and commander to the Gentiles.

Here the sequence is chronological. First came the Lord's witness concerning his own status and destiny; then, his death as a covenant victim and his resurrection; and in due time, when he comes in Shekinah clouds (Rev. 1:7), his royal dignity.

\* This is normal O.T. usage (e.g. Ex.34:7; Num. 14:18; Ps. 25:7; and many more). It would seem logical, therefore, to find this idea in the promise of 2 Sam. But where? — in v.14, which could possibly be read with reference to the sacrifice of Christ ("stripes"; s.w. Is. 53:5), although Ps. 89:32 suggests differently?

\*\* Examples: Gen. 32:10; Ps. 132:11; Mic. 7:20; Is. 16:5 etc. etc.

## Gentiles

If chronological sequence is still insisted on, then the Almighty's promise that the Messiah shall call and shall be sought by the Gentiles (Heb. *goi*) must refer to the diffusion of his influence and authority from Jerusalem when he sits on "the throne of his father David" (Lk. 1:32).

The great promise in 2 Samuel 7 has no mention of Gentiles, but this is more than made up for by the next chapter which details in impressive fashion the extension of David's dominion over one Gentile people after another. Thus Messiah's kingdom was foreshadowed.

David knew that his experience was to be interpreted in this way, and being a prophet (Acts 2:30) he wrote about the Messiah by writing about himself. "Thou hast made me the head of the Gentiles: a people whom I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me" (Ps. 18:43,44).

Then, and not till then, shall "many run\* to and fro, and knowledge (of God) be increased" (Dan. 12:4).

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\* Cp the use of this idiom in Jer. 23:21; Hab. 2:2; Ez. 14,21; 2 Thess. 3:1; Am. 8:12; 1 Kgs. 18:46; Ps. 147:15; Gal. 2:2.

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## 55 (2). "Seek ye the Lord" (v.6 -13)

The welcoming call: "Ho, everyone that thirsteth..." (v.1) is now repeated in more specific fashion: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found." The plain implication behind these words is that such opportunity is not prolonged indefinitely, neither for the world blithely turning its back on God, nor for the individual who halts between two opinions. If a man would find God, he must bestir himself to seek. And when the truth of God's salvation is seen for what it is, personal decision becomes another 'must'. The switherer does not command God's admiration. When certain half-disciples said: "Lord, suffer me *first* to...Lord, I will follow thee; but let me *first*..." (Lk. 9:59-62), Jesus had blunt things to say about "looking back"; he knew that such men need a good shove in the right direction: "*Go thou, and preach* the kingdom of God."

But did Isaiah need to speak with such urgency? Did not his own words say the opposite?: "They seek me daily, and delight to know my ways" (58:2). But, alas, one does not have to read much further to recognize that these words are stiff with scorn and sarcasm, such as the contemporaries of Jesus needed in later days. And the present generation also? In the religious life this is one of the greatest perils — going through the motions, and kidding oneself that God has been both sought and found.

"But if from thence (dispersion, captivity), thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul" (Dt. 4:29). But even when He is near, He must be sought, says Isaiah. "What nation...hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?" (4:7; Isaiah alludes to this).

### Paul used Isaiah in Athens

But these Scriptures, primarily for Israel's benefit, were capable of being turned to

account when taking God's appeal to unenlightened Gentiles. It has often been said that on Mars Hill Paul tried to turn the gospel into philosophy in order to impress the philosophers, and failed for that reason. A careful comparison of Acts 17 and Isaiah 55 soon establishes that then, as on all other occasions, Paul was building on Holy Scripture.

<b>Acts 17</b>		<b>Isaiah 55</b>	
23.	The unknown God.	5.	Nations that knew thee not.
27.	That they should seek the Lord.	8.	My thoughts are not your thoughts.
27.	If haply they might feel after Him, and find Him.	6.	Seek ye the Lord.
27.	Though he be not far from every one of us.	6.	While He may be found.
30.	God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.	6.	While He is near.
24.	Lord of heaven and earth.	7.	Let the wicked forsake his way.
31.	He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained.	9.	As the heavens are higher than the earth.
		4.	I have given (appointed) him for...a leader and commander of the people.

Here the undeniable link between verse 6 and Acts 17:27 ensures that the other parallels are not forced or imagined. But on that great occasion Paul also made impressive use of Isaiah 45:

<b>Acts 17</b>		<b>Isaiah 45</b>	
23.	The unknown God.	15.	Thou art a God that hidest thyself.
23.	Him declare I.	6.	That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west.
24.	Lord of heaven and earth.	12.	I have made the earth...my hands have stretched out the heavens.
25.	As though he needed anything.	13.	Not for price nor for reward.
26.	Made of one all nations.	14.	Egypt...Ethiopia...Sabeans.
26.	Times before appointed.	21.	Who hath declared this from ancient time?
26.	The bounds of their habitation.	18.	He formed it to be inhabited.
27.	Seek after the Lord.	19.	I said not...Seek ye me in vain.
28.	His offspring.	11.	Ask me...concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands...
29.	The Godhead not like unto silver or gold — and:	20.	They have no knowledge that set up their graven image.
30.	This ignorance.		
31.	Judge the world in righteousness.	23.	The Word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness.
18, 21	Philosophy.	9, 10	Philosophy condemned.

Paul was quick to see that the message of Isaiah to an Israel much infected with the paganism of their neighbours would not be without its relevance to an Athens full of altars and temples.

Therefore "let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord," especially since there is also the emphatic promise that "the Redeemer shall come to Zion and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob" (59:20).

But such a repentance will never get off the ground unless it begin in the right place — with a man's "thoughts", literally: "weavings", that pattern of subtle complexity which a man spins in his own mind. In their place, let there be the holy pattern as of the cherubim of glory woven into the fabric of the curtain in the Holy of Holies. But that was the workmanship of one "in whom the Spirit of God was." Without this aid, there is failure from the start, for "My thoughts are not your thoughts. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My thoughts higher than your thoughts."

### **Psalms and Ecclesiastes**

Here Isaiah was quoting from one of his favourite psalms of David (103:11; note there also v.5,12,15,16). And the equation of the two shows that he contemplates God's "thoughts" which mean forgiveness for men: "so great is his *mercy* towards them that fear him" — "he will have mercy upon him...he will abundantly pardon" (55:7).

The theme modifies easily, almost imperceptibly, from God's "thoughts" and God's "mercy" to His Word sent forth to make men aware of an undeserved lovingkindness and to condition them for receiving it. For a thirsty country like Palestine, the figure could not be more lovely: "as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth...so shall my word be" (v.10,11).

But of course Isaiah had read his Ecclesiastes. He knew that the rain and the snow do return into the sky to fall yet again with renewed beneficence: "All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again" (Ecc. 1:7).

So Isaiah's meaning must be: "returneth not thither until its work is done." Indeed, this is implicit in what follows: "it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please." God's rain "watereth the earth," even though there are only "the thorn" and "the briar" (v.13) to be seen as a result. He sends His rain on the just and on the unjust. His Word goes forth and there is no failure — it accomplishes that which God has delight in; but the impatient watchman of the Lord may often go long disappointed, because of his impatience.

Just as most of God's good rain seems to go to waste, so also it may often appear to be with His Word. But not so, for, whatever else, it supplies "seed to the sower, and bread to the eater." Paul picked up these words with reference to the generosity of Gentile believers in sending cash to Judaea to help their hard-pressed brethren there (2 Cor. 9:10 RV). But it is not easy to see just how he intended this pithy saying to be read.

Perhaps he meant: The Word of God has so worked in you Corinthians that it has moved you to superb generosity to your Jewish brethren, and thus you have provided me, Paul the sower, with yet more seed, for when I quote your fine example it will stir others to like activity; this will be in addition to there being "bread for food (to the eater)", a most practical help and solace to poverty-stricken brethren in the Holy Land.

It has already been surmised that Isaiah knew his Ecclesiastes. Confirmation for this comes from a comparison with Ecc. 11:1-6. The verbal links seem undeniable — there is a mention of rain, sowing seed, reaping, bread, "the works of God who doeth all", and "thou knowest not (55:8) whether shall prosper (55:11)." And, like Isaiah's message here, the Ecclesiastes passage seems to make most sense when read as a figurative homily about how, when, and where to proclaim God's Word.

### God's good rain

The figure goes much further back to the prophecy of Moses who described his own inspired utterance thus: "My doctrine shall drop as the rain...as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass" (Dt. 32:2). But the idea is at its best in Isaiah: "Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open\*, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it...the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear" (45:8,23). What a contrast with the message of Jeremiah when God's patience with Israel had given out: "Is not my word like as a fire...and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (23:29). Different times and different people call for different methods.

Sooner or later the heavenly "rain" really accomplishes that for which it is sent, so that mountains and hills rejoice, and all the trees — fir and myrtle instead of thorn and briar — join in the glad response to God; "and *he* (the promised leader and commander: v.4) shall be to the Lord for a Name" — for a final fulfilment of all that the Name Jehovah has intended and foretold.

### Joy and Fruitfulness

When young king Joash, who had been kept for years in the secrecy of the sanctuary of the Lord, was brought out to the people, all the people clapped their hands and shouted: "God save the king." Then what response when the Messiah comes forth from the Presence of God and is presented to his people in Jerusalem? — the trees of the field, nurtured to full growth by his "rain", will clap their hands.

The thorns which the curse in Eden made inevitable (Gen. 3:18) are gone, for the curse itself is taken away. The curse of rank unproductive wildness denounced upon Israel — "all the land shall become briars and thorns" (Is. 7:24) — will be supplanted by the balmy fruitfulness of a Year of Jubilee. And the *people* who are "briars and thorns" — "the sons of Belial who cannot be taken with (any human) hand" (2 Sam. 23:6) and also those who "crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh" (Heb. 6:6) — will be "rejected and nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned" (Heb. 6:8).

But Isaiah does not dwell on that, for he has so many good things to say. It may even be his intention to declare a miraculous *transformation* of species *from* briars and thorns *to* graceful fir and myrtle. After all, is not that what the gracious rain of God's Word is intended to do?

All this blessedness centres in the Messiah himself. He who was "cut off out of the land of the living" (53:8; Dan. 9:26) is now "an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off," one who imparts a like blessing to those who deem themselves without fruitfulness, "a dry tree" — "I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off" (56:3,5) — LXX: "it shall not fail."

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\* Double meaning — the lush Spring growth, and the resurrection of Jesus in the Spring of the year (note 40:8: "the Word of your God shall rise up.")

## 56 (1). Eunuchs and Strangers (v.1-8)

The eloquent appeal: "Seek ye the Lord" (55:6), is now renewed, but this time in terms more comprehensive than men of Israel would have thought possible. Now a gracious acceptance is offered not only to those Gentiles who chose to be lifelong "hewers of wood and drawers of water" in the sanctuary of the Lord, but also to those whom the explicit precept of the law totally disqualified from access to God. Indeed, the net is now cast even wider than that. "Mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (v.7).

And the terms upon which all such shall now reckon as God's true people are these: "Keep ye judgment and do justice...Blessed is the man that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil...they that choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant..." (v.1,2,4).

### Contemporary

In Isaiah's own day, all this meant the renewal, with increased impetus, of the great reformation king Hezekiah had set in train. Those in the nation who scorned his earnest appeal for a return to godliness (2 Chr. 30:10) had thus qualified for the status of eunuchs and outsiders. But instead — so well did Hezekiah understand through his prophet the principles of the gospel — even those who hitherto were kept at arm's length now found themselves received with all the graciousness of God.

Amongst these was "the son of the stranger, that had joined (Levi-ed) himself to the Lord" (v.3). From the days of Baal-peor and the Gibeonites (Num. 31:47; Josh. 9:27) Gentiles coming under the domination of Israel had been dedicated to the service of the House of the Lord, taking on the more menial tasks and leaving Levites free for higher service. Originally the idea had been that in such an environment their debased idolatrous notions would atrophy and become harmless. More than this, such Gentiles would have unique opportunities to know the glory of the God of Israel and to learn His Law. Thus it came about that many of these Nethinim (men *given* or *appointed* to God's service) became more zealous to serve the Lord than the Israelites who should have been their mentors. The list of these Nethinim who gladly left the comforts of life in Babylon in order to rough it re-establishing the worship of Jehovah in Jerusalem, is most impressive (Ezra 2:43-58).

There are indications that in Hezekiah's time the temple staff of such Nethinim was augmented by the capture of Assyrian and Egyptian\* prisoners, and also by the gifts of slaves which neighbouring countries sent to Hezekiah after the Assyrian overthrow (14:1,2,3; 45:14; 18:7; 2 Chr. 32:23; Ps. 76:11)\*\*

It was probably to this deliverance and its ensuing blessings that Isaiah alluded: "My salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed...The Lord which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him..." (v.1,8).

The multitude of Jewish captives Sennacherib had sent off to Babylon soon came back again, and besides them were these others, Gentiles, now dedicated to the work of God.

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\* Already taken by the Assyrians at El-tekeh and captured from them by the men of Israel.

\*\* Hebraists will see point in "joined" (v.3,6) being in Niphal.

Once again the modernist interpretation staggers badly, for in the time of Cyrus (a) there was no temple — for some years it was only in prospect; (b) in the days of Ezra there was no special salvation of God "near to come;" (c.) the Lord did not "gather others to him" — the period of Ezra and Nehemiah was marked by rigorous exclusiveness.

On the other hand, it is easy to see how the burning zeal of Hezekiah, which had already thrust aside punctilios of legalism at the time of his great Passover\*, would readily find room in the service of Jehovah for strangers and eunuchs.

The deliberate joining together of the names of Hephzibah and Hezekiah in this context ("choose the things that *please me*, and that *take hold* of my covenant"; v.4) might suggest that the king's wife was a Gentile, and hence the happy emphasis here on "strangers" and "all peoples"; cp. Ps. 45:10,12.

### Jesus and Paul interpret

However, fascinating though it may be to work out the relevance of these prophetic words to those ancient days, the fuller and more worthwhile exposition turns from Hezekiah to Christ. There is the Lord's own authority for this — and also Paul's.

"My salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed" (v.1). There can be little doubt that Paul had his eye on these words when he wrote about the gospel as "the power of God unto salvation...for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16,17).

But in that case where is Isaiah's equivalent to "from faith to faith," i.e. on the basis of faith (and not works) to the man who shows faith? The next verse continues: "Blessed is the man...that layeth hold on it (my covenant; v.6); that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it" (v.2). The sabbath declared a man's faith in God as the Creator (Ex. 20:11) and Redeemer (Dt. 5:15) and Sanctifier (Ex. 31:13). And God's covenant means believing the Promises to the fathers, they enshrine His "salvation" which was "near to come" when Jesus went out proclaiming that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 3:2; 4:17; Lk. 10:11).

The Nethinim commended by Isaiah and drawn to the Lord did the most menial tasks in His House — "Blessed is the man that doeth this" (v.2). And at the Last Supper, Jesus became a "drawer of water" for the washing of his disciples' feet\*\*, concluding that acted parable with Isaiah's words: "If ye know (discern) these things, blessed are ye if ye do them" (Jn. 13:17).

### The Ethiopian Eunuch

But in the hearts of strangers and eunuchs were misgivings that they would find themselves excluded from divine privilege. Did not the Law of Moses shut them out of Israel? (Dt. 23:3)? Eunuchs were given no hope whatever of acceptance. Here was the point of the Ethiopian eunuch's appeal to Philip: "See, water! does anything hinder me to be baptized (as my disability has hindered my offering of sacrifice in the temple)?" (Acts 8:36). But now, no hindrance, for the gospel is "on the basis of faith only, to the man who manifests faith." So, making his confession: "I believe...", he was baptized and went thence on his way reading on in his copy of Isaiah about

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\* A four-fold infringement of what the Law commanded (see 2 Chr. 29:34; 30:15,17,18-20,23) was more than covered by the intercession of this large-hearted king.

\*\* And this in a context often reminiscent of the consecration of the priests (Lev. 8); consider details in Jn. 13:3,4,7,8,9,10. See "Gospels", ch. 185.

eunuchs accepted in the sanctuary of the Lord, and...rejoicing — as Isaiah had foretold: "I will make them joyful in my (spiritual) house of prayer" (v.7). What a contrast with the disappointments experienced in Jerusalem's temple of burnt offerings and sacrifices!

This is what the gospel can do for any man estranged from God, no matter how he may lament: "Behold, I am a dry tree" (v.3). With new life in Christ, God "has made the dry tree to flourish" (Ez. 17:24) and to be "like a green olive tree in the house of God" (Ps. 52:8). And at the same time unfruitful Israel has dried up from the roots (Mk. 11:20: note v.17).

But "eunuchs" — the spiritually deprived, who all in vain seem to hunger and thirst for righteousness — these who "take hold of my covenant; even to them will I give\* a hand (Heb.) (i.e. a monument, like that of childless Absalom; 2 Sam. 18:18 s.w.) and a name better than that of sons and daughters...an everlasting name that shall not be cut off" (v.5). Here was an implicit promise of resurrection.

### **Strangers made nigh**

Likewise "the sons of the stranger\*\*" "called uncircumcision...aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise...are made nigh by the blood of Christ", writes Paul (Eph. 2:11-13), who goes on immediately to tell how such "strangers and foreigners" may joyfully serve the God of Israel in a new kind of temple.

They do this by "choosing the things that please me" (v.4). But inasmuch as "it pleased the Lord to bruise him", His Suffering Servant (53:10), they "are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Nor is Jeremiah at variance with his fellow-prophet when he exhorts: "Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth for in these things I delight (s.w.)" (9:24), for these gracious works of God involve forgiveness of sins and the new life in Christ. The message is the same.

### **Symbolism in Christ's ministry**

All this Jesus foreshadowed in his ministry when he cleared out of the temple all the crude abuses the rulers had encouraged. More than this, "he cast out all them that sold and *bought* in the temple." But the only people who bought in that sacred place were the pious worshippers, purchasing animals for sacrifice. These too come under the ban of the Man of Nazareth. Now, in the last week of his ministry, he was declaring an end to animal sacrifices!

But "the blind and the lame (typical of spiritually stricken Gentiles) came to him in the temple, and he healed them" (Mt. 21:14). Never was acted parable more eloquent.

But Jesus put even more point to it with his quote from Isaiah: "Mine house shall be Called an house of prayer for all the peoples" (v.7).

### **Gentiles called**

This last phrase is the normal expression, exceedingly common right through the

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\* "Give" alludes to their name Nethinim, "those given or appointed to temple service".

\*\* The New Testament uses this LXX word only once—of the Samaritan leper (Lk. 17:18), a man doubly excluded from fellowship.

OT., for the tribes of Israel. So primarily these words express the great ambition of godly Hezekiah to weld the northern and southern kingdoms into a spiritual unity.

But evidently the Septuagint translators looked hard at the context, especially verse 6, and decided that the scope of the prophecy was far wider than that. Accordingly they used the expression which usually served to designate Gentile nations; and it was in this form that Jesus quoted it. Did he mean to imply that Jews would become Gentiles, and pious Gentiles Jews? There are many hints in this part of the gospels that in the last few weeks of his ministry the Lord found a good deal of solace from the bitter disappointment of Israel's indifference, by contemplating the day when his gospel would call multitudes of Gentiles to worship in the new temple of the Lord.

"Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become one flock, one shepherd" (Jn. 10:16 RV). Even the prophet Caiaphas declared "that Jesus should die for the nation (the Gentile word again!)...but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (Jn. 11:51,52).

"From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same (from far east to far west) my name shall be great among the Gentiles" (Mal. 1:11). "The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him" (v.8). The words seem to hold a wondrous promise of yet more ingathering — at some future time, more Jews and yet more Gentiles. Lord, speed the day!

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## 56 (2). Watchmen, Shepherds, Dogs (v.9-12)

There are few more dramatic changes in Isaiah's prophecy than that which takes place at 56:9. Theme and tone are all at once drastically different. The prophet switches from his warm encouraging apostrophe welcoming outsiders to the House of the Lord, and with eloquent sadness and anger he exposes the apostate spirit which, in spite of all his hard work and the inspiring lead given by Hezekiah, still characterized most of his nation.

### Late Isaiah?

Again the modernists, with their theories about a Captivity "Isaiah", or a post-Captivity "Isaiah", find themselves with their backs to the wall, only to suffer summary execution! Without labouring the issue, the following points may be made briefly:

1. There is here a picture of utter corruption of priests and prophets (56:9-12) which has nothing to match it in the time of Cyrus or the years following.
2. The vivid withering censure of wholesale indulgence in the old Canaanitish cults (57:1-13), with their encouragement of wholesale sexual promiscuity, can be made to refer to no period after the time of Zedekiah. As a description of the hangover from the evil days of Ahaz, every detail fits. The pointed allusion to Moloch-worship (king, Melech=Moloch; 57:9; 2 Kgs. 16:3) demands a pre-Captivity reference.
3. Jeremiah 12:9 is an unmistakable quotation from Isaiah 56:9. (The quotes from Isaiah in Jer. 10,11 forbid a reversal of the argument!) The words were again splendidly appropriate in his day, but not later.

4. Who is "the righteous man" (57:1) who is perishing as this prophecy is written? Here the modernist gropes helplessly and unhelpfully. But reference to Hezekiah fits the context perfectly.

### Isaiah's own time

This approach is valid for the entire section (56:9 - 57:13). The call to beasts of the field to devour is a fitting figure for God's use of heathen nations as His instruments of judgment against His people (cp. 5:29; 7:18; 31:4). It was the fulfilment of a curse God had threatened: "I will send wild beasts among you" (Lev. 26:22).

The watchmen — blind, ignorant, dumb, slumbering, drunken (v.9-12) — are the religious leaders who found it pleasanter to go with the tide of apostasy rather than to seek dutifully to arrest it.

So, because of this, there was Assyrian "evil to come" (57:1), and it looked as though nothing could save the righteous king who, bearing the iniquity of his people, was incurable and perishing — a broken-hearted man who had done his best and apparently failed. The natural perversity of the people asserted itself, and instead of a Day of Atonement or a Feast of the Lord there was an orgy of pagan debauchery. As in the later days of Josiah, reformation had gone only skin-deep. The basic character of the nation was not changed by having a king who found his chiefest joy in an unquenchable devotion to the praise of Jehovah.

### N.T. Allusions

But it is when, with the help of the NT., one turns to the corrupt days of the first century A.D. (and the twentieth) that the vigour of this prophecy makes its impression.

As decay made its mark in the life of the early church, these words of Isaiah took on a new and solemn meaning. Foreseeing this, indeed knowing the evil to be already at work, Paul warned the "watchmen" against the inroads of "grievous wolves not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29-31). Those who should be shepherds (*ro'im*; v.11) or seers (*ra'im*) turned out to be *ra'im*, bad men! "They all look to their own way" — here are the familiar words: "We have turned every one to his own way" (53:6 s.w.).

The greed and money-making of the temple (Mk. 11:15) came into the ecclesia also: "every one for his gain," in the spirit of "the hireling whose own the sheep are not" (Jn. 10:13).

In both his epistles Peter seems to imply the special relevance of this Isaiah passage. He warned Gentile converts against the pernicious allurements of the old life "when you walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine...and abominable idolatries" (1 Pet. 4:3). Instead of these, "watch unto prayer" (v.7). Instead of "turning every one to his own way," let there be a "returning to the shepherd and watchdog of your souls" (2:25). The phrases do not quote Isaiah, but are very like his language.

And Jude, so ready to follow Peter's lead, makes pungent double allusion to Isaiah:

## Isaiah 56

10. sleeping, lying down.  
 11. Greedy dogs which can never have enough; these are shepherds...

## Jude

8. Dreamers, defiling the flesh\*.  
 12. RV: Shepherds that without fear feed themselves.

The warning given by the Lord Jesus himself of coming evils was necessary then and again in the end of this age. "Eating and drinking with the drunken" was his parabolic phrase (Mt.24:49) — in Isaiah: "Come ye, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and *tomorrow shall be as this day*" (v.12). What is this but Peter's warning about men who blithely assume that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Pet. 3:4).

So, just as in so many other places the messages of the prophets find their most striking fulfillments in the end of the Jewish age and the coming of the Lord, so also the Scripture warns against spiritual decay, cynicism, and self-indulgence among God's people. Then, it warned in vain. Does it sound forth today just as ineffectually?

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\* The correspondence here with Isaiah (LXX) is much closer than might appear. The leading words are identical; and Jude's "defiling the flesh" interprets the other phrase admirably.

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## 57 (1). "Their whorish idolatry" (v.1-13a)

The heading of this chapter is not taken from the text of Isaiah 57 but from the standard summary at the head of the AV text (some of these are quite masterly). This paragraph of the prophecy is so obviously about Israel's "whorish idolatry" as to make it one of the most straightforward Isaiah wrote. And yet, by a strange paradox, it is also one of the most difficult, for it abounds in obscure phraseology, double meanings and euphemisms. It seems very likely that Isaiah was harnessing the slang of his time to the invective of the Word of the Lord, employing phrases which were luminous in his day but which, like the fashionable jargon of two centuries ago, have now lost their shine. The commentators, usually preferring a few slick emendations rather than making confession that they are groping in the dark, here seem more ready than usual to admit defeat.

Once again the modernists are "up against it" in more ways than one, for verses 3-9 so obviously have no relevance to the end of the Babylonian captivity, or later, that they see their cherished Second (and Third) Isaiah dogma in rough water. Wade, for instance, admits that "the nature of the charge made seems incompatible with an exilic date", and yet somehow manages to have a post-exilic prophet writing as though with the standpoint of a contemporary of Isaiah. Such artificiality!

The opening verses, with their strange oscillation between singular and plural, are somewhat mystifying until the *aba,aba* formation is recognized. The "righteous man" who is perishing is king Hezekiah, who was told: "set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live" (38:1). He is being "taken away because of\* wickedness," the sin of the nation; the Lord laid upon him "the iniquity of us all" (as in 53:6). Yet here there is also a prophecy of recovery: "he shall enter into peace...walking in his uprightness" (v.2).

At that very time there was anguish of soul among Hezekiah's contemporaries,

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\* Cp. the Hebrew in Dt. 28:20; Jer. 4:2; 7:12; Hos. 10:15. Yet 2 Kgs 22:20 seems to imply that the prophetess Huldah, faced with double meaning in this passage, read it the other way.

besieged by the Assyrians in Jerusalem: "The sinners in Zion are afraid...who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire (of the Glory of the Lord)...He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly, (cp. Ps. 15:2)...Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty" (33:14,15,17).

For all his burning enthusiasm, Hezekiah had not been able to carry more than a fraction of the nation with him: "The godly man is perished out of the land: and there is none upright among men" (Mic. 7:2).

### Israel at its worst

So, in high indignation, Isaiah turns on those who took the name of Jehovah on their lips but yet gave themselves to evil, indulging in the worst excesses of the native Canaanite religions which had lingered on through many generations because the austere precepts of Deuteronomy (e.g. 20:16-18) had gone neglected.

There is no more excoriating exposure of evil to be found in this long prophecy than the explosion in these ten verses. The gist of their meaning is not to be missed by the most inexperienced reader. But the precise point of some phrases eludes the insight of scores of commentators.

The opening words set the tone: "ye sons of the sorceress, seed of the adulterer\* and the whore" (v.3). The references to sorcery and whoredom may be intended to recall Jezebel, priestess of the Phoenician Baal, who died enquiring scornfully: "Is it peace?" The prophet's answer here is: "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (v.21).

The mention of "a wide mouth" and "drawing out the tongue" may be a further allusion to this evil woman who spoke against Jehovah and His prophet with an almost admirable self-confidence. But more likely it is a caustic euphemism for the vile practices\*\* now pictured in Isaiah's cartoon, for that scornful enquiry: "Against whom (*al-mi*) do you sport, or indulge yourselves?" seems to call for answer with *almah*, a virgin!

Double meanings of this sort come thick and fast in this purple passage\*\*\*. The prophets of God knew how to use this weapon in savage satire long before low-grade BBC comedians turned it into cheap jokes to get a crude belly laugh from lascivious audiences. But these "children of transgression (i.e. born wicked), seed of falsehood (the serpent's own progeny)" (v.4) deserved all the bitter attacks and withering exposures Isaiah could make.

There was no sexual indulgence or perversion which these people of Israel had not taken over from Canaanites and Phoenicians. Macalister's excavations at Gezer opened the eyes of the archaeologists to the corruption which went by the name of religion there. And children were slain in sacrifice (v.5) — the "family planning" and abortion of those days! — and were passed through the fire to "horrid Moloch" the king (v.9)\*\*\*\*

The indulgence to which this people gave themselves seemed without limit — under "holy" trees (v.5), in the clefts of the rocks (v.5), in high places on the hill tops (v.7), as well as behind closed doors (v.8), which according to Jewish custom should have carried reminders of consecration to the Lord (Dt. 6:9).

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\* Cp. Mt. 16:4; "an evil and adulterous generation." There is a good deal in Isaiah 57 appropriate to the events of this chapter.

\*\* "Israel in the Wilderness" H.A.W. p. 165.

\*\*\* There are more examples in v.5,6a,8bde,9.

\*\*\*\* It is even possible that Hezekiah only came to the throne because his older brothers died in this way! (2 Kgs 16:3)

Doors which at Passover should have been marked with a special "remembrance" of the Lord and His great deliverance had become instead a cover for that which was shameful \*.

### No dependence on the Lord

There was also political as well as moral apostasy. The exhortations of Hezekiah and his prophets to lean on the God of their fathers in the time of the Assyrian threat went unheeded. Instead, "thou didst send thy messengers afar off (into Egypt, for instance; 30:1-5; 31:1), and didst debase thyself even unto hell...yet thou saidst not, There is no hope (there)" (v.9,10). Yet it was tacitly assumed that there was no hope *in God*: "Thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, In returning (to Me) and rest (in Me) shall ye be saved; in (this) quietness and confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not. But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses..." (30:15,16).

The leaders of Israel, fearing the enemy and not the Lord their God, went in for diplomatic lying (v.11), instead of remembering with faith God's ancient deliverances of His people.\*\*

So Isaiah turned on them with heavy sarcasm: "I will declare thy 'righteousness' and thy 'works'; for they shall not profit thee\*\*\* " (v.12). Such a contrast with the "righteousness" (salvation) which God offered, and by and by provided! (56:1; 51:5; 46:13). "When thou criest, let those whom thou hast gathered together (false gods and human allies) deliver thee" (v. 13).

But instead "the wind shall carry them away," leaving those who put their faith in Jehovah safe and assured — "they shall inherit my holy mountain."

Now, for the time being, Isaiah has done with correction and scolding, and he turns with relief to the encouragement of God's faithful remnant. But in duty he must return to this unsavoury task. Whilst his people are as they are, he *must*, though it be against all personal inclination.

It looks as though the prophet Daniel, a great student of the earlier books of his Bible, chose to explain Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Isaiah's language, when he told how "the wind carried them away", leaving the stone to become a great mountain, a holy mountain (cp. Dan. 2:35 with Is. 57:13 and 41:15,16).

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\* The Hebrew word for "remembrance" (v.8) also means "male".

\*\* "Remembered me not" could read "remembered not my sign", with allusion to the Lord's Memorial Name, which guaranteed Israel's continuance for ever.

\*\*\* 1 Cor. 13:3 is the nearest that Paul ever came to quoting this fine passage against justification by works. Why didn't he make more use of it against the Judaists, one wonders?

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## 57 (2). "A contrite and humble spirit" (v.13b-21)

Even though the tone of this paragraph is in such sharp contrast with what has preceded it, and even though the rabbis chose to begin here the synagogue Haphtarah for the Day of Atonement, there can be no doubt that this section does run on from the first half of the chapter.

There is the same repetition of singulars and plurals as in verses 1,2, alluding to Hezekiah and his faithful remnant:

- 13. He that putteth his trust in me
  - 14. My people.
- 15. Him that is of a humble and contrite spirit.
  - 15. The humble (pl.)...the contrite ones.
- 16. Thy spirit.
  - 16. the souls which I have made.
- 18. Comforts unto him.
  - 18. and to his mourners.

### Hezekiah and his faithful remnant

The Hezekiah reference in these verses goes easily enough. He was the leader who "put his trust in me." The God-given reward for this faith was that he did "possess the land" overrun by invincible Assyrians, and he did "inherit God's holy mountain" through a miraculous healing which enabled him on the third day to "go up unto the house of the Lord" (2 Kgs. 20:5).

Thus "the heart of the contrite ones" — those who responded to the appeal to "prepare the way (back to God), and to take up the stumblingblock out of the way" — was revived.

Nevertheless, immediately after this surge of faith and zeal for Jehovah there came an estrangement, for Hezekiah, dazzled by the allurements of an influential political alliance and egged on by his less godly advisors, signed a treaty of friendship and mutual aid with the men sent by the wily king of Babylon.

Hezekiah should have known better. "For the iniquity of his covetousness (the "present" sent by Merodach-baladan, and the allurements of political advantage), God was wroth" (v.17). So all the time that negotiations were in progress, Isaiah kept away from court: "I hid me" (v.17; 39:3). But as soon as the men of Babylon were on their way home, then came blunt denunciation from both Isaiah and Micah — and immediate repentance and collapse of spirit on the part of the king. Hezekiah "feared the Lord, and besought the Lord, and the Lord repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against him" (Jer. 26:19).

Because of this repentance, because the king "went on, turning back (to God) in the way of his heart" (v.17), the Lord "restored comforts" to him and to the people who likewise mourned their lapse (v.18; 2 Chr. 32:26): "Peace, peace (with God), to him that is far off, and to him that is near...and I will heal him" (v.19). But for the ambitious Merodach-baladan, restless and turbulent as the troubled sea, no peace!

In the light of this contemporary reference of the prophet's words it is easy to understand why Isaiah should hark back to the early impressive vision he had had of the glory of the Lord:

<b>Isaiah 57</b>	<b>Isaiah 6</b>
15. The high and lofty* One, Whose name is Holy	1. The Lord, high and lifted up* (s.w.)
17. I hid me.	3. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.
15. I dwell with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit —	2. With twain (of his wings) he covered his face.
15. to revive the heart of the contrite ones.	5. Woe is me...because I am a man of unclean lips.
	7. Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged.

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\* This Hebrew Niphal must imply: lifted up on the wings of the cherubim (and what they symbolize).

## 500 Isaiah Part 3

The experience of Isaiah as prophetic representative of his nation had been repeated by Hezekiah as their royal representative.

### Christ and his faithful remnant

The meaning of these splendid words for the believer in Christ far surpasses any significance they may have had for the faithful remnant in ancient days.

"Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us," demanded Philip, eager to see a theophany comparable to that revealed to Moses in Mt. Sinai (Jn. 14:8). The theophany was there in Christ his Lord — the Holy One, dwelling with "him that is of a contrite and humble spirit." Jesus was himself the bruised one (s.w. as 'contrite'; 53:5), humbly taking on himself the form of a suffering servant.

This very fact made him a stumblingblock to his people — "to the Jews a stumblingblock" (1 Cor. 1:23). But the prophet's call is: "Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way, O my people" (v. 14). Later on, Isaiah repeated these words, only substituting for "stumblingblock" the inspiring word "standard, ensign" (62:10). For the true people of God, Jesus became this: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).

For all who give loyalty to this standard, reproach is rolled away: "I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth, when the spirit fails before me, and the souls which I have made" (v.16). For such, "he will not always chide, neither keep his anger for ever" (Ps. 103:9; cp. 85:5; Is. 28:28).

### The rich young ruler

The man who came to Jesus asking: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" has provided a fine illustration of estrangement brought about by a man's unwillingness to yield full loyalty to the appeal of Christ. The text of the LXX version has some remarkable coincidence with the gospel record of that encounter. Also, when it is recognized that there is fair evidence for identifying the rich young ruler with Barnabas (see "Gospels", ch. 148), the coincidences become even more remarkable:

"For the iniquity of his covetousness ('great possessions'; Lk. 18:23) for a little while (i.e. until Acts 4:36) I grieved him (s.w. Mk. 10:22)...and he went (away) sorrowful (s.w. Mk. 10:22)...I have seen his ways (Lk. 18:24), and I healed him, and exhorted him, and have given him true exhortation (Acts 4:36 s.w.); peace upon peace to them that are far off\* (the gospel to the Gentiles committed to Barnabas and Paul), and to them that are nigh (they preached to Jews also)," (v.17-19).

The principles behind this call of Barnabas stand for all who would "inherit eternal life".

But the wicked, whether he be Sennacherib "casting up mire and dirt" against the God of Israel, or whether he be Merodach-baladan "casting up (political) mire and dirt" against Assyria, are all "like the troubled sea, for it cannot rest" (v.20). God's alternative: "Peace, peace," sounds very much like Siloam. Better the cool refreshing underground waters of Hezekiah's tunnel than the mire and dirt of a Godless troubled sea. Teaching the same lesson, Jesus said: "Peace, be still," to the wild waters of Galilee (Mk. 4:37-39). Only he has the power to do this. Yet Isaiah's phrase is: "saith my God"!

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\* Used of (a) Jewish dispersion; Dan. 9:7. (b) Gentiles; Eph. 2:17.

## 58 (1). Fasting to the Lord (v.1-7)

It has already been observed that the second synagogue reading for the Day of Atonement is Isaiah 57:14 - 58:14. This is an admirable Scripture to combine with Leviticus 16, for there can be no manner of doubt that the prophet was building all this exhortation to his people on the familiar Day of Atonement service — probably on an outstanding Day of Atonement in which king Hezekiah called the people to repentance.

Jeremiah 26:18,19 has a remarkable reminiscence, spoken a hundred years later, of this occasion which had left its mark in the memory of the nation. Evidently when the treaty was signed with Merodach-baladan, not only did Isaiah rebuke the king but also Micah denounced impending judgment because of it (Mic. 3:12). The effect of this prophetic disapproval was to bring about an immediate dramatic change in the attitude of Hezekiah — he "feared the Lord, and intreated his favour." Thus the threatened judgment was deferred: "the Lord repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against them." So once again Hezekiah's intrinsic godliness and wholesome example was the salvation of the nation\*.

It would seem that Isaiah's call to celebrate a true Day of Atonement was heeded, and thus a God-sent disaster was averted — for the time being, at any rate. "There shall be peace and truth in my days" (39:8) has its echoes in 57:17-19 (peace) and 59:14,15 (truth). And 57:21 ("no peace") links easily with Mic. 3:5 which immediately precedes 3:12.

### Allusions to the Day of Atonement

This prophecy repeatedly makes use of language appropriate to Yom Kippur:

1. "I dwell in the high and holy place" (57:15) provides a pointed reminder that on this great Day there was a special offering in the Holy of Holies.
2. "With him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." There is reference here to the great multitude of the people praying in penitence in the outer court.
3. "I create the fruit of the lips" (57:19) — the high priestly benediction pronounced only after God had signified His pleasure at the people's penitence and His acceptance of their sacrifice.
4. "Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near" — "The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace." And this blessing was available to Jew and Gentile alike (Lev. 16:29) — both "near" and "far off". Contrast v.21 "No peace to the wicked."
5. "Lift up thy voice like a trumpet" (58:1) alludes to the Shofar sounded at the Feast of Trumpets ten days earlier and also to bring in the Day of Atonement itself.
6. "Show my people their transgressions." This was, of course, the outstanding day in the year when remembrance was made of sins committed.
7. The sustained allusions to fasting (58:3-6) are difficult to make sense of apart from the Day of Atonement, for this was the only fast prescribed in the Law of Moses. "We have afflicted our souls" (v.3) comes straight from Lev. 16:29,31.

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\* On this extraordinary episode, see H.Gt., ch. 20.

8. "An *acceptable* day to the Lord" (58:5) employs a word which very commonly refers to one of the Feasts of the Lord or to an acceptable sacrifice.
9. "Let the oppressed go free" (58:6) alludes to the fact that the Year of Jubilee (the release of slaves) began on the evening of the Day of Atonement (Lev. 25:9). The year of deliverance from Sennacherib's hordes was the only Year of Jubilee mentioned in the Bible (2 Kgs 19:29)\*.
10. "Then shall thy light break forth as the morning" (58:8); this expression describes the manifestation of the Shekinah Glory over the mercy seat (cp. Ps. 80:1). "The glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward" links this with the pillar of cloud and fire which guided and protected Israel in their deliverance from Egypt — "the pillar of the cloud stood behind them" (Ex. 14:19).
11. "Thy light shall rise in obscurity (the darkness of the Holy of Holies), and thy darkness shall be as the noon day" (58:10) — another allusion to the Shekinah Glory.
12. "Thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not" (58:11). This is probably to be read with reference to the early rains which come on in Palestine very soon after the Feast of Tabernacles.

### Formality and insincerity

The spiritual tone of the nation was normally, alas, far below that which Isaiah called for. There were plenty of sins to be brought home to the unresponding conscience of the house of Jacob (v.1). "They seek me daily, and delight to know my ways," the prophet declared with an irony which surely bit deep. But they went through the motions of religious observance, and accordingly felt pleased with themselves. So, in sending His prophets with such a biting message of disapproval, the Almighty was surely not being fair to them. So, they thought: "wherefore have we fasted...and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?" (v.3). Here was boiler-plate self-satisfaction. How was it to be dented?

Determined to take the shine off this complacency, Isaiah went into action with sledgehammer hometruths: "Behold, in the day of your fast ye find (your own) pleasure, and oppress\*\* all your labourers (v.3 RVm; see AVm)...Wilt thou\*\*\* call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?" — going through the motions of religiosity, but without any true spirit of repentance or re-dedication.

The God of Israel sought, and still seeks, a different kind of devotion from His people:

"Is it not sharing your food with the hungry, taking the homeless poor into your house, clothing the naked when you meet them and never evading a duty to your kinsfolk? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn and soon you will grow healthy like a wound newly healed; your own righteousness shall be your vanguard and the glory of the Lord your rearguard." (Is. 58:7,8 NEB).

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\* There are hints of another Year of Jubilee in David's reign. Reckoning back 7 x 49 from BC 700 (Hezekiah's Jubilee), this would be BC 1043, early in David's reign.

\*\* Another of Isaiah's caustic puns — *tin-g'su* (exact, oppress) suggests *tin-g'shu* (draw near to God).

\*\*\* Note the effective personal appeal behind this sudden change to a singular pronoun.

This eloquent passage surely applied the judicial pronouncement which dominates Christ's own picture of the Last Judgment:

"I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat:  
 I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink:  
 I was a stranger, and ye took me in:  
 Naked, and ye clothed me:  
 I was sick, and ye visited me:  
 I was in prison, and ye came unto me" (Mt. 25:35,36).

The people of Isaiah's day were far from reaching such standards of unselfconscious philanthropy. And to this day the nation is given to the same comforting conviction, that, provided the forms of religion are attended to, there need be no worries about personal dedication of spirit.

Even the New Israel is not untarnished in this respect. What good is there in a routine of meetings, if they become just a spiritual soporific, soothing when they should stir or stimulate, reaching to the depths of the soul?

## 58 (2). Repentance, then Blessing (v.8-14)

The theme of the Day of Atonement runs on through much of this chapter and the next:

1. There is mention of "the Glory of the Lord", identified with the Shekinah Glory which led Israel out of Egypt and which guided the people in the wilderness (cp. 52:12): "thy righteousness (the glory a sign of divine acceptance) shall go before thee; the Glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward." (v.8). It was this Glory which shone forth from above the mercy seat.
2. "Thy light (cp. 60:1) shall break forth as the morning (i.e. the glory of a radiant dawn), and thy healing (the forgiveness of sins) shall spring forth speedily" (v.8).
3. Those key terms "spring forth...righteousness...glory" come together in what is demonstrably a psalm for the Day of Atonement (85:9-11).
4. "Then shalt thou call (the communal prayer of the people whilst the high priest was in the sanctuary), and the Lord shall answer" (v.9).
5. "Then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day" (v.10) — allusion to the shining of the Glory in the utter darkness of the Holy of Holies.

These allusions continue into chapter 59:

6. "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you" (v.2). This last phrase looks back to Isaiah's vision of cherubim with covered faces (6:2) — they are called "seraphim" (fiery ones) because the characteristic cherubim faces are covered.
7. "We wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness (the manifestation of the Glory in response to the high priest's ministration of sacrifice), but we walk in darkness" (v.9).
8. "Transgressions...sins...iniquities..." (v.1 2); the same word as in Lev. 16:21.
9. In v.9-15 there is a long detailed confession of national sinfulness, but with no means of salvation, no righteousness to cover all this sin (v.16).
10. "The way of peace they know not" (v.8) alludes to the high-priestly blessing: "...and give thee peace."

11. "Your sins have hid his face from you" contrasts sharply with "the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon thee"!
12. Immediately after Paul's quotation of v.7,8 (in Rom. 3:15) there comes the only New Testament mention of "mercy seat" (v.25 Gk.), except for Heb. 9:5.
13. "Your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath uttered perverseness" (v.3), instead of the solemn prayer appropriate to God's holy day.
14. "Hands defiled with blood" (v.3) makes a grim contrast with the finger of the high priest anointing the sacrificial blood on the mercy seat.

#### **If...then...**

The Lord's appeal through His prophet is both plain and eloquent: Cease this dependance on formal religion; let your religion be one of the spirit, expressing itself in heartfelt acts of brotherly kindness to your fellows — "then shall thy light break forth as the morning...the Glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward" (v.8); in other words God will supply an open sign of His approval, and thereafter abundant blessings will rain down on you. "Thou shalt cry, and he (the Lord) shall say Here I am" (v.9).

But if God's Israel would enjoy such close communion with their God, there must be change of heart. That powerful little word "if" comes into play. Let them abandon the yoke of oppression, the putting forth of the finger in trickery (or criticism?), and all indulgence in wicked talk (v.9). Instead, self-denial — bestowing on the hungry that which you would like for your own self-indulgence (v.10 RVm). *If* these things are done, then with all confidence you may look for an open token of heaven's approval (v. 10b).

And not just one sign. The blessings of God will multiply, just as they did for Israel in the wilderness: "The Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought" (other wilderness allusions in v.6,8).

"He shall make strong thy bones" (v.11). Here is yet another of Isaiah's clever double meanings, for by simply splitting one word in two this unexpectedly declares: "a Tree shall cause thy dead to be released"! And the next phrase speaks of Paradise restored: "thy soul shall be like a watered garden."

"Eternal waste places" (v.12), so-called because their desolation seems to be everlasting, shall be built. These "desolations of many generations" (61:4) can and will be restored. "And he shall call thee, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths for the sabbath (the sabbath year, which began at the Day of Atonement?; Lev. 25:9)." It is the repairing of breaches in a water conduit which restores a path for the waters, so that there is indeed a watered garden and a spring of water which does not fail.

"He — the Lord — shall call thee" by these gracious names, but in fact it is *He* who pours forth the blessings. What makes thee "a repairer of the breach" is thy repentance and thy keeping of a true fast unto the Lord. All the rest is done by the Lord Himself. And this stands as true for the New Israel of the twentieth century as for the Israel of twenty-seven ancient centuries ago.

#### **Its own reward**

The Almighty's eloquent "if" comes in yet again: "If thou turn away thy foot from a sabbath\*-of-doing-thy-pleasure on my holy days (as in 56:2,4,6), if thou call the

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\* There is surely some link here with 2 Kgs. 16:18, but it is not easy to see just what. Eccl. 5:1 suggests the temple service.

sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking words (i.e. talking tittle-tattle, or business; Am. 8:5): *then*\* shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord " (v.13,14).

At first sight there is something odd about this conditional promise, for — paraphrased — it seems to say: "If you take delight in serving God, then you will take delight in serving God."

This is not word-spinning, but the enunciation of an important spiritual truth: "To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundance." The man who finds pleasure in devotion and service to God finds more and more pleasure in such a life as time goes on.

Centuries before, the prophet Samuel taught the same way of life: "If ye will fear the Lord, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the Lord your God" (1 Sam. 12:14).

But, alas, the converse of this proposition is also true; "From him that hath not is taken away even that which he hath." An endless litter of spiritual wrecks bears witness, not the least impressive of these being national Israel.

Isaiah was guided to harness the vivid words of Moses' last solemn warning to his people: "I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth (in the cherubim chariot of the Lord), and feed\*\* thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father"(v.14; cp. Dt. 32:13,9).

The tag of divine guarantee is attached to this alluring prospect: "the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

\* Very emphatic, as in v.8.

\*\* The Gk. word for "sop" (Jn. 13:26) has a very close link with LXX usage here. Did Jesus quote these words to Judas? The next paragraph (59:1-8) could hardly be more apt.

## 59 (1). A Searing Denunciation (v.1 - 8)

The sequence of basic ideas in this part of Isaiah is impressive in its inevitability:

Chapter 56:	Do judgment and justice, and so experience God's salvation.
Chapter 57:	Israel chooses instead either a foul religion or else —
Chapter 58:	the right religion in the wrong spirit.
Chapter 59:1-8	Such sin makes God's salvation impossible.
Chapter 59:9-15	Repentance at last!
Chapter 59:16-21	Salvation at last!

Certain other features of this very fine chapter call for attention.

The variation in pronouns breaks it down into five distinct paragraphs.

v.1 -3:	The prophet's apostrophe to a sinful nation.
v.4-8:	His withering description of their corruption.
v.9-15:	The nation's abject repentance.
v.16-19:	The prophet tells how his God comes to the rescue.
v.20,21:	God's own promise of Messiah and his work.

Another remarkable characteristic is the emphatic repetition of "judgement" and "righteousness", five times each in v.1 -17 RV. In this context both words signify the same personal moral quality: "judgement" is that which will stand up to God's judgment — His

scrutiny and assessment. These two words frequently come together in Isaiah, sometimes with the meaning just indicated (as in 58:2), sometimes as synonyms for God's salvation (as in 51:4,5), and at least once in both senses (56:1).

### A sinful nation

Is there any part of Isaiah's prophecy which begins in more telling fashion than this?:

"Behold, the Lord's *hand* is not shortened, that it cannot save, neither his *ear* heavy that it cannot hear...your sins have hid his *face* from you.\*" Powerful anthropomorphism, to match the indictment of Israel: "Your *hands* are defiled with blood (cp. 1:15), and your *fingers* with iniquity; your *lips* have spoken lies, your *tongue* hath muttered perverseness" (v.3).

Here is the answer to the self-righteous remonstrance of the nation: "Wherefore have we fasted, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?" (58:3). It was not God's fault. By their perversity they had bound him hand and foot. He was helpless to help them. "Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?" At present, alas, the only possible answer to these rhetorical questions was only too evident, an answer supplied by their own hypocrisy and wilfulness.

Nations depending on other gods found them "short of hand" (37:27mg), powerless to withstand the inroads of Assyrian might, and behold, Jehovah was now in a like sorry plight!

Instead of the cloud of sweet-smelling incense which shrouded their high-priest from the nuclear radiation of the Lord's Shekinah Glory (Lev. 16:12,13), "your sins have hidden his face from you" — a smokescreen of horror!

The indictment that follows makes it evident that even the influence of good king Hezekiah had had a reforming effect on only a fraction of the nation. The evils of earlier days were not readily purged out.

"None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies" (v.4). In an earlier exposure, Isaiah had declaimed against the same cynicism that turned law into lawlessness: "They make a man an offender by the Word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate (Isaiah himself?), and turn aside the just with the rubbish (*tohu*, as in 59:4)" (29:21).

### Telling metaphors

In this later diatribe Isaiah piles up one vivid figure of speech on another: "They conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity\*\*. They hatch cockatrice eggs...he that eateth of their eggs dieth (poisoned!), and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper" (v.4,5). Here is all the quiet evil of the serpent, as in Eden.\*\*\*

And as the sinners in Eden \*\*\*\* sought to fashion garments of their own devising so also these: "they weave the spider's web" — intricate, clever past imagining, something to marvel at; nevertheless — "their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their (own) works" (v.5,6; cp. 30:1; Job 20:12-16). To cover his own sin, a man needs that which no amount of human

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\* What a contrast with 53:3!

\*\* A quotation from Ps. 7:14, which inveighs against the traitor who plots against the life of God's Beloved.

\*\*\* Phrase after phrase in v.2-8 seems to hark back to Gen. 3,4.

\*\*\*\* It is even possible that the worship of the brazen serpent, stamped out by Hezekiah, had secretly come into being again. In Gehenna, at the end of Solomon's conduit coming in from south of Bethlehem there is the Dragon's well.

ingenuity can contrive — an imputed righteousness. "The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in" (28:20) — different metaphors, but the same idea!

There may be another of Isaiah's double meanings here. For the word for "cockatrice" strangely suggests "north"; and "viper" is linked with "south" (30:6). Then was Isaiah having a clout at the schemings of the pro-Assyria and pro-Egypt parties at court?

The figure changes again: "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood (as though desperate to quench a great thirst!)... \*wasting and destruction (51:19) are in their highways (by which they make pilgrimage to Zion!). The way of peace they know not...they have made them crooked paths" (v.7,8).

It is noteworthy that Paul uses these words to establish that "Jews and Gentiles are all under sin, as it is written..." (Rom. 3:9). But the passage cited is about Jewry — and so also all his other texts here. Then has Paul proved only half his case? Not half, but all of it, for if his point stands for Jews, it most certainly stands for benighted Gentiles also.

Isaiah had now said enough. His words had gone home. The long wail of misery and repentance which his next paragraph records proves this. But before that can be considered, it is desirable to go back and examine the remarkable NT. connections of the words just reviewed.

### New Testament applications

John the Baptist, ever using Isaiah's prophecy as his text-book, angrily reproached his hypocritical contemporaries as a "generation of vipers" (Lk. 3:7), and his Lord took up the same reproach (Mt. 12:34).

In another place Jesus less angrily seems to have echoed the same passage: "If he (the son) shall ask an egg, will he (the father) give him a scorpion?" (Lk. 11:12) — a figure for a biting retort? Man may do this, but not the Father in heaven. Again using Isaiah John warned his hearers that the crooked paths they had made for themselves (59:8) must be made straight (40:3,4; Lk. 3:5). It was a denunciation taken up by an angry Paul against the sorcerer who would impede the progress of the gospel: "O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil (seed of the serpent)...wilt thou not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13:10).

Jesus also: "If thou hadst *known...in* this thy day the (ways) unto *peace!* but now they are *hid from thine eyes*" (Lk. 19:42). These are Isaiah's words: "The way of peace they know not...we grope for the wall like the blind, who hath no eyes" (59:8,10). And alas, to this day blind Israel still gropes for its Wailing Wall, but finds there no true repentance.

Jesus made another subtle use of this passage. "Peace" (*Shalōm*) is Siloam. The way of Siloam they knew not, but to the blind man (Jn. 9) Jesus showed the way, so that he who "*looked* for light", begging for it, "walked in darkness" no more, but saw "the light of the world."

Against such a NT. background as this, can it be doubted that this pregnant passage was also intended as a prophecy of the trial of Christ before the Sanhedrin?:

"Your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have

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\* In Rom. 3:16 Paul omits the powerful phrase about "thoughts of iniquity" — because he has already covered this in 1:21?

spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity...Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood (Judas' phrase! Mt. 27:4)." No wonder Paul quoted these words about Jews and Gentiles being alike under sin (Rom. 3:9,15), for the condemnation of Christ came only from a conspiracy of crude injustice, manipulated by Israelite and Roman working together.

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## 59 (2). Confession and repentance at last (v.9-15)

At last appeal and denunciation have their effect. The change of heart God has long asked for is now evident. The historical occasion was probably the repentance which ensued when Micah and Isaiah denounced the Babylonian alliance (39:5ff; Jer. 26:18,19).<sup>\*</sup> Always "God's salvation is near to come" (56:1), but until the people's frame of mind is right He still holds off.

Now, by a moving confession of worthlessness God is brought nigh and the promised blessings of His Year of Jubilee (2 Kgs. 19:29) are made sure. The words read like the high priest's recital of the people's repentance as he ministered in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement.<sup>\*\*</sup> "Ye shall afflict your souls," commanded the Law of Moses (Lev. 16:29) and now, in inner truth — and not just in the outward formality of fasting — the people did so, to the glory of God.

The curses of God's disapproval had overtaken them (v.9: s.w. Dt. 18:15,2), but now, thanks to a change of heart, His "judgment" and "righteousness" (His *salvation*) were soon to overtake them instead.

"We wait for light, but behold darkness; for the brightness<sup>\*\*\*</sup>(of God's Shekinah Glory), but we walk in thick darkness." (v.9; cp. 58:10). Here is a realisation of helplessness. "We grope for the wall like the blind." The words are straight from the Deuteronomy catalogue of curses (28:29), and their quotation here is an open admission of failure wilful and perverse. Thus God's chosen people find themselves like men of Sodom blinded by the Glory of God (Gen. 19:11), like blind men leading the blind into ignominy (Mt. 15:14). And proud intellectual philosophers of Athens were in the same helpless condition until they set themselves to "feel after Him ('grobe', s.w. LXX as in Acts 17:27), and find Him."

### The Crucifixion

But far more important than the experience of these Athenians was that of others in the same generation, foretold here in unmistakable terms: "We stumble at noon day as in the night (about the sixth hour, darkness over all the Land till the ninth hour; (Lk. 23:44)...We roar all like bears<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>, and mourn sore like doves (all the people...beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned; Lk. 23:48)...conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood (false witnesses!). And judgement is turned away backward...truth (Pilate!) is fallen in the broad place (the Praetorium)...and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey" (v. 10-15).

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<sup>\*</sup> The concluding verses of ch.59 may imply an earlier occasion when the Assyrian attack was threatening.

<sup>\*\*</sup> The pronouns echo 53:3-6.

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Heb. *nogah*, always has this reference; s.w. 60:3; 62:1. Here, it is an intensive plural.

<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> In Hebrew another play on words, suggesting: "those with sorrow of heart" (Lev. 26:16).

Now let the spotlight move to focus on Saul of Tarsus!: "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood...we grope for the wall like the blind...and we grope as if we had no eyes; we stumble at noon day (Acts 22:6) as in the night...speaking oppression and revolt...he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey; and the Lord saw, and it displeased him...therefore his Arm brought salvation unto him...So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun" (v.7,10,14-16,19). In plenty of places, and not just here, the OT. has prophecies not only about Christ, but also about Christ's men!

### On trial

The figure of a court of law is almost commonplace in Isaiah (41:1,21-29; 43:8-13,26; 44:7; 45:20-25; 50:8; 58:2). Here once again it is elaborately worked out. "Our transgressions make accusation\* before thee, and our sins testify against us...And judgement is turned away backward, and justice (righteousness) standeth afar off; for truth is fallen in the broad place (the temple area where the trials were held in public, 2 Chr. 29:4 RV)...he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the Lord saw, and it displeased him that there was no judgement...no intercessor, therefore..." (v.12-16).

The point here is simple: No amount of human effort or cleverness, no reliance on legalism or the keeping of rules, can acquit mankind from a sweeping and utterly justified condemnation before God. Verse 13 compresses the proven indictment into "Guilty on two counts — crime against God and against one's neighbour":

- a. "In transgressing and lying against the Lord, and departing away from our God;"
- b. "speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood."

From this guilt there is no escape by any human means. Even "he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey. And the Lord saw (this helplessness), and it displeased him" — as indeed it must. Was His great Purpose, begun in Eden to come to nought? So He went into action.

All this is anthropomorphism, of course, for there was "a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." But how reassuring to the Lord's faithful discouraged remnant! They may not be able to expunge the horror of their own sins, but such an open and frank confession as this prophecy expresses, cannot fail to harness the pity and the mercy and the effective action of the Redeemer-God of Israel.

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\* Deriving the verb from *riv*, accuse, rather than *ravav*, multiply.

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## 59 (3). Rescue Operation (v.16 - 21)

The people of the Lord had sinned grievously (59:1-8). Then at last they had repented and confessed their guilt (59:9-15a). Yet still the consequences of their apostasy were with them. They were in dire straits, and there was no human deliverer (v.15b,16a). So God Himself came to the rescue.

The relevance of the remarkable passage which now follows, to the times of Isaiah is obvious and even exciting. The Assyrian invasion was the people's well-deserved punishment from their God (8:6,7; 10:5,6). But now, with some of the people learning faith from their worthy king, the situation called for salvation, righteousness (i.e. deliverance), vengeance, recompense.

So the angel of the Lord went forth clad in heavenly armour. "When the enemy shall come in like the Euphrates (the waters of the River strong and many; 8:7), the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him" (v. 19). In response to the king's agonized inquiry a similar message came to Hezekiah: "Behold, I will send a blast upon him (appoint a spirit against him), and — in his other camp at Libnah (2 Kgs. 19:8) — he shall hear tidings, and he shall return to his own land" (37:7). The mighty hurricane of the Shekinah Glory which the angel of the Lord raised up against the Assyrians is powerfully described in Isaiah 30:27-33; 31:8,9.\* Thus "his righteousness, it sustained him", vindicating against Assyrian railing and invective the God worshipped in Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 18:22,30,32-35; 19:4,10-13,16-19, 22-24,27,28,34,37).

"So shall they fear the name of the Lord (30:27) from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun" (v. 19a). The destruction of the might of Assyria inevitably brought glory to the God of Israel and to His king reigning in Jerusalem. Nations near and far stood in awe.

But this only came about because, thanks to Hezekiah's fine example there were those that turned from transgression in Jacob (v.20).

However, right at its end, as in some other instances, the prophecy fails in its contemporary fulfilment: "My spirit that is upon thee (Hezekiah), and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever" (v.21).

At the time of the Assyrian invasion Hezekiah had no son. And when a son was born, he was a Manasseh and not another Hezekiah\*\*. But the promise of a never-ending line was not sustained to Hezekiah, and instead the Messiah came through a collateral branch of the family of David (Lk. 3:31).

### **Gospel fulfilment**

Once again the comment has to be made that, exciting though the contemporary reference of this prophecy may be, its real force and power comes out when NT directives are followed to apply it to redemption in Christ. The other is mere foreshadowing.

"And the Lord saw (and it pleased him that there was a contrite heart in his people, and confession of sin; v.9-15), and it displeased him that there was no judgement. And he saw that there was no man\*\*\*, and wondered (Heb. he desolated himself) that there was no intercessor" (v.15,16).

Jeremiah and Ezekiel, ever alike in their message, have the same kind of telling phrase (Jer. 5:1; 11:14; Ez. 22:30), but in their time the current problem was how to save Israel from the immediate consequences of their own thick-skinned disloyalty — and these prophets found no answer. Isaiah, always more fundamental and with an eloquent anthropomorphism, describes the Almighty moved with pity for his helpless people and racking His brains for the solution to a desperate problem.

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\* In 31:9 "ensign" is the same as "standard" (59:19).

\*\* Even so, Manasseh's repentance must not be overlooked (2 Chr. 33:12-16). It very often is.

\*\*\* Note how this passage puts a more wholesome meaning on the prototype in Ex. 2:12. Moses did not look furtively, hoping to be able to act unobserved; he considered that there was no man both willing and qualified to set about the task of saving his helpless people, and then — trusting in God (Acts 7:25RV) — took action himself.

No *man!* Then why not send them "an angel from heaven with a despotism"? Because it was "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." So, "by the righteousness of One Man," and only by that means shall there be "justification of life."

"No intercessor"? But indeed there is! Prophecy had already revealed "the Arm of the Lord" strong to "make intercession for the transgressors" (53:1,12). "Therefore his Arm brought salvation *unto him*" (v. 16). That last simple phrase is important, for salvation from sin can only be through acceptable sacrifice ministered by an acceptable priest and brought "unto Him" in His holy presence. And in the parallel: "his righteousness, it sustained him;" the verb is very commonly used of both priest and sacrifice (e.g. Ex. 29:10,15,19; Lev. 3:2,8,13).

### **Salvation — phase 2**

More than that, sin has not only to be atoned for, but also slain. So the equipment of the high priest — breastplate, crown, ephod, girdle and the rest — become the accoutrements of a warrior: a different kind of breastplate, a helmet of salvation\*, garments of vengeance (contrast v.6), zeal as a cloak (s.w. 9:7), the girdle of truth, and the Sword of the Spirit (v.21). And all who join in this war must be similarly equipped with "the whole armour of God" — it is called that because He is the Commander-in-chief and He provides the equipment (Eph. 6:14ff; 1 Th. 5:8).

The change from atonement to warfare is signified not only by a change of terminology but also by a change of tenses, from past (v. 16,17) to future (v. 18-21), as though to intimate two phases in the Redeemer's work.

The day is yet to come when "according to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies" (v. 18). the character of this recompence becomes startlingly clear when it is realised that verse 16 — "his arm brought salvation..." — is repeated (63:5) in a juggernaut assertion of divine authority: "He shall smite the oppressor with the rod of his mouth" (11:4).

### **Wilderness foreshadowing**

Once again, in that last hour, Israel will find itself swamped by an enemy who will "come in like a flood" (v. 19). But once again, as in the days of Hezekiah, "the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up the standard against him."

Here is a reminiscence of God's deliverance of Israel from Amalek in the wilderness. One phrase after another suggests it: "His arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him...when the enemy shall come in like a flood...this is my covenant with them...my words which I have put in thy mouth ...from henceforth and for ever." Jehovah-nissi — the Lord is my standard — commemorates that "the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Ex. 17:15,16).

### **Problem passage**

But this redeemer "will come to Zion," not to Sinai, "and to them that turn from transgression in Jacob" (v.20). The words are easy, their meaning simple. But they

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\* A crown of thorns!

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present a major problem by turning up in a distinctly different form when quoted by Paul. In Romans 11:26 the apostle appropriates this passage to confirm that ultimately God will bring salvation to cast-off Israel as well as to Gentile members of His New Israel. But Paul's LXX text differs: "There shall come for the sake of Zion the Deliverer, and he shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" — and this in turn he alters to "out of Zion." This last phrase may be borrowed from Ps. 14:7 — distinctly relevant — Paul does that kind of thing. But two problems still remain:

- a. The problem of inspiration and authority of the text. Which reading is correct? Is Paul here (as in so many other places; e.g. Rom. 9:9,27,28,29) correcting the Hebrew text by means of his LXX? — a conclusion that might startle conservative scholars. Or does one's understanding of the inspiration of scripture have to be re-shaped in the light of examples such as this?
- b. The problem of the meaning of the text. In Isaiah, the idea appears to be that Messiah will come to save those who are already repentant, the faithful remnant in Israel. In Romans, the passage seems to mean: Messiah will come to change the stony hearts of the nation (according to the usual, though mistaken, interpretation of Zech. 12:10). Actually both ideas are clearly taught in the OT. (Lev. 26:40-42; Dt. 30:1-3; Joel 2:12-18 — Rev. 1:7; Ez. 20:33-38; 36:24-28), a fact which saves the interpreter from some embarrassment. But which idea did Isaiah intend to teach here?

### A New Covenant

Because of the sudden change of pronouns in verse 20, it has been suggested that perhaps this verse is to be read as a parenthesis. But evidently Paul did not so read it, for his quotation in Romans 11:26 runs on: "For this is my covenant unto them," using the words from verse 20. But Paul broke off there, evidently with Jeremiah's great prophecy in mind about the New Covenant written in men's hearts (31:33; but see also Is. 61:8,9). There is no inconsistency with Isaiah's fourfold emphasis on "my words in thy mouth," for "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10).

But in the first instance the promise of "my spirit upon thee, and my words in thy mouth" must apply to the Messiah, the Prophet like unto Moses, of whom it was foretold: "I will put my words in his mouth" (Dt. 18:18). In Isaiah, the Spirit is the hallmark of the Messiah (11:2; 40:7,13; 42:1; 44:3; 61:1; 63:14), and so also God's word in his mouth (40:8; 45:23; 51:16; 55:11). But the emphasis on "thy seed" and "thy seed's seed" is reassurance enough that the promise is not for Messiah exclusively (44:3; 53:10; 61:8,9; 65:23).

### Modernist dogma

By contrast with the two (three) satisfying applications of this prophecy suggested here, the weakness of the modernist approach is immediately apparent. The "experts", much divided amongst themselves, either go for reference to Israel's deliverance from Babylon in the time of Cyrus, or (more commonly) to a period several generations later. In either case a specific reference for the vivid details in this paragraph is not attempted. Relevance to either of the epochs suggested becomes a matter of guesswork.

In particular, the powerful picture of a Redeemer God coming to the rescue of His

Chosen People, pouring out wrath on their Gentile oppressors, and commanding the awe and allegiance of kings far and near has absolutely nothing in the history of Cyrus onwards to match it. Prophecy and history simply do not correspond. From Hezekiah to the time of Jesus this fine passage is phenomenally irrelevant.

## 60 (1). Zion exalted

By this time it is surely almost unnecessary to vindicate Isaiah 60 against the dogmatism of modernists who assert a late date for "Second (or Third) Isaiah." Aware of the incongruities arising from an attempt to pin chapter 60 on to the time of Cyrus, they steal a few more generations, hoping for greater facility of reference to the time of Nehemiah or later. But the difficulties are still there:

- a. There is no period between Hezekiah and Paul when this prophecy can have any semblance of relevance to current events (which is what modernists always look for). At no time during those centuries did Gentiles gladly flow to Zion to glorify the God of Israel.
- b. Verses 7,13 speak plainly of a temple in existence — "mine altar...the house of my glory...the place of my sanctuary."
- c. "The nation that will not serve thee shall perish" (v.12). For seven centuries after Hezekiah these words were currently meaningless.
- d. The very close links between this chapter and Isaiah 49 (listed below) demand that both these Scriptures be given a like reference. The modernists, even on their own hypothesis, are in a fix here. Apply both to Hezekiah and his times, and the problem evaporates.

<b>Isaiah 60</b>	<b>Isaiah 49</b>
4. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee.	18. Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee.
4. Thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side.	22. They shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.
16. Thou shalt suck the breasts of kings.	23. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers.
16. Thou shalt know that I the Lord am thy Redeemer.	23. Thou shalt know that I am the Lord.
21. The work of my hands, that I may be glorified.	3. Thou art my Servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

### Contemporary events

The relevance of many details in Isaiah 60 (as a primary reference) to the aftermath of God's remarkable deliverance of Jerusalem in Hezekiah's day is very impressive. The modernists abandon all attempts at correlation between this chapter and history. To them these words are no more than wishful thinking by a pious prophet.

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- a. This prophecy speaks of altar and temple as in existence (v.7,13).
- b. The sustained picture of Gentile tribute to the God of Israel matches the history perfectly: "And many brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that He (the Lord) was magnified in the sight of all nations from henceforth." (2 Chr. 32:23).
- c. "To bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them" (v.9) is a perfect counterpoise to (i) the massive captivity of 200,000 Jews whom Sennacherib boasts about in his Taylor Prism inscription; (ii) the lavish payment of tribute which had been made in an earlier attempt to buy off the Assyrian (2 Kgs. 18:15) was also let go.
- d. "The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted" (v. 12). These words, confidently labelled by many an expositor as an interpolation because so completely out of harmony with the rest of this prophecy, can now be seen as a most effective parenthetical quotation of the bombast of Sennacherib in his efforts to cow Jerusalem into submission: "The nation and kingdom that does not serve me perishes; yea, those nations are utterly wasted" (compare 36:18-20; 37:11-13,18,19). That word for "wasted" makes play with the name of Sennacherib. And there is also another pun: "The nation that will not serve thee shall not be preserved." Similarly, "the Lord thy saviour" alludes to Isaiah's own name.
- e. "For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver" (v. 17). There is pointed contrast here with the earlier occasion when, during Hezekiah's sickness, his faithless princes tried to buy Sennacherib off (2 Kgs. 18:15,16), by stripping the temple of its gold and silver in a futile attempt to avoid the ravages of invasion (now note again verse 9).
- f. "The branch of my planting" (v.21) anticipates the blessing of the Year of Jubilee (2 Kgs. 19:29; cp. 61:3): "The remnant that is escaped of the house of Israel shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward" (19:30). And "inherit the land for ever" contrasts very effectively with invasion and the departing of great numbers of captives. There are plenty of other expressions which likewise contrast most effectively with the suffering and wretchedness of that time; e.g. v.10a,b,11a,c, 14a, 15a, 17c, 18a, 22.

Thus this prophecy, like almost everything else in Isaiah, has its roots in the prophet's own days. But recognition of this fact is only the first step in appreciation of its message. The New Testament interpretation is what matters most.

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## 60 (2). The Gospel Era

There can be no manner of doubt that, whatever prototype may be available, the real intention of this prophecy is to describe in rich figure and warm glowing phrase the blessings of Israel in the Messianic age. The People, the City, the Gentiles, and the Glory of the Lord — these are the main constituents of a rich and satisfying picture.

Yet, in not a few places, the NT. appropriates these ideas with confidence to describe the blessings brought by Christ in his first advent.

"The Gentiles shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (v.3). When these lovely words are followed by a picture of Gentiles bringing "gold, and frankincense" (v.6RV), a link with the visit of the Wise Men to the child Jesus seems inevitable (Mt. 2:1-12), especially when it turns out that the last phrase of that verse 6, when read in Hebrew, *sounds* rather like: "his drinking *myrrh* shall shew the Lord." It was evidently a similarity which had been noted by the Wise Men themselves.

This closer linking of Isaiah 60 with Messiah's birth helps to establish that the "star" seen by the Wise Men was actually a manifestation of the Glory of the Lord. \* The Hebrew word *nogah* — "brightness" — always has this idea; and the verb *zarach* — "rising" — often carries this meaning. \*\*

It is easy now to see why the sub-apostolic church assumed that the Wise Men were kings. In the light of this Isaiah passage, how far wrong were they?

There is also a Gentile context about Paul's echo of verse 21: "the work of my hands, that I may be glorified" — cp. "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph. 2:10; see v.11,12). But of course this is the way Isaiah uses this language elsewhere: 45:11,12; 29:23 — both of them fine passages.

The companion phrase — "the branch of my planting" — was doubtless in the mind of Jesus when he scornfully wrote the Pharisees off for their hypocrisy: "Every plant, which my heavenly father hath not planted, shall be rooted up" (Mt. 15:13). But on the other hand, the corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying brings forth much fruit (Jn. 12:24) — "a little one shall become a thousand" (v.22).

A *double entendre*, characteristic of Isaiah, has the same redemption theme: "In the womb (the virgin birth!) I have had mercy (Symmachus: reconciliation; cp. 54:7,8) on thee" (v. 10) — and verse 16 goes on to talk about the redeemed as God's babies, nursemaided by the Gentiles.

Thrilled by this theme and its heart-warming fulfilment in Gentile response to the gospel, Paul might well express his relief and thanksgiving in the words of this prophecy: "Thine heart shall fear (the Lord), and be enlarged (with joy and affection)" (v.5; cp. 2 Cor. 6:13). Indeed, in discouraging times this prophecy became his reassurance: "If the diminishing of them (Israel) be the *forces of the Gentiles*, how much more their fulness?" (v.5; 61:6; Rom. 11:12).

Finally, there is the remarkable parallel sequence of thought in the Epistle to the Ephesians. Perhaps in only two places (see 5:14) does Paul actually quote from this part of Isaiah, but the sequence of ideas is undeniably similar:

<b>Ephesians</b>		<b>Isaiah</b>
2:1	Dead	59:10
2:3	Lust of the flesh	59:4
2:7	Ages to come	60:21
2:10	Work of my hands	60:21
2:13	Gentiles far off, made nigh	60:5,11
3:6	Gentiles fellow heirs	60:21
3:14	Bow knees	60:14
4:24	Put on	61:10
5:2	Redeemer	60:16
5:8	Were darkness	60:2

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\* No astronomical phenomenon ever cited will satisfy the details in Mt. 2:9.

\*\* Dt. 33:2; Is. 58:10; Mai. 4:2; 2 Sam. 23:4; Ps. 112:4; and what about Gen. 32:31? Note also the sinister meaning in 2 Chr. 26:19.

Ephesians		Isaiah
5:8	Children of light	60:1,3
5:9	The Spirit	59:21
5:14*	Shine upon thee	60: 1
5:22	Husband and wife	61:10

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\*Here the words of 60:1 seem to be combined with phrases from 52:1,2.

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## 60 (3). The Messianic Kingdom

The earlier applications of this prophecy are both of them well-grounded in Scripture and impressive in their relevance. But, without doubt, the full power of this prophecy is only felt when its rich language is read as a divine anticipation of the splendour of the Messianic Age.

The resemblances to Psalm 72 are most marked. That "Psalm for Solomon" was a great king's prayer for the promised Messiah, whose goodness and power he knew he could never hope to emulate. This perhaps explains why Isaiah 60 has so many of the echoes of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon's court.

Isaiah 60		1 Kings 10	
9.	Unto the name of the Lord thy God and to the Holy One of Israel.	9.	Blessed be the Lord thy God which delighteth in thee.
5.	The <i>forces</i> of the Gentiles shall come unto thee.	2.	With a very great <i>train</i> (s.w.).
6.	The multitude of camels...dromedaries of Midian and Ephah.	2.	Camels.
6.	Frankincense	2.	Spices
6.	Gold	2.	Very much gold.
17, 19	Peace...righteousness	9.	Judgement and justice.
19.	Everlasting light...inherit the land for ever.	9.	For ever.
9.	Ships of Tarshish.	22.	Ships of Tarshish.
13.	Fir, pine, box...to beautify the place of my sanctuary.	12.	Almug trees...pillars for the house of the Lord.
3.	Gentiles...kings to thy rising.	24.	All the earth.
17.	For brass gold...etc.	21.	Vessels of pure gold...silver nothing to be accounted of.
But note especially:			
17.	Thy officers peace, and thy taskmasters righteousness.	5:13	King Solomon raised a levy out of all Israel.

It soon becomes evident from the Book of Revelation's copious use of Isaiah 60 that what Solomon was able to achieve only in a rather gross materialistic fashion will be lifted to a superlatively high degree of spiritual fulfilment when Christ is king in Zion.

<b>Isaiah 60</b>	<b>Revelation 21</b>
3. Gentiles shall come to thy light.	24. The nations shall walk in the light of it.
5. The forces (wealth) of the Gentiles shall come unto thee.	24. The kings of the earth do bring their glory into it.
11. Thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night.	25. The gates of it shall not be shut at all by day (for there shall be no night there).
14. They that despise thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet.	3:9 I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.
14. They shall call thee, The city of the Lord.	3:12 I will write upon him...the name of the city of my God.
18. Thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.	12. A wall great and high...twelve gates.
19. The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee.	23. The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it.
19. The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.	23. The glory of the Lord did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.
20. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself.	25. No night there.
21. Thy people also shall be all righteous.	27. There shall in no wise enter in any thing that defileth...
22. I the Lord will hasten it in its time.	22:20 Surely I come quickly.

Another set of allusions intermingling with those just listed seems designed to suggest the bringing in of a New Creation, a New Paradise, unspoiled and unspoilable:

- 2. Darkness.
- 1-3. Light.
- 19. Sun and moon.
- 7,8. Animals and birds.
- 21. The Lord's garden ("my planting"); cp. 61:11.
- 13. Trees "beautify the place of my sanctuary" (cp. 61:3).
- 7. Acceptable sacrifice.
- 11. Gates not shut.

Also in chapter 61:

- 7. No more shame.
- 9. Seed blessed.
- 10. Clothed with garments of salvation.
- 10. Bridegroom and Bride.
- 11. A garden like Eden.

And in chapter 62:

- 4,5. The marriage blessed.

The parallels with Isaiah 49 are also worth re-considering in this light. (See also Is. 66:12-14,19-21).

In his television tour of the splendour of the Zion that is to be, the prophet uses his camera on four main features — the Glory, the City, the People and the Gentiles.

### The Glory

"From first to last, it is a blaze of light", writes Torrey. In the opening verses this is made even more impressive by contrast with its immediate prelude — darkness covering the Land, and gross darkness the People. The Hebrew word for the second of these phrases normally refers to the thick darkness of the Shekinah presence as an expression of divine displeasure: "In thick darkness they (Israel) shall be driven away" (8:22). The pillar of cloud "was a cloud and darkness to them (the Egyptians), but it gave light by night to these (Israel)" (Ex. 14:20; cp. Joel 2:2, - Zeph. 1:15).

But now all estrangement between God and His people is past. Instead, a ringing cry to "arise, be enlightened" by the Heavenly Light. Ezekiel describes the return of the Shekinah Glory from heaven and, via the Mount of Olives, into the sanctuary (Ez. 43:2,7). And Isaiah himself has already foretold that "in the day when the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious" there will be "upon every dwelling place of mount Zion...a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night" (4:2,5). This Glory of the Lord, which was seen intermittently in the temple from the time of Solomon (e.g. 1 Kgs. 8:10,11; 2 Chr. 26:16-20(?); Is. 6:1-4; 38:8) will be a normal permanent feature of Zion in the days to come. The entire city, and not just the inner sanctuary, will be a Holy of Holies filled with Heavenly Light (Rev. 21:23).

Doubtless this emphasis on the de-grading of the sun and moon in Zion (v. 19,20) is just part of the intense symbolism which runs right through this vision of Messianic blessing and splendour, but it is difficult (in the light of the supporting Scriptures) to evade the conclusion that there will be a marvellous Heavenly Light in and over Mount Zion in the age to come: "I will glorify the house of my glory...He hath glorified thee...I will make the Place of my feet glorious...that I may be glorified...his Glory shall be seen upon thee" (v.7,9,13; 21:1; cp. Mal. 4:2; Is. 40:5).

### The City

The character and quality of this New Jerusalem is portrayed in symbolic language\* of poetic splendour: "The sons of strangers shall build up thy walls...thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night\*\* (v. 10,11). There will be a profusion of trees — cedars of Lebanon, firs, pines, box trees — to "beautify the place of my sanctuary" (v.13) and to make available countless booths for a non-stop Feast of Tabernacles (Neh. 8:15).

Everything about this city will be of the finest. No tawdry materials, nothing perishable, for it is a City of God. "For brass I (the Lord) will bring gold, and for iron silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron" (v.17). What a contrast with the inglorious days of Rehoboam when (as at the present day) tawdry shields of brass perforce had to do duty for God's glorious shields of gold! (2 Chr. 12:9,10). In that day even gold will scarcely suffice! Better materials will be there, to strengthen and glorify: "Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise" (v.18) — Jesus the Saviour, and a true Judah, the saved.

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\* It *must* be symbolic. Look at the use made of it in Rev. 21!

\*\* So the walls are obviously figurative. Little point in having literal walls, if the gates are never shut!

In the two pictures of the New Jerusalem — Isaiah and Revelation — there is an interesting change of emphasis. Isaiah describes a city with a temple — "the (holy) place of my sanctuary...the place of my feet" (v.13). This last phrase alludes to the ark of the covenant (1 Chr. 28:2; Ez. 43:7; cp. 66:1). And there are sacrifices to be offered: "the flocks of Kedar...shall come up with acceptance on mine altar" (v.7). But in Revelation, "the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal" (21:16) — the entire city is a Holy of Holies; and there is no hint of sacrifice or the sprinkling of blood, for that has been done "once for all" (Heb. 9:28; 10:10-14).

Then is Isaiah describing sacrifice in the Age to Come or isn't he? This, at least, may be said — that the concentration of palpably figurative language in Isaiah 60 (e.g. v.4c,8,10a, 11 a, 16ab, 17,20a) makes it impossible to dogmatize, on the basis of *this* evidence, that animal sacrifices will be resumed in the Millennium.

That Isaiah should use this kind of language is readily explained. He was writing for his own generation as well as for the distant future, and necessarily had to express himself in terms of contemporary ideas. But when John wrote, the days of Jerusalem's temple were numbered.

### The People of the City

Those who have established their rights of citizenship in the New Jerusalem will make haste to take up residence: "Who are these who fly as the Cloud\* (of the Shekinah Glory) and as the doves\*\* (of God's Holy Spirit) to their windows?" (v.8). Doubtless Paul was influenced by this Scripture when he described the gathering of the saints thus: "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught away together with them, in Clouds, into the air for the purpose of meeting the Lord (at Jerusalem)" (1 Th. 4:17).

"Thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed\*\*\* at thy side (v.4). They will be the honoured elite of the new society, recognized as such and not needing to assert their privileges: "the ships of Tarshish...bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them,\*\*\*\* unto the name of the Lord thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel" (v.9) — it will be their *spiritual* bank balance that will be transferred to the funds of the New Jerusalem, for "violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders (contrast Gen. 49:5)...thy people shall be all righteous" (v.18,21)\*\*\*\*\*

How relative standards will change! "The Little One (among the thousands of Judah: Mic. 5:2) shall become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation" (v.22). David, the youngest in his family, and despised by the rest, will rise to highest honour. And men like Paul (= the small one, "the least of the apostles"; 1 Cor. 15:9) will be found to have built himself into a mighty Gentile family.

But all these are the fruits of Christ, "the Branch of my planting" (v.21; s.w. 11:1). They are the work of His hands, that He may be glorified.

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\* What a contrast with Ez. 38:9!

\*\* The final Deluge of destruction is past. Now, a New Era (Gen. 8:11; 6:16).

\*\*\* This Hebrew word also means "faithful".

\*\*\*\* The converts of the preacher of the gospel; 1 Cor. 3:12.

\*\*\*\*\* The future prospects of Zion and its people are filled out in such passages as 11:4-10; 29:19,23,24; 30:23-26; 32:15-18; 33:17,20-22.

Nowhere else in all the Bible is there such sustained emphasis on Gentile submission in the Kingdom of God. The nations of the world will increasingly find pleasure in the rule of God. More and more they will gladly devote the finest resources of their lands to the glorifying of the God of Israel.

"The wealth of the Gentiles, and their kings, shall be brought...camels of Midian, dromedaries of Ephah: all they from Sheba, they shall bring gold and incense\* ...the flocks of Kedar...the rams of Nebaioth...the ships of Tarshish...the glory of Lebanon...strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee...the sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee...thou shalt suck the milk of Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings" (v.5-16).

All the earlier sanctuaries of the Lord were made of Gentile materials. Israel plundered the Egyptians, and from their riches fashioned the Tabernacle. David dedicated all the gains of his long series of Gentile wars to the temple which Solomon built. The second temple, built after the Captivity, had the practical encouragement of Cyrus and Darius Hystaspes. The temple built in the time of Jesus was financed by Herod the Great, an Edomite. And the spiritual temple which has taken its place has been made up mainly of Gentiles. So it is fitting that in the coming era God will be glorified by the votive offerings of Gentiles (cp. Jer. 33:9; Dt. 33:19).

It is noteworthy that nearly all the regions mentioned — Midian, Ephah, Sheba, Kedar, Nebaioth, Lebanon — are Arab territories. The very peoples who are described in the prophets as gloating over the last-day discomfiture of Israel (Ez. 35:10; 36:2; Obad. 12; Ps. 79:4; 83:3-12) now join Israel in humble submission. Here is the final solution of the vexatious Jew-Arab problem.

This happy reconciliation in godliness will not be an immediate unanimity, human nature being what it is. So that out-of-step verse 12 has an air of sober realism about it: "The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee (and with thee) shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted." Zechariah fills out the picture, and tells precisely how: "no rain...plague" (14:17,18) — these, where necessary, in a world of unparalleled fertility and in the midst of a population bursting with health!

With the Glory of the Lord filling the City of God, the New Jerusalem thus becomes a centre of world re-generation. It is a theme Isaiah never wearies of (e.g. 35:6; 45:4; 46:12; 49:14-26; 51:3-11; 52:1,8-10; 54:11-14; 55:12,13), but nowhere is he more eloquent than here.

His picture of godly prosperity ends with the heartening reassurance: "I the Lord will hasten it in his time\*\*" (v.22). So also the NT. portrayal of the New Jerusalem: "Surely I come quickly" (Rev. 22:20). But this guarantee did not inhibit the Lord's apostle from adding his own: "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

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\* The omission, or disguised inclusion, of myrrh might suggest that the day of suffering is past.

\*\* What a contrast in 5:18!

## 61 (1). The Blessings of Jubilee (v.1- 6)

One of the great types of the Messianic Kingdom is the Year of Jubilee, when slaves were set free, and land returned to the families who originally owned it, and under the blessing of God the sabbath year of non-cultivation was continued for yet another year (Lev. 25:8-24). Allusions to all this are traceable in Isaiah 61:

- a. "To proclaim liberty to the captives" (v.1). This is the very phrase of Lev. 25:10.
- b. "To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (v.2).
- c. "Trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord" (v.3). All that grew in the Year of Jubilee came through the blessing of God, and not by man's cultivation.
- d. "Therefore in their land they shall possess double (the double blessing of Lev. 25:22): everlasting joy shall be unto them" (v.7).
- e. "They are the seed which the Lord hath blessed" (v.9).
- f. "As the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth" (v.11).

### Contemporary history

The Jubilee blessing on which this lovely language is based is, of course, the Jubilee in Hezekiah's reign (37:30) which confirmed to God's people that the astonishing deliverance from the brutal Assyrians was God-wrought, and not a fluke of good fortune. This Jubilee is the only one alluded to in the whole of Scripture (with the possible exception of David's Jubilee; see Ps. 133).

Other phrases clearly have their origin in the same impressive historical events:

- a. "The opening of the prison to them that are bound" (v. 1) describes the sudden access of freedom which came to the great multitude of captives carried off by Sennacherib.
- b. "The day of vengeance of our God" (v.2), an expression seemingly so out of place in this winsome passage, now presents no difficulty.
- c. "Trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord" (v.3) is matched by Isaiah's prophecy of Jubilee: "And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward" (37:31).
- d. "They shall build the old wastes...they shall repair the waste cities" (v.4). Sennacherib boasted about the "forty and six fenced cities" (Taylor Prism) which he captured — and doubtless burnt, according to a favourite Assyrian custom. It is known for certain that he did this to Lachish. The abundant blessings of the Year of Jubilee meant that the people had time to concentrate on the re-habilitation of towns and farmsteads. Assyrian
- e. "Ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles" (v.6). Here is allusion to Assyrian plunder and also to the gifts which poured in from delighted and awestruck Gentile neighbours who shared in the widespread relief at Assyrian discomfiture.
- f. "As a bridegroom...as a bride" - an allusion, carried over into 62:4,5, to Hezekiah's health-blessed re-union with his wife Hephzibah, from whom he had been separated by his leprosy. "Garments of salvation...the robe of righteousness" (v.10) in what was, to all intents and purposes, a new marriage.

- g. The Hebrew word for "proclaim liberty" (v. 1) also describes the swallow. Thus there is implied a time when captives, dragged away by the Assyrians, may migrate back to their homeland. "Freedom to the captives" matches the language of Isaiah in many another place about the same utterly unexpected phenomenon; e.g. 42:22; 45:13; 48:20; 49:9,20,21; 51:14; 60:9.
- h. Verse 3 is, literally, "the mourners of Zion", and could allude to far-off captives mourning that they have been snatched away from service in the temple; cp. contemporary Ps. 137:1ff
- i. "Their seed shall be known among the Gentiles...all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed." (v.9).

### A prophecy about Jesus

Yet once again it has to be insisted that the stirring events of Hezekiah's day are no more than a foundation on which to build a prophecy of more vital truth, with Christ at its centre. There is the Lord's own warrant for this: "*Today* is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears," he declared, after reading from this prophecy in the synagogue at Nazareth\* (Lk. 4:17-21).

Truly the Spirit of the Lord was upon him (v. 1) — John saw the Spirit descending on him at his baptism (Jn. 1:32). Nor did God give the Spirit to him by measure (Jn. 3:34), but in overflowing fulness (Is. 11:2; 42:1; 48:16; Mic. 3:8).

First person pronoun — "upon me" — is unusual in Isaiah (cp. 48:16d; 49:1; 50:4). It undoubtedly identifies the Servant of the Lord, foretold in earlier prophecies (cp. especially 42:1). Yet the same person calls himself "I the Lord (Jehovah)" (v.8). So great, so divine, is this Servant. Nevertheless there is a distinction made: "The Lord (Himself) hath anointed me" — "God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Ps. 45:7; Heb. 1:9). There is pointed contrast here with Aaron who was anointed by Moses (Ex. 40:13). "God anointed Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit and with power" (Acts 10:38).

With this unique endowment of divine grace (Lk. 4:22RV), Jesus came preaching gospel news\*\* to the meek: "The poor have the gospel preached to them," Jesus told the messengers of imprisoned John; yet, mysteriously enough, he did not "proclaim liberty to the captive" prophet. Thus, by that very fact he bade John look for another fulfilment of the prophecy over which he was brooding.

Jesus came also "to bind up the broken-hearted" (lovely phrase!\*\*\* The true gospel of the kingdom, truly received, will do this for any man. Elsewhere Isaiah proclaims the fulness of this blessing "in the day that the Lord bindeth up the hurt of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound." (30:26).

Very beautifully the LXX version turns the Hebrew for "proclaim liberty" into a word of striking double meaning — not only "letting go free", but also "forgiveness of sins." And this is the word Jesus used in his interpretation of the prophecy when he read it in the synagogue.

\* *Netzer*, whence the name Nazareth, comes in the last verse of Is. 60.

\*\* So LXX, and in 40:9; 52:7,8; 60:6; Joel 2:32; Ps. 96:2; 40:9; Nah. 1:15.

\*\*\* The tendency of modern versions to omit this phrase from Lk.4:18 must be resisted: (a) MSS evidence in Lk. 4 favours its inclusion, though not overwhelmingly; (b) it is incredible that Jesus' synagogue copy (in Hebrew) did not include it; and it is equally incredible that Jesus should skip this expression; (c) verse 23: "Physician, heal thyself," alludes to it.

Another winsome promise is: "the opening (of the prison) to them that are bound". In Luke 4:18 this becomes: "recovering of sight to the blind." The Hebrew word normally means the opening of the eyes; it is specially suitable to describe prisoners emerging out of black-dark dungeons, only to be blinded temporarily by a blaze of sunlight. The Truth of Christ has just that effect on many a man. He needs time to re-adjust to the vivid glory of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4-6).

It is surely a mistake to assert, as is often done, that in his synagogue reading Jesus stopped at "the acceptable year of the Lord" because the next phrase: "the day of vengeance of our God," was not to be fulfilled then. This is short-sighted exegesis. Experience with NT quotations from the OT shows that frequently the relevance of the context is implied and included; in other words, only *part* of the appropriate Scripture is quoted in order to steer the reader to a consideration of the rest. Also, this was a synagogue lection, which would certainly not stop in the middle of a sentence. Most decisive of all — these words of Jesus *proclaimed* the day of vengeance, i.e. warned of its imminence — they did not inaugurate it.

It is even possible that the re-pointed Hebrew should read "the day of resurrection" — a phrase soon to be literally true regarding Jesus himself, and at that very moment true in a spiritual sense for those in Nazareth who would give heed (Jn. 5:25)\*.

This lovely idea leads on to another equally reassuring — "to comfort all that mourn.\*\* Here is the original of one of the Lord's most indispensable Beatitudes (Mt. 5:4). It broadens out into a charming sequence of metaphors:

"To appoint for Zion's mourners (those who are bona fide citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem), to give unto them beauty for ashes\*\*\*, the oil of joy (of Messiah's own anointing; Ps. 45:7) for mourning, the garment of praise (their praise of Him, or His of them?) for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might glorify himself (by glorifying His Sanctuary and His Land)" (v.3)\*\*\*\*

### Blessings in Christ

Alluring pictures of co-mingled material and spiritual blessings follow one another in quick succession. The language itself is comparatively easy. The chief difficulty is to decide whether the words are to be taken literally, with reference to Israel restored and glorified in Messiah's kingdom, or to be read figuratively as a sequence of impressions of the spiritual blessings of the New Israel. In the light of conclusions already reached earlier in this chapter, there should be room for both ideas, with the emphasis more particularly on the second.

"They shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations" (v.4). This is the language used with much foreboding by Moses (Lev. 26:31,33) — God's curse on a wayward Israel. But now, in Messiah's day all past suffering is forgotten, and the ravages of persecution are made good. "They" in the words quoted are explained to be "strangers...the sons of the alien" who also "stand and feed your flocks" and serve as "your ploughmen and your vinedressers" (v.5).

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\* Yet contrast 34:8; 49:8; 63:4. Is this another of Isaiah's double meanings?

\*\* Vengeance (resurrection) — *naqam*. Comfort — *nacham*.

\*\*\* Yet another juggle with words: "Sashes for ashes," weddings for funerals (consider Lk. 7:32,22; Mt. 9:15; 2 Sam 13:19).

\*\*\*\* Phrase after phrase in verse 3 occurs first in ch. 60; see v. 15,18,20,21.

## Gentiles

This reversal of fortunes had already been anticipated: "And strangers shall be joined with them (Israel)...the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the Lord for servants and handmaids: and they shall take them captives, whose captives they were" (14:1,2). It happened literally in Isaiah's day when Sennacherib's army was brought to nought; most of the survivors were rounded up and made to serve those they had harried and despised. The gospel has brought and will yet bring other finer fulfillments: "strangers from the covenants of promise...now in Christ Jesus...are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:12,13). With what insight did Isaiah write: "strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob" (14:1).

Such a religious union is implied in the present prophecy: "Ye shall be named priests of the Lord: men shall call you the ministers of our God" (v.6). At Sinai the whole nation of Israel was called to be "a kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6), that is, a missionary people to educate benighted Gentiles. But the very next day they were frantically clamouring for Moses as a go-between, to spare them from the searching Presence of Jehovah (Ex. 20:18-21). Then how could they take their God to the Gentiles? They never did! So the priesthood passed first to Moses' own tribe, and then later to "a royal priesthood" of humble Gentile believers brought near to God through Christ (1 Pet. 2:9; cp. Rom. 15:16,27).

But now Israel in the Land ("ye") will fulfil God's earlier intention through an educating mission to the Gentiles, "and in their (Gentile) glory shall ye speak yourselves", i.e. declare a message which comes from your own soul.

It is a satisfying picture of a new and better Israel.

## 61 (2). "Everlasting Joy" (v.7-11)

The division that is made here in these studies is really distinctly arbitrary, for Isaiah 61,62 have essentially one theme, even though the prophet plays several variations, all of them full of charm and power.

It has already been suggested that the (double) allusion to "the double" (v. 7) is Jubilee language (cp. Zech. 9:12). But there are also other possibilities. For example: "Because their shame was double, and they possessed confusion as their portion therefore in their land double (blessing)" (cp. 40:1,2; Job 42:10). Or there could be reference to the double portion of the firstborn even though son of a wife held in low esteem (Dt. 21:17) — cp. "the seed which the Lord hath blessed" (v.9). In that case, the parallel mention of shame would suggest the re-acceptance of Israel after being rejected. This would harmonize well with the ensuing ideas about "forsaken...desolate...Hephzibah...Beulah" (62:4). Again, that significant word "portion" may be intended as a reminder of the Levitical inheritance (s.w. Num. 18:20); i.e. Israel accepted back as a priestly people (cp. 61:6,10; 62:4).

Here Isaiah slips in a telling reminder of former evils, now forsaken: "I hate robbery for (or, with) burnt offering" — sacrifice exploited as a means of plundering the poor, in the way that Annas and his unholy crew did with such sublime skill and efficiency in the time of Jesus.

But now, in sharp contrast, "I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them" (v.8) — it is the covenant made with Abraham: "they are the seed (53:10) which the Lord hath blessed" (i.e. forgiven, as in Gen. 22:17,18).

"Their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the peoples (Israel)' (v.9). All acknowledge them. There is now no doubt about them being the true family of God. And they are "among Gentiles" and "among Israel" — the election of grace!

This fact is the very crown of Messiah's happiness: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God" (v.10). Why? Because he sees "of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied" (53:11). It was for this joy set before him that he endured (Heb. 12:2). This prospect of joy infected Christ's closest friend: "the friend of the bridegroom...rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice" (Jn. 3:29; cp. v.10 RVm).

Here, then, is the explanation of the unexpected phrasing which follows: "He (Jehovah) hath clothed me with the garments of salvation (wrought for others), he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness (to be imputed to them) ...as a bridegroom...and as a bride" (v. 10).

By a strange mixture of figures — marvellously apt nevertheless — it is both a marriage and a priesthood. Could it be that priestly language applied to a newly-wed husband is an unrecognized Hebrew idiom? The words describe priestly garments (Ps. 132:9,16; Is. 62:3; Ex. 39:22). It was Moses who clothed Aaron with garments "for glory and for beauty" (Ex. 28:2,40). But this priest is accoutred for his high office by God Himself: "*He* hath clothed me...as a bridegroom is priested with a garland, and as a bride is adorned with her jewels" (v. 10) — it is the same mixture of figure and reality.

The fruits of this happy heavenly marriage are now charmingly expressed in another very fitting simile: "For as the earth bringeth forth her bud\*, and as the garden (of Eden restored) causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth (the same words come in Gen. 2:9; 1:11): so the Lord will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations" (v.11). Thus the lovingkindness of a Redeemer God will be made known in all the earth — "glory and beauty" for His Messiah who mediates this salvation, and joy and gladness for those whose undeserved redemption is so happily consummated.

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\* The Hebrew word sounds delightfully like "a wedding festivity". It also suggests the Branch; 4:2.

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## 62. Hephzibah — Beulah

The relevance of this prophecy to contemporary events continues to be readily discernible. There is a picture of the Land redeemed from desolation (v.4) and from the ravaging of invaders (v.8). The people hear a ringing call to centre their thanksgiving and praise on God, and to enjoy holy feasts at His Temple All is righteousness and joy. God's salvation for His people is fully assured. The themes of priesthood, royal glory, and marriage are unexpectedly intermingled. Did Hezekiah become a king-priest after his recovery? There is pointed allusion to

Hezekiah's wife Hephzibah\* (2 Kgs. 21:1). Her reunion with him after the miraculous recovery from leprosy would be like re-marriage after a disheartening period of divorce. All the circumstances presented a most attractive miniature of God's recent dealings with His people — their spiritual sickness and desolation, the sudden dramatic divine deliverance, the regathering of the people to their *Go6*, the glorifying of Zion's Temple, and the awe-struck wonder of Gentile nations.

But all this is a springboard for a most attractive Messianic prophecy. It is this which is undeniably the main purpose behind all that is written here.

In the first sentence, Messiah is the speaker (as at the beginning of ch. 61): "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burneth" (v.1). Soon after this, Zion's watchmen are bidden hold not their peace out of concern for Jerusalem (v.6). But evidently their work as "the Lord's remembrancers" is secondary to what Messiah himself is eager to do. It is an aspect of Christ's high-priestly work not greatly appreciated that he too "prays for the peace of Jerusalem," a peace with God which the holy city has not known these many centuries. In this way also "he makes intercession for the transgressors" (53:12). And this earnest pleading will go on, must go on, until the righteousness of Zion is declared by the "brightness\*\*" of the Glory of the Lord. What a contrast with past times when "we wait...for brightness (*nogah* again), but we walk in darkness" (59:9).

The figure of "a lamp that burneth" (i.e. continually) provides a most fitting reminder of God's great covenant with Abraham when the Glory of the Lord as "a smoking furnace and a burning lamp" passed between the pieces of the divided covenant sacrifices (Gen. 15:17). All that was then being promised, or implied, now comes to fruition in Christ.

Also, the Lord God promised David "a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his Son after him, and to establish Jerusalem" (62:7; 1 Kgs. 15:4). Now the picture of fulfilment fills out.

### New names

This new Messianic era is appropriately signified by new names "which (as with Abram and Jacob) the mouth of the Lord shall name" (v. 2). No longer Forsaken or Desolate. The first of these describes a wife put away as unworthy (54:6,7; 49:14), the second a ravaged land (nearly always). King Asa's wife was named Azubah (Forsaken), and the reader is left to speculate why (1 Kgs. 22:42). Such a name would hardly be borne from birth. So presumably her husband, zealous against idolatry, put her away because she encouraged the apostasy he hated (cp. 2 Chr. 15:16). Such a parallel with the nation is hinted at here in Isaiah.

The alternative new names are all full of charm and attractiveness: Hephzibah — my delight is in her; Beulah — married (to the Messiah; Rev. 21:9); Sought out; Not Forsaken (v.4,12). The reversal in these names is akin to those used symbolically in Hosea's family, when Lo-ammi and Lo-Ruhamah are changed to "My people" and "Blessed with forgiveness": and Jezreel (scattering) becomes Jezreel (sown in fruitfulness).

But the best of all new names "which the mouth of the Lord shall name" is *The Lord our Righteousness* (hinted at in v.2a). For this is "the name of my God, and the

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\* According to the Talmud she was Isaiah's daughter, but Ps. 45:10,12 suggests differently.

\*\* Heb: *nogah* always signifies the Shekinah Glory.

name of the city of my God...and my new name" (Jer. 33:16; Jer. 23:6 Rev. 3:12).

### **A Royal Priesthood**

With such a new name goes also a new standing in the sight of God — a royal priesthood, such as natural Israel was called to but never showed any sign of attaining:

"Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God" (v.3). Here, the key words: "crown" and "diadem" are both royal and priestly in their use\*. In "Revelation: a Biblical approach" (p.13), the suggestion is made that the high priest's crown was not a bonnet with a golden plate attached over the forehead, but a circlet of seven diamonds. "A crown of glory in the hand of the Lord" is, in part, interpreted in Rev. 1:16: "And he (the one like the Son of man) had in his right hand seven stars" which are "the angels of the seven (Gentile) churches" (v.20).

But why in Messiah's hand, and not on his head? Is it because, there (in Rev. 1), he is about to wear a *royal* crown?

### **Marriage**

The figure moves from priesthood back to marriage (61:10mg): "As a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee" (62:5). There is incongruity here, for natural sons do not marry their mother. Probably "sons" is to be read as "disciples" - a common enough idiom (e.g. 1 Kgs. 20:35; Heb. 2:13; Mt. 12:27). Alternatively, it has been proposed to read "thy builders" — a slight emendation; for the next verse goes on to speak of the walls of Jerusalem.

"So shall thy God rejoice over thee" — as he promised to do when His people return to Him with a good heart (Dt. 30:2,9,10). The loveliness of the union of a young man with his bride tells better than any other figure the story of God's redemption of His own.

### **No silence, no rest**

So it is only right that this desired consummation shall never be out of mind either of those who aspire after its blessings or of the gracious God who brings it to pass. Accordingly the "watchmen upon the walls of Jerusalem" are most urgently exhorted never to "hold their peace day nor night\*\*": ye that are the Lord's remembrancers\*\*\*, let there be no silence to you. And give no silence to him, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (v.6,7).

Here is a clear mandate to the Lord's faithful remnant to besiege heaven with their prayers for the open assertion of the authority and righteousness of God in the earth. Isaiah knew nothing of the doctrine that God is working to a rigid unadjustable chronological time-table. He had no use for disciples who faithlessly omit to pray with all their heart and soul for the vindication of the holiness of their God. The N.T. counterpart to these words is the Lord's intense parable about the importunate widow, a parable framed before and behind with warnings about the Second Coming. But today the Lord's people have mostly wedded themselves to the

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\* For the latter consider Ex. 28:36-38; Lev. 16:4; Zech. 3:5; Rev. 19:12(7).

\*\* Literally: "all the day and all the night continually" (the word describes the continual burnt offering).

\*\*\* He doesn't need any, but loves to be reminded all the same!

comfortable misconception that the Almighty hath appointed a *date* in which he will judge the world in righteousness. So they "keep silence" and cease to be watchmen. But Isaiah himself was different: "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down..." (64:1).

"Till he establish" (v. 7) employs one of the key words of the great covenant made with David (2 Sam. 7:13). "The Lord hath sworn by his right hand" makes the same allusion. So there can be no doubt that the prayers of the watchmen are to be for the coming of the Messianic kingdom. The next verse refers to "his strength." This conjunction of phrases looks back to Jachin and Boaz, (1 Kgs. 7:21), the brazen pillars of the temple specially associated in the minds of Israel with the renewal of "the sure mercies of David" (2 Kgs. 11:14; 23:3). Here is a remarkable paradox, truly, that "the Lord hath sworn" — so the thing is certain! — yet He is to be given no rest until He establish the throne of David.

### Plundered no more

Fulfilment will mean an end to the long sequence of tense unhappy times when the fruits of labour have been triumphantly snatched away by rapacious plunderers: "Surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies" (v.8). There is clear implication here that the experiences, now at an end, came about not in spite of the will of God but because of it (1:7,20). But now, for sure, it will never happen again. There is many a comfortable word of this kind in Isaiah\*.

Furthermore, these blessings will not be received in any spirit of selfish self-indulgence: "The wine for which thou hast laboured...they that have gathered it shall drink it in the courts of my holiness" (v.8,9; Jer. 31:12). Bread and wine will happily celebrate the greatest goodness of God (Mt. 26:29), in a world without end.

### Messiah's triumphal entry

Describing the urgent preparations for Messiah's coming, Isaiah harnesses the fine phrases of his own earlier prophecy: "Prepare ye the way...cast up the highway...say ye to the daughter of Zion...Behold, his reward is with him, and his recompence before him" (v.10,11; 40:3,9,10).\*\*

Jesus proclaimed his own right to fulfil this prophecy when he made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It is not by accident that in the record of that great occasion when Matthew introduces his interpretive citation of Zechariah's familiar words: "Behold, thy king cometh unto thee...", with others from Isaiah: "Say ye to the daughter of Zion." Here the sequence is: "Behold thy salvation (thy Jesus, who is also thy king) cometh" (v.11). The context here turns immediately to judgment (63:1-6) — and in his lament over Jerusalem, Jesus likewise forewarned of dire tribulation to come. So also will it be, when he comes not for a dress rehearsal but for final fulfilment; then the judgment will not fall on Zion: "Sought out, a city *not* forsaken," but on the implacable enemies of the Lord in Edom.

Called "the holy people," saints in Christ (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2) will be joined by an Israel made new in God's sight by their new-found faith in a Messiah they have hitherto ignored. Jerusalem became a city forsaken when Jesus declared: "Your house is left unto you desolate" (Mt. 23:38). But now, as with the ominously named children of Hosea (Hos. 1:9; 2:23), there comes a dramatic reversal of status: "The redeemed of the Lord."

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\* Consider 4:6; 32:18; 33:20; 52:12; 54:9-11,15-17; 65:21,22.

\*\* Compare the alternative offered by the modernist: Chapter 40 comes from an unknown prophet of the time of Cyrus, and is now echoed by another, also unknown, of the time of Nehemiah or later. And both of them spoke prophecies which are pathetically without fulfilment!

## 63 (1). The Winepress (v.1-6)

This is one of the most dramatic paragraphs in the whole of Isaiah. A powerful blood-stained figure is accosted coming from Edom, and in response to eager questioning explains the accomplishment of a mission of retribution for the despite done to God's helpless people.

For such a short prophecy there are some extraordinarily tricky problems to be solved.

### Edom the enemy

First, is the prophecy really about Edom? The Hebrew text can be read in such a way as to eliminate all geographical allusion: "Who is this that comes, more than a man, raiment more crimsoned than the grape-gatherer?" Read thus, the words use the figure of the winepress for judgment, as in plenty of other Scriptures, but without special reference to Edom. At the same time, "more than man" would point specifically to the Lord Jesus returned in glory.

The weight of evidence is, however, in favour of retaining the familiar reading. The very close parallel with Isaiah 34 is surely decisive. That prophecy also is about "the year of recompence for the controversy of Zion" and "the day of the Lord's vengeance" (34:8); it, too, is a judgment of blood (34:6,7). Since Edom is specifically the subject of the earlier prophecy, the same is almost certainly the case with this later one.

Here, also, contemporary events supply reason for an Edomite application. The men of Edom were always glad of an excuse to give vent to their bitter hatred of Israel. In the preceding reign of Ahaz Edomites joined with other plunderers of that stricken kingdom (2 Chr. 28:17). Psalm 83 — almost certainly a psalm of Hezekiah's reign\* — has Edom as a leading marauder. Psalm 137 identified by Thirtle as another Hezekiah psalm\*\*, speaks bitterly about the rancorous hostility of "the sons of Edom." Obadiah similarly is probably to be read with primary reference to the Sennacherib crisis.\*\*\*

### Punitive expeditions

Most relevant of all is the brief account in 1 Chr. 4:39-43 of a series of punitive expeditions in the days of Hezekiah against neighbouring peoples, including mount Seir. This, in particular, would provide the prototype for the picture of Messianic judgment in Isaiah 63:1-6. Once the prophecy of Joel is accepted as belonging to the same period, 3:19 is also suddenly seen to fit the present thesis remarkably well: "Edom a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah."

It is easy to see how events would develop after the destruction of Sennacherib's army\*\*\*\*. From being threatened with extermination, Hezekiah's hard-pressed state suddenly became the dominant power of that area. No longer were the Assyrians to be feared; and those who had entered the conflict alongside them,

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\* Not the Jehoshaphat period, as is often assumed. The verbal contacts are all with the prophecy of Isaiah. And the details of the psalm simply do not fit the earlier occasion.

\*\* See Thirtle's remarkably fine study of this problem in "Old Testament Problems," pp.130-140.

\*\*\* The last five verses are irrelevant to any other suggested application. They fit into the Hezekiah period without difficulty.

\*\*\*\* Herodotus refers to him as "king of the Arabians" — a crashing howler unless the Assyrian was helped by a variety of loyal allies.

eager for the plunder of the rich Judaeon countryside, would now cower in terror, fearing retribution. It is hardly to be expected that the men of Israel, finding themselves suddenly on the crest of the wave, would not use the opportunity to assert themselves against those who had lately gloated over their helplessness.

Thus, even this most unlikely prophecy turns out to be founded, like its predecessors, in the events of the prophet's own day. And the phrase: "the year of redemption" (v.4) is likewise seen to be a carry-over from the Jubilee allusions of ch.61,62.

### Messianic fulfilment

Here, then, is the occasion, yet future, of Messiah's judgment against the enemies of his people.

The assumption is often made that all this will come about when Messiah is leading his glorified saints from mount Sinai to Jerusalem. This is an ill-conceived interpretation. True, the language of the Exodus is often employed in the prophets, and especially in Isaiah, to picture the Lord's salvation of his people; but a careful examination of examples soon makes it clear that a *similar*, not an *identical*, exercise of divine power is intended.\* In any case, the idea of a "wilderness march of Christ and the saints" explicitly contradicts plain scriptures that the Lord comes to the mount of Olives and Jerusalem (Acts 1:11; Zech. 14:4).

This appears to be the picture in Revelation 19 also. The King of kings is seen "clothed in a vesture dipped in blood" (19:13) and with an army of angels (Mt. 24:31) at his back (19:13,14), "He tramples\*\* the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (19:15). Yet it is after this that "the beast and the kings of the earth, and their armies, are gathered together to make war" against him (v. 19).

The idea of a punitive expedition against Edom *after* Messiah has asserted his authority in Jerusalem is fully confirmed by Revelation 19 just quoted. There the divine leader is already King of Kings and Lord of Lords (v. 16). Also, Psalm 2 is quoted: "he shall rule them with a rod of iron." But this is true *after* God has set His king upon the holy hill of Zion.

### "The peoples"

A problem of a very different sort arises from the use in these verses of the word for "peoples":

"Of the peoples there was none with me" (v.3)

"I trod down the peoples in mine anger" (v.6).

All expositors tacitly assume that the second of these describes the judgment on Edom and others. But this meaning makes nonsense of the earlier occurrence. There (in v.3) the meaning must be: "Of Israel there was *none* with me" — in other words Messiah comes not to co-operate with Israel but to save Israel.

The normal usage of this word *amim* (peoples) is with reference to Israel. In Isaiah 40-66 all 46 occurrences have this meaning.

If, then, there is to be consistency in the interpretation of this passage, "I trod down the peoples in mine anger" implies first a judgment which has already taken place on Israel. The phrases "there was none to help...none to uphold" implies an

\* One detail of special significance — here there is dramatic judgment against Edom; but ancient Israel were explicitly forbidden to take action against "Edom, thy brother."

\*\* The word "trample" (v.3) implies a multitude of helpers, as here.

Israel going through the mill of Gentile oppression in the Last Days — but it is God-wrought; it is He who has contrived this final retribution against a wayward people. Then, after repentance long overdue, comes the saving of Israel by Messiah's intervention.

The sense of Psalm 60 is remarkably similar: "Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies" (v.12) — but this follows after: "thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment" (v.3); cp. also Is. 51:22,23; Jer. 25:15-33; especially v.17,18,26,30.

This last and greatest deliverance is brought by Messiah. There is no other saviour available: "I looked, and there was none to help; and I *wondered* that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation..." (v.5). Why should there be this marvelling at lack of aid for Israel? Because there is "a prince (Michael) which standeth for the children of God's people" (Dan. 12:1), His appointment to this high office of caring for Israel dates at least from the time of the Exodus (Ex. 23:20-23). His protecting work is alluded to in this very prophecy: "the angel of his presence saved them" (v.9).

Then why should Michael not be at hand to help Israel once again in this last dire extremity? The Lord Jesus supplies the answer in his own prophecy of the Last Days: "the powers of heaven shall be shaken" (Lk. 21:26). In a time of trouble the like of which the world has never known, the upsurge of evil will be so universal and violent as to make continued angelic control unsure!

At such a time, Messiah — greater than all angels and archangels — will himself *redeem* in garments *stained\** with blood.

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\* These two words (v.3,4) are essentially the same in Hebrew. Different aspects of the same great work.

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## 63 (2). The Great Intercession (v.7-19)

Just as Isaiah's earlier denunciation of judgment on Edom (ch.34) gave way suddenly to an entrancing picture of the blessings of the Messianic kingdom (ch. 35), so now in similar fashion the treading of the winepress in Edom (63:1-6) changes to an eloquent reminiscence of God's gracious goodness to his people in days gone by (63:7-14); and this merges into a sustained appeal for heavenly help (together with abject confession of utter unworthiness), the like of which is only to be matched in the Old Testament in Moses' unflagging self-less appeal for his people at their worst (Ex. 32,33). The sub-division of the text at 64:1 is unfortunate, but it will have to be followed here, to avoid too long a section of commentary.

### Who is the speaker?

The singular pronoun with which this section begins immediately presents a problem of identification. Thereafter the pleading is always on behalf of "us" — God's Israel (the one apparent exception — "towards me," v.15 — is a dubious reading). The most natural interpretation is to read the intercession as offered by the prophet himself on behalf of his nation, like the other great intercessions by Daniel and Nehemiah. But since the "I" of verses 1 -6 is undoubtedly the Messiah, one is inclined to take verse 7 in the same way — Messiah at last including cast-off Israel in his heavenly pleading because they are now turned to him in repentance confessing

their sins (64:5,6). From this point of view the prophecy hangs together, as spoken against the background of Israel's final and greatest tribulation.

### Reminiscences of the Exodus

There is an unsurpassed eloquence about the opening appeal as it celebrates the gracious acts of the Lord — His lovingkindnesses, His praises, His great goodness, His mercies — with special reference, doubtless, to His covenant promises (as in 55:3). Even though repeated waywardness has written off Israel as Lo-Ammi, not My people, the loving kindness of God must finally reassert itself, as in times past: "Surely they are my people, children that will not lie (i.e. not disbelieving or disloyal; Ps. 116:11) — children who will not reject (me), LXX — "so he was their Saviour" (v.8). That word *moshiya* echoes the name of *Mosheh*, Moses, round whom all this paragraph centres. The whole point of it is just this: Lord, remember what You did for us in ancient days; now come to our aid in like fashion, for our need and our undeserving are alike greater!

"In all their affliction he was afflicted" (v.9). Who would not be reluctant to relinquish these lovely words, expressing in such matchless fashion how God entered with yearning compassion into the sufferings of His people (cp. Ex. 3:7; Jud. 10:16). Yet other readings are possible. "In all their adversity he was no adversary" (RVm). This fits into the picture of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage.\* Then "the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them (Ex. 6:6); and he bare them (Ex. 19:4; Dt. 1:31), and carried them all the days of old" (v.9).

### Israel's Guardian Angel

This theme of the angel of God's presence with Israel is a fascinating one, and well worth tracing through Scripture.

The guiding and protecting angel, who appeared to Abraham and Jacob and also to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:2) also provided safety for Israel when beset by the Egyptians at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:19,20). He was permanently assigned as Israel's guardian through the wilderness: "Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee in the way...Beware of him; and obey his voice, be not rebellious against him; for he will not pardon your transgressions; for my Name is in him. But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries" (Ex. 23:20-24).

From this time forward, this heaven-sent helper is constantly referred to as "*the* angel of the Lord." His activities on behalf of Israel can be readily traced. He confounds the nefarious work of Balaam. As "a man with a drawn sword in his hand" he is captain of the Lord's host for the invasion of Canaan. He guides deliverers like Gideon. He rebukes Israel with corrective affliction. He rescues Jerusalem with hammer blows of destruction against the Assyrians. He holds out a drawn sword over Jerusalem in A.D.70. In the Last Days, he is named (very appropriately) at last as Michael "who stands for the children of God's people" (Dan. 12:1; Rev. 12:7?; Dan. 10:13,21)\*\*. But at this time "the powers of heaven shall be shaken" (Lk. 21:26), so that without the advent of Messiah in supreme power and glory there

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\* LXX, influenced doubtless by v.5a, reads: "Not an ambassador (prophet) nor an angel, but himself saved them." Attractive as this reading is, it hardly fits into the Exodus context, when God certainly did work through his delivering angel and through the prophet Moses. "Similarly, Gabriel appears to have a special role; see B.S. ch.16.07.

would be little hope for Israel.

There are plenty of other allusions that fit into this framework in intriguing fashion.

### Provocation

The prophet in his reminiscences of the awe-inspiring experiences and surpassing blessings of Israel's early days does not lose his sense of proportion. There was that other sickening inescapable theme of Israel's wretched failure and faithlessness: "They rebelled, and grieved his Holy Spirit" (v. 10). "They provoked the spirit of Moses, so that he pronounced (their condemnation) with his (own unaided) lips" (Ps. 106:33; cp. 95:10).

It was a close parallel to the days of Noah. "My spirit shall not always abide in man " God had said (Gen. 6:3RVm). "It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart" (6:6). So "he turned to be their enemy."

In Isaiah's day, thanks to the influence of prophets and a pious king, some at least of the people learned to read the lesson of past history: "Then his people remembered the ancient days of Moses, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock (Moses leading Israel through the Red Sea)? Where is he that put his Holy Spirit in the midst of them (the angel of God's presence)? that led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm (the angel again?), dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name (as a God who raises His own from the dead)?" (v.11,12).

That fervent repeated appeal was heard, and Jerusalem delivered by a stroke of divine power every bit as sensational as that deliverance at the Red Sea.

### New Testament Commentary

The use made in the NT. of this scripture is both copious and impressive:

- a. "They grieved his Holy Spirit" (v. 10) becomes Paul's exhortation to his converts: "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30; for 'redeem' see 51:5,9). In Isaiah the allusion is to the angel of God's presence. In the NT. his place is taken by a more intimate bestowal of divine power.
- b. "Spirit came down from the Lord, and guided them" (v. 14 LXX). One of Christ's promises of the Holy Spirit used this very expression: "He (the Comforter) will guide you into all truth" (Jn. 16:13). It is easier now to understand the seeming repetition in this passage.
- c. "Where is he that brought them up out of the sea (figure of the grave; Dt. 30:13), with the shepherd(s) of his flock?" (v.11). In Heb. 13:20 this becomes: "Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant...". In the Hebrew text, "shepherd" is plural — evidently intended to be read as an intensive plural: "that great shepherd." The Exodus context in Isaiah shows that "the blood of the everlasting covenant" is not the covenant made later at Sinai, but the blood of the Passover lamb which meant dramatic deliverance from bondage.
- d. "He turned (repented!)...and fought against them" (v. 10). In Rev. 2:16: "repent; or else.../ *will fight against them* with the sword of my mouth (this last phrase is from Is. 49:2). The next verse mentions manna in the wilderness and the Lord's everlasting name given to him that overcometh.

### 534 Isaiah Part 3

It is easier now to understand the seeming repetition in this passage:

<b>Verses 11,12</b>	<b>Verses 13,14</b>
a. That brought them up out of the sea.	a. That led them through the deep.
b. With the Shepherd of his flock.	b. As an horse in the wilderness.
d. Dividing the water before them	c. That they should not stumble.
e. That put his Holy Spirit in the midst of them	d. As a beast goeth down into the valley.
f. That led them by the right hand of Moses.	e. The Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest.
g. To make himself an everlasting name.	f. So didst thou lead thy people.
	g. To make thyself a glorious name.

#### **Importunity in the Last days**

These correspondences, together with the NT allusions already listed point strongly to the idea of a further fulfilment of all these words with reference to those in Christ. He is the greater Moses, sent by God once and again to deliver a people groaning in bondage.

Then the impassioned pleading of verses 15-19, repeated with equal intensity in 64:8-12, should have its counterpart in the fervent prayers of God's people today. It is a moving picture of people made miserable not only by their evil circumstances but also by an overpowering sense of personal helplessness. In these paragraphs the exhortation already addressed so eloquently to the Lord's watchmen: "Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, take ye no rest, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (62:6,7), finds its response in an insistent desperate importunity matched only by that of Daniel praying for Messiah the Prince and for the consolation of Israel (Dan. 9):

"Look down from heaven, and behold...where is thy zeal and thy strength?...hold not back!...O Lord, why hast thou made us to err, from thy ways?...Return, for thy servants' sake...O thou that wouldest rend the heavens, and come down..." (63:15 - 64:1).

Here is prayer as it should be prayed, prayer of a kind that 20th century saints have surely not learned to pray, for had they done so, mightier events than earthquakes, famines, pestilences, wars and rumours of wars, would have happened ere this.

But this prayer is not just pathetic pleading. It has a backbone of educated spiritual understanding capable of appreciating the basic principles of God's redeeming work: "Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not" (v.16). The faithful remnant whom Isaiah represented had the insight to realise that it was no virtue of theirs if the blood of Abraham flowed in their veins. Much more fundamentally, they claimed kinship with Abraham's God: "O Lord, thou art our father, our redeemer." Moses had tried to teach this high ideal: "Is he not thy father, that hath gotten thee? He hath made thee, and established thee" (Dt. 32:6). And David remembered it: "Blessed art thou, Lord God of Israel our father" (1 Chr. 29:10). But missing it badly, the adversaries of Jesus boasted brashly: "We be Abraham's seed" (Jn. 8:33), as though that in itself put them beyond criticism.

"Our redeemer" also emphasizes kinship, for this is the word which describes the near kinsman who comes to the rescue of an afflicted member of the family suffering from slavery or oppression or imprisonment for debt. In all this there is a deep appreciation of the saving grace of God to those who are His.

Yet the prayer remonstrates that these who now plead for God's aid, because there is no other to be had, find themselves baffled by being treated rather as God treated recalcitrant Pharaoh in the time of Moses: "O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways (shutting their eyes lest they should see; 6:10), and hardenest our heart from thy fear\*" (v.1 7).

This had certainly happened in Isaiah's day when, led in stubborn perversity by their king Ahaz, the people had shown no inclination whatever to lean on the Lord their God. "Ask a sign," Isaiah had invited, only to be told by the mulish king: "I want no sign from either heaven or hell"; yet, transparent hypocrite that he was, he must needs switch piteously to: "Neither will I tempt the Lord" (7:10-12).

Hezekiah and his faithful ones were different, hence this insistent plea: "Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance" (v.17). Here (as in 52:8RV) there is allusion again to Israel in the wilderness. The ark and the Shekinah Cloud went before them "to seek out a resting place." When it rested, the liturgical word of Moses was: "Return, O Lord, unto the ten thousands of the thousands of Israel" (Num. 10:36). That word: "Return" celebrates God among His people again after a period of separation. So, well might the faithful of this age make the same petition with heartfelt fervour.

### **Problem**

But there is here a puzzling mention of adversaries treading down the sanctuary (v.18). This (with 64:11) is usually quoted with special confidence by those assigning an exilic or post-exilic date to this part of Isaiah. The details are not as conclusive as they might seem, for there is evidence that at the behest of Tiglath-pileser III Ahaz accepted an Assyrian garrison in Jerusalem \*\*, and that these men were quartered in the temple area: "Ahaz took away (literally: divided) a portion of the house of the Lord, and gave it unto the king of Assyria" (2 Chr. 28:21 )\*\*\*

Hence the lament: "We are become as they over whom thou never barest rule; as they upon whom thy name has not been called" (v.19). With a stricken king unable to exercise government, and with boastful Assyrian threats ringing in their ears, it might well seem that their God had let them lapse into Gentiledom.

In days to come this sense of hopelessness will recur more acutely than ever before. And at that time, only the prayers of the faithful in Israel will save Holy City and Holy Land from final irrevocable dereliction.

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\* Here is an allusion to Isaac (Gen. 31:42,53), to match the earlier mention of Abraham and Jacob.

\*\* Tiglath-pileser followed this policy with other defeated nations.

\*\*\* Cp. also Ps. 74:3-8; 79:1; and the implications behind Is. 7:13; 11:9a; 52:1; Mic. 5:5.

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## 64. "Rend the heavens!" (v.1-12)

An earlier section of Isaiah 63 is filled with reminiscences of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, and their unworthiness of such a salvation. Now, after a moving intercession on the people's behalf, the prophet revives other memories of Israel in the wilderness. The language of the first half of chapter 64 is extremely difficult. It is only a recognition of the allusions to Israel at Sinai which gives intelligibility and coherence to the obscure phraseology. But it will also be seen by and by that Isaiah is using this to frame a prophecy of a new Covenant greater than that made with Israel there.

The language in Exodus about the theophany at Sinai is very highly-coloured; and since the Bible narrative is not in the habit of going in for purple prose, it may be taken that the sight and sound of that theophany was so overpowering as almost to provide an adequate excuse for the people's demand to Moses: "Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Ex. 20:19). So they chose Moses instead of the Voice of God, and have been dying ever since.

At that time "mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly" (Ex. 19:18). The same awesome Shekinah Glory of God had appeared to Moses in a bush which burned but never consumed. The same Glory had protected Israel at the Red Sea and had guided them to Sinai by a pillar of cloud and fire.

### Theophany in the wilderness

It was these remarkable experiences which are now made the basis of Isaiah's allusive language:

- a. "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence" (v.1). This is what happened at Sinai: "The whole mount quaked greatly...and the Lord came down on mount Sinai" (Ex. 19:18,20).
- b. "As when fire kindleth the brushwood" (v.2RV) — an allusion to the Glory of God in the bush.
- c. "The fire causeth the waters to boil" (v.2). This appears to be an indirect reference to the mighty pillar of cloud which was the constant witness to God's Presence in the wilderness.
- d. "To make thy Name known to thine adversaries" (v.2). Compare the Lord's word to Pharaoh: "...to show thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth" (Ex. 9:16).
- e. "Thou earnest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence" (v.3) -Sinai, once again (cp. Mic. 1:3,4).
- f. "For from of old, men (Israel) have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen..." (v.4). This, too, alludes to Sinai: "When the people saw it (thunderings, lightnings, earthquake, smoking mountain), they removed and stood afar off...Let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Ex. 20:18,19).
- g. "Which he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him" (v.4) — Moses beholding the Glory of the Lord in the mount.

- h. So also verse 5: "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth (in God)\*". Compare how the angels of God met Jacob (Gen 32:1 s.w.).
- i. "We have sinned in them (in thy ways) constantly, yet we shall be saved" (v.5). A reminiscence, probably, of the sin of the golden calf and other defections, from which Israel were saved only by the intercession of Moses
- j. j. The allusion to righteousness as "filthy rags" (v.6) — surely a mistranslation — now comes in with remarkable fitness, for the Hebrew word is essentially the same as that translated "ornaments" — which the sinners in Israel were bidden put off them (Ex. 33:4,6) after the apostasy of the golden calf And appropriately the word for "unclean thing" (v.6) is that employed scores of times in the Law of Moses for the defilement which excludes from fellowship in the congregation of the Lord.
- k. "Thou hast hid thy face from us" (v.7). These words describe the divine reaction to Israel's apostasy in the wilderness: "And when the Lord saw it, he abhorred them...and he said, I will hide my face from them" (Dt. 32:19,20).

The point of all these allusions to Israel in the wilderness is evident enough. They make confession that the people of Isaiah's day had gone as far away from their God as their fathers did. Yet God had not forsaken them, little though they deserved His care. With a lovingkindness past believing, He continued to manifest His Glory among them and to bring them through their troubles to the Land of Promise.

#### Isaiah's intercession

With all this as background to his thinking the prophet now bursts once again (as in 63:15-19) into an impassioned prayer fit to rank with the intense moving intercession which Moses made on their behalf (Ex. 32:11-14,31,32):

"But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people...Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O Lord? wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?" (Is. 64:8,9,12).

The prophet speaks not just for himself but for his undeserving people. Four times (v.6,8,9) that emphatic "we-all" comes in to bear up all the nation before their God of compassion and comfort.

Here is the resolution of the strange paradox: (v.5,6) "we all as an unclean thing" may nevertheless claim God as a Father because he is happy to accept repentance as righteousness. Remarkably, but also appropriately, this passage (with its parallel in 63:16) is the only place in the OT. where "Our Father" becomes a prayer.

And just as Moses built his petition for forgiveness on an eloquent plea that God vindicate His own honour (Ex. 32:12,13), so now Isaiah also: "Thy holy cities\*\* are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire" (v. 10,11).

#### What historical background?

These words about the temple are made one of the chief reasons to be urged by modernists against any possible authorship by Isaiah, contemporary of Hezekiah,

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\* The Hebrew word always implies this.

\*\* Intensive plural for "thy unique holy city"? Note the parallelism: "Zion...Jerusalem".

since that first temple was not burnt till the days of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 52:13).<sup>\*</sup> There is not sufficient ground here on which to build an entire theory of authorship, especially when it is seen that the Hebrew past tenses (v. 10,11) may be read as expressing the *threats* and *intention* of the brutal Assyrian enemy. <sup>\*\*</sup> "Of a truth, Lord," Hezekiah was driven to lament in his prayer for deliverance, "the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire" (2 Kgs. 19:17,18). There is here an implication that Rabshakeh, the great boaster, had threatened the same fate for the holy temple in Jerusalem.

Then well might the prayer end with the desperate remonstrance: "Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O Lord? wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?" (v. 12). Faced with such a decisive challenge to the God of Israel as that made by the Assyrian, Jehovah simply *had* to vindicate Himself, and He did! After the time of Hezekiah there was no open manifestation of divine power to save the holy city, nor will there be until Israel prays with heart and soul for the Messiah to whom they have hitherto shown indifference.

### New Testament applications

Long after the time of Isaiah, the faithful remnant who repented at the preaching of John the Baptist had the answer to their prayer: "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down" (v.1). It came when they saw their leader baptize Jesus and "he saw the heavens rent asunder (RV), and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him" (Mk. 1:10). Further fulfilment should have confirmed their faith at the crucifixion when "the earth did quake, and the rocks rent" (Mt. 27:51) as at Sinai, and also the veil of the temple which symbolized the barrier between heaven and earth, "was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" as by a divine hand.

Thereafter the divine revelation which Israel refused at Sinai became the special privilege of those who saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But the wisdom of God in him was shut to Israel's leader — "none of the princes of this (Jewish) world knew it." In effect they were repeating the attitude of Israel at Sinai. So Paul quoted, appropriately with reference to Jewry: "Eye did not see, nor did ear hear, neither did it enter into the heart of man (this last phrase from Is. 65:17 LXX), whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him. *But* God revealed them by His Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:8-10).

Those who see themselves as "unclean" in the sight of God and yet "saved" (v.5,6) rejoice in the over-ruling providence of God: "We are the clay, and thou our potter" (v.8). Paul's comment: "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of *the same lump* to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Rom. 9:21). This is a truth many, even in Christ, are loth to accept — that there is *no* virtue in those whom God fashions "unto honour", but only in the One who does the fashioning:

"We are all the work of thy hand" (v.8). On this also Paul adds his expository comment: "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God afore prepared (in Christ?) that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

In view of the systematic NT. application of this Isaiah prophecy to saints in Christ, it would seem eminently reasonable to find room for its other details in the

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<sup>\*</sup> Certainly v. 10,11 could not apply to Zerubbabel's temple (the suggested alternative), for the fathers did not praise God in *it*, nor was it burned with fire. And if a Nebuchadnezzar reference is insisted on, then certainly this most moving penitential prayer brought no response whatever.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Cp. especially the intention in Ps. 74:7,8, a psalm which belongs to Hezekiah's days.

same context. Before many years are past, once again Zion will be destined to be a wilderness and Jerusalem a desolation (v.10). At that grim time if there is to be salvation for Israel it will only be through the importunity (as in v.8-12) of saints in Israel and among the Gentiles. When saints pray as they have never prayed, then and only then will the redemption come.

#### A useful parallel

63:15ff		64:7-12	
16.	Thou art our father.	8.	Thou art our father
16.	Thy name.	7.	Thy Name
17.	Made us to err from thy ways.	5.	We have sinned in thy ways continually.
17.	Hardened our heart — (quoted: Rom. 9:18).	8.	We are the clay, and thou our potter (quoted: Rom. 9:21).
18.	The people of thy holiness	9.	We are thy people.
18.	Thy sanctuary trodden down.	11.	Our holy and our beautiful house...burned...laid waste.
15.	Thy mercies...are they restrained?	12.	Wilt thou refrain thyself, O Lord?
64:2	The fire of meltings (mg).	7.	Thou hast melted us.

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### 65(1). The Faithful Remnant — and the rest (v.1-16)

There is no difficulty in recognizing the contemporary reference of this part of the prophecy. Whereas modernists, driven by their theories to postulate a Third Isaiah (ch. 56-66), grope around uncertainly trying to find some sort of connection between this chapter and the times of Zerubbabel (or later)\*, the well-defined theme here of the faithful and the apostates fits the reformation period of Hezekiah's reign with little difficulty.

It has to be remembered, then, that the northern kingdom of Israel, after generations of spiritual degeneration (2 Kgs. 17:15-17), was left shattered and leaderless after the inroads of Tiglath-pileser III, Shalmaneser V and Sargon II. Hezekiah, set on religious reformation and political unification of the nation, made an eloquent appeal to the northern tribes (for in spite of deportations most of the Israelitish population was still in the land). He besought them to return to the God of the Fathers. This call to signify a change of heart by keeping the Passover once again at Jerusalem was scorned by many but heeded by some (2 Chr. 30:5-11,18) who thus gave themselves the biggest spiritual treat of their lives when they shared the fellowship and joy of a double Passover week (2 Chr. 30:22-26) along with their brethren of Judah from whom they had been so long separated.

#### Easy contemporary reference

Here, then, is the background to the text of Isaiah 65,66. "I am sought of them that asked not for me: I am found of them that sought me not" (v.1). The primary reference is to the people of the northern kingdom who had

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\* 65:3,4,7,11; 66:3,6 very effectively forbid any reference to the Babylonian captivity or to any period after that.

in effect become Gentile by their centuries of disloyalty to the God of Israel. But now many of them, although only a remnant of the mass of the nation, responded to Hezekiah's appeal to join in Passover observance at Jerusalem. "I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation (the ten tribes) that hath not called upon my Name. I spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people" (v.1,2) — how well these words describe Hezekiah's call to national repentance, addressed to Judah as well as to those in the north: This is evidently the way Paul reads the words (Rom. 10:20,21).

Then comes a purple description of the foul religious practices which they had taken up. There were abominations in the temple itself — "provoking me to anger continually\* to *my face*"; they had been encouraged to it by Ahaz (cp. 2 Kgs. 23:12). There was ritual fornication in gardens; they queued up for it! (66:17 RVm) — it was *their* way of achieving Paradise Restored. Copying the Assyrian\*\* they burned incense on brick altars (instead of unhewn stone: Ex. 20:25): v.3. In their craze for spiritualism they held séances in cemeteries and sepulchres (cp. 8:19,20). They flouted Moses' explicit commandments, eating swine's flesh\*\*\* and partook of nauseating meals of other unclean food (v.4; 66:17). And a man could be a murderer (66:3a)\*\*\*\* and still be welcomed into this unholy "fellowship". The high places did a roaring trade (65:7), especially those dedicated to the gods of Good Luck and Destiny (v.11 RV).

### The faithful remnant

And alongside all this, which evidently went on openly and unashamed and was even officially encouraged until zealot Hezekiah got into his stride, there was the faithful remnant who clung earnestly to the God of their Covenant and who cringed at the shameless shame in which their fellows of both Israel and Judah were steeped.

These were "the new wine found in the cluster" (v.8), the bunch of fine fruit in a bad vine which seemed only fit for burning. "Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it" (v.8). For the sake of those who would fain be worthy of their father Abraham, the undeserving nation was to be preserved: "So will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all."\*\*\*\*\*

The piety of these faithful ones brought its own immediate reward, for it is possible to infer that Jerusalem was beleaguered by the Assyrians at Passover (cp. the phraseology of 30:29; 31:5); so those whose religious duty took them to Jerusalem for the Feast found themselves in the only place that was safe from the ferocity of the invaders\*\*\*\*\*: "I will bring a seed out of Jacob (the north), and out of Judah (the south) an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect shall inherit her (Jerusalem), and my servants shall dwell there" (v.9).

In the impressive sustained antithesis (v.11-16) the destinies of these two sharply-contrasting sections of the nation are set out:

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\* The word commonly used for the continual burnt offering!

\*\* Archaeological evidence for this.

\*\*\* Macalister found this at Gezer.

\*\*\*\* It is tempting to suggest that 66:3,4,17 are verses belonging after 65:4 or 5. Omit them from ch. 66 and there is very good continuity there.

\*\*\*\*\* Isaiah's attention to the faithful remnant is most marked, as this list of passages shows: 1:9, 10, 28; 4:3;6:11-13; 13:12; 17:4-6; 24:13-16; 33:15-17; 51:1-3; 57:13; 66:5,10-14. Cp. also Amos 5:13-15; 8:1; 9:8,9; Jer. 24. Ps. 74, with the same theme, has *Al Taschith* — destroy not! — as its subscription.

\*\*\*\*\* Of course, this Passover was not the one detailed in 2 Chr. 30; but it may be confidently assumed that after the great success of that big occasion, the observance was continued in every year of Hezekiah's reign.

"I will number\* you to the sword, ye shall all bow down to the slaughter...Ye shall be hungry, thirsty, ashamed...Ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit. Ye shall leave your name for a curse...the Lord thy God shall slay thee" (v.12-15) — this is terrible language, describing all the havoc of the Assyrian war!

The emphasis of this grim picture is accentuated by the constant repetition — four times in ch. 65, and nine times in ch. 66 — of "thus saith the Lord."

But "I will *first* measure their work into their bosom\*\*(v.7) implies blessing afterwards. Accordingly, by contrast with this reprobation: "My servants (the faithful remnant) shall eat...and drink...and rejoice...and be called by another name" (v.13-15). Each of these "shall bless himself in the God of truth...and shall swear by the God of truth." For all such "former troubles are forgotten...they are hid from mine eyes" (v. 16) — this with reference to the mighty contrast of blessing which followed after the Assyrians were so astonishingly destroyed. The very routes by which Jerusalem could best be attacked — via Sharon or the Valley of Achor — were instead to be "a fold of flocks...a place for herds to lie down in" (v.10)\*\*\*

The captivating picture of peace and happiness which now follows (v.17-25) is a Messianic expansion of the wonderful wave of prosperity which swept through the Land after this divine rescue operation.

### New Testament allusions

The NT. makes use of this prophecy in an astonishing number of ways, but how to mould these together into a consistent pattern is a task the present writer does not have the insight for. Even taken piecemeal they are not without their problems.

- a. Paul's use of verses 1,2 is at first glance rather startling (Rom. 10:20,21), for he applies verse 1 to Gentiles seeking the gospel, and verse 2 to obdurate Israel. But of course this is right, for the language of verse 1 implies a willing heart: "I am sought...I am found," whereas verse 2 has only the opposite idea: "a rebellious people."

This follows the prototype splendidly, for verse 1 originally applied to those from Galilee of the Gentiles who responded to Hezekiah's call, whilst verse 2 focusses on the unregenerate in Judah.

In the Last Days there will be a startling reversal of this Scripture, for then, goaded and driven by hard circumstances, Jewry will begin to turn to the God of their fathers, pleading for aid which can come from no other, whilst certain of those Gentiles who call themselves Brethren in Christ will find themselves disregarded because of the emptiness of their pretensions: "Lord, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence..." (Lk. 13:26).

- b. Indeed this reversal of status is already evident in the Apocalypse, for Isaiah's apostrophe to them "that forsake the Lord" is several times alluded to in Christ's caustic message to Laodicea. "When I called, ye did not answer" (v.12). And the judgment that "ye shall be hungry...thirsty...ashamed" (v 17,18) is made even more graphic: "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked...the shame of thy nakedness" (3:17,18). The "new name" (LXX) promised to the faithful (v.15) is there also in Revelation (3:12).

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\* In the Hebrew a deliberate play on the name of the god of Good Luck (v.11 RV), this is a numbering without any "atonement for your souls" (Ex. 30:12-16).

\*\* Alternatively this passage could read, very trenchantly: "I will measure their work, all of it, and will recompense it (LXX) into their bosom."

\*\*\* Note that those who offer offensive sacrifice (v.3,4) do not enjoy the blessing of the New Age, but the animals themselves do! (v.25).

The promise of blessed eating and drinking (v. 13) becomes a meal of matchless fellowship: "I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me" (3:20). And blessing in "the God of Amen" (v. 16) is unexpectedly matched by the introduction of the same letter: "These things saith the Amen" (3:14). When these associated ideas are recognized, Laodicea's warning becomes specially ominous as addressed to Gentiles who have become Jews and are now in danger of reverting to type.

- c. It may be taken as fairly certain that Jesus meant his healing of the Gadarene demoniac (Mk. 5:2,15) to be seen and read as a picture of what he will one day do for a demented desperate Israel, abhorred and alone among the nations: "which remain among the graves, and lodge in the sepulchres, which eat swine's flesh...which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me..." (v.4,5). All these details are accurately echoed in the gospel story. The type is most impressive ("Gospels", p.286).
- d. In harmony with this use of Isaiah is Paul's allusive warning to the Corinthians: "Ye cannot drink of the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils" (1 Cor. 10:21). This is certainly more than a casual glance at v.11 (LXX) "Ye are they that...prepare a table for the devil (demon), and fill up a drink offering to (the god) Good Luck". If in ancient days, says Paul, Israel could welcome such degeneracy, ought not the New Israel to take warning and steer clear? The warning is much needed in the present day also!
- e. Pharisees needed it also. In the Lord's parable — no caricature, one may be sure — "the Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee that I am not as other men," whilst the publican "stood far off" (Lk. 18:11,13). This is precisely the spirit of Isaiah's words: "They say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou" (v.5). It is a picture of a man-made religion in which the falsely pious exalts himself to a holiness which is not really his. Such are "a smoke in my nose" — the incense of their prayers is a horror to high heaven.
- f. There is a section of the Sermon on the Mount (Lk. 6:21ff) where Isaiah's graphic antithesis (v.13ff) is taken as a model: "Woe unto you...ye shall hunger...shall mourn and weep;" but by contrast he assures his little flock: "Blessed are ye...ye shall be filled...ye shall laugh...leap for joy." And the Lord adds: "Good measure...shall men give into your bosom" (v.38) — contrast Isaiah: "I will measure their work, and recompense it unto their bosom" (v.7).
- g. But most impressive is verse 16: "He who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth," that is, the God who fulfils His Promises\*. Abraham was told that all nations would bless themselves in his Seed (Ps. 72:17 RVm). With reference to these superlative truths, Paul declared with warm emphasis that "all the Promises of God in him (Jesus) are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God" (2 Cor. 1:20). To this the Lord Jesus adds his own assurance: "These things saith the Amen...the beginning of the (new) creation of God" (Rev. 3:14). "Behold I am alive for evermore, the Amen; and have the keys of death and of the grave" (as promised to Abraham; Gen. 22:17a).

Kay (Sp. Comm.) has this good comment on v. 15,16; "To the curse pronounced on every one that violates God's law, he (Jesus) said "Amen"

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\* See Concordance under "Truth." Also, B.S. p.404.

upon the cross. To the blessing guaranteed to all nations by God's promises to Abraham and David, He said "Amen," when he rose from the dead to "live for evermore" (Rev. 1:18).

Let those who truly believe these promises bless themselves in the God of Truth, and He will add His blessing.

## 65 (2). New Heavens and Earth (v.17 — 66:2)

This fine heart-warming prophecy is really all of one piece with what goes before, as this sequence shows:

v.8	: New wine.
v.14	: A new song.
v.15 LXX	: A new name.
v.17	: New heavens and earth.
v.18	: A new Jerusalem.
66:1,2	: A new temple.

Perhaps the list should be extended to include new people, new houses, new animals.

The basis of this glowing picture is, of course, the short era of prosperity which followed in Hezekiah's ravaged kingdom as a result of Assyrian defeat and the phenomenal blessings of a Year of Jubilee. But since the real intent behind the prophecy is to encourage the Lord's faithful remnant in all ages with its alluring promises of a matchless Messianic Age, it is from this point of view especially that it will be studied now.

Just as, in other prophecies, the ruin of Israel is spoken of as a return to chaos (*tohu*, Gen. 1:2; cp. Is. 24:1; Jer. 4:23), so also Israel's restoration is described as a new creation — "new heavens and a new earth."

### The growth of the New Order

This new order does not spring instantaneously from the hand of its Maker. He has "*planted* the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth" (51:16). The phrases imply growth. Messiah himself was first "a tender plant" (53:2). Every man in Christ is a "new creation," growing into his proper place in Messiah's new world (2 Cor. 5:17) which finds its consummation in the Millennial Age (2 Pet. 3:13). Even when that glad era comes in, there will be no waving of a magic wand. Nations will be educated (2:3,4) and healed (Rev. 22:2); sinners will be weeded out (v.20); and the framework of a new and godly civilisation will be fashioned (v.21-23).

### Paradise Restored

Specially impressive is the way in which this Messianic Age is spoken of as a return to the blessedness of a primeval Paradise:

v.17	: New heavens and earth.
v.20	: The sinner cursed.
v.22 LXX	: A tree of life.
v.23 LXX	: They shall not beget children for the curse.

v.25 : Dust shall be the food of the serpent.  
 v.20 : The child a hundred years old suggests a gradual progression back to the patriarchal age of Gen. 5.

One of the great blessings of this promised time, not appreciated as much as it might be, will be the ability to forget: "The former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (v.17). In these words lies the answer to the problem, which besets not a few, of the possible loss of husband or wife or parent or child who does not come to share this redemption. "Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old (the verbs are imperative). Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth (again growth is implied)" (43:18,19).

Thus there will be unalloyed gladness — the words for joy and rejoicing come six times in two verses: "for the Lord will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers" (Dt. 30:9). *Every* sadness will be wiped away: "The voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying" (v.19).

### The punishment of the wicked

Nevertheless, sin will be punished, and will be seen to be punished. In an age when the removing of the curse brings a blessed lengthening of days, "the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed" (v.20)\*. Here is a hint that before the oblivion which Scripture plainly declares to be the ultimate destiny of those who have had no wish to live with God in this life (Ps. 37:34,36,38; 1:4; 52:5), the real punishment of the rebellious will be a mortal lifetime of experience of the blessedness of the age to come. \*\* This, probably, is what Jesus meant by his repeated warning about "weeping and gnashing of teeth." The first of these phrases certainly signifies poignant sorrow. But "gnashing of teeth" expresses not regret but violent *anger* (Acts 7:54) — anger with self that such wonderful God-given opportunities of redemption and the joy of a heavenly kingdom should have been wilfully thrown away: 'Fool! fool! to have this surpassing heavenly gift held out to you, yet deliberately to turn away from it, for the sake of the tawdry allurements of a life which is now being swept away! Fool! fool! this will be the real punishment of the unworthy.

One of the great blessings of the coming age will be security and the satisfaction of enjoying the work of one's hands: "They shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them" (v.21). This promise is a deliberate contrast with the curse God held over a wayward Israel: "Thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof...The fruit of thy land, and all thy labours, shall a nation which thou knowest not eat up...And he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: which also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or the increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee" (Dt. 28:30,33,51).

Such evil days will be gone for ever. It is understandable that the people of Israel knowing the bitter havoc of invasion from pitiless Assyrians should repeatedly have the happiness of Messiah's reign described for them in terms of freedom from all such horror (32:18; 52:1; 54:16f; 62:8f).

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\* An alternative reading has been suggested: "He who falls short of a hundred years shall be reckoned accursed."

\*\* Compare what happened to David's enemies. When he returned after the rebellion, they were allowed to live on in his kingdom — and then they died.

It may be that, like other details in this lovely picture, the language of building and cultivation is also intended figuratively, as Paul used it of his preaching work: "Ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building" (1 Cor. 3:9). In that case, it points to world evangelism in Christ's kingdom, free from all the difficulties and discouragements which now constantly beset the preacher: "mine elect (v.9,15) shall long enjoy the work of their hands" (v.22).

Paul evidently read the language in this figurative fashion, for the next phrase: "They shall not labour in vain," was more than once used by him with reference to the work of the gospel: "holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain" (Phil. 2:16; cp. also 1 Th. 3:5; 1 Cor. 15:58) — "their offspring (i.e. their converts) shall be with them" (v.23). "They shall not bring forth for the curse (either of Genesis or of Dt. 28:41), for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord (inheriting the great promise made to Abraham; Gen. 22:18)."

In that day these blessed saints in Christ will be closer to their God than ever before: "Before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear"\* (v.24; cp. 58:9). David, Daniel, Hezekiah all knew the thrill of immediate response to their prayers (Ps. 32:5; Dan. 9:21; 2 Kgs. 20:4). The brethren in the early church in Jerusalem knew it also when Peter was freed from prison, but they shrugged it off as incredible (Acts 12:5,14,15). No longer will feeble faith find such experiences stupifying, for then "he shall be with them, walking in the way" (Is. 35:8).

At that time an almost unbelievable harmony will bring relaxation and joy to the whole world. Wolf and lamb, lion and bullock will know sweet fellowship (is this language symbolic of Saul and Jesus, Judah and Ephraim?) All creation will be changed except the serpent and it now robbed of all power to destroy: "dust shall be the serpent's meat." Instead, "they (Messiah's enemies; Ps. 72:9) shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord" (v.25)\*\*

### What Temple?

The climax of this detailed description of Messiah's kingdom comes in God's appeal that men fashion for Him in the midst of all this wonderful transformation a temple befitting His Glory. Can there be such a resting place for the splendour of His Presence? "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?" (66:1). Even when blessed with all the good gifts that Messiah can bestow, is there anything good enough for men to devote as a gift to grace the sanctuary of God (as Israel did in the wilderness; Ex. 35:21-35)? No, not possibly! for all that men have, and will have, comes to them only by God's gift: "All these things hath mine hand made, and all these things were (at my behest)." That last phrase is another allusion to the Genesis Creation, like the list already given on page 543f: "And God said, Let...be; and it was so."

David, when dedicating the vast assemblage of materials for the temple he was not to be allowed to build, recognized with rare insight this humiliating truth: "But

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\* 30:19 combine this verse and v. 19b.

\*\* In this verse the same Hebrew verb does duty for "hurt" (bruise) and "feed" One of Isaiah's characteristic puns.

who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chr 29:14).

By those words he supplied man's only possible answer to the Lord's apostrophe. God's own answer is the same: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

Here is the veto to every humanist philosophy that ever was. Let all human skill and cleverness and insight cease to take pride in its own achievement — "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and that maketh flesh his arm" (Jer. 17:5). Instead let human wisdom recognize its own smallness, and submit humbly to the authority of God's revelation of Himself in Holy Scripture — more than this, let a man tremble before him who is the Word of God (cp. Acts 9:6). The humble heart will be the only thing in God's New World which His hands have not made. So this, and this only, can be dedicated to God as His dwelling place.

Stephen taught his hide-bound contemporaries that since the resurrection of the Lord Jesus "the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands (Acts 7:48). Now "the true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:23). Yet to this day attempts are made to sully this truth with expectations of a temple equipped with an enormous altar for animal sacrifices and with "boiling houses" of fantastic proportions. This after a sacrifice has been offered "once for all" (Heb 7:27; 9:26,28; 10:10).

This issue of a literal or spiritual temple with which to honour the God of heaven and earth has to be faced. It decided the deaths of Jesus and of Stephen. It brought persecution to both Peter and Paul. "Where is the house that ye build unto me?...To this *man* will I look."

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## 66 (1). The Holocaust — and after (v.3-24)

Few chapters in this second half of Isaiah have their roots so evidently in the prophet's own day as this concluding section does. And the process of pinning prophecy on to history also serves to demonstrate very clearly that the obsession of many commentators with chronological sequence (requiring that these later chapters be forced into the reign of Manasseh) is sadly mistaken.\* All through, certainly from chapter 14 onwards, the entire prophecy of Isaiah belongs strictly to the reign of Hezekiah.

### Mockery by unbelievers

At the outset (v.5) the faithful are comforted with the assurance that their faith in God is to be vindicated by events. The sarcasm of unbelieving fellow-Israelites will be exposed as cynical folly: "Ye that tremble at the word of the Lord, Your brethren that hate you, that cast you out for my name's sake, have said (in sarcasm), Let the Lord be glorified (and then we will believe!)."

This was precisely the attitude of many, especially in the northern kingdom, when Hezekiah's messengers brought the royal exhortation to them to renew their loyalty to Jehovah: "Show us the Glory of the Lord right now. Prove to us that he really is

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\* It is not even true that there is chronological sequence in the chapters which undisputably belong to Hezekiah's reign. Each has to be treated on its merits.

active for Jerusalem and the worshippers there, and then we will take Hezekiah seriously." (2 Chr. 30:10).

The sardonic comment of the prophet was: "He *shall* appear — to *your* joy (the faithful), and to *their* shame (the mockers)." And so it came to pass.

That northern mockery doubtless took its stand on the futility of events in the reign of Ahaz: 'What good was the temple in Jerusalem then? Ahaz made a treaty with Tiglath-pileser, but it simply meant paying an annual tribute and suffering the humiliation of an Assyrian garrison in the temple area! Then why should we set our hopes on Passover-keeping in that temple reduced to a shambles by his soldiers?'

In response to this faithless feet-on-the-ground attitude Jehovah took charge of the situation. He did "appear" to their shame — they had to endure yet another Assyrian invasion, the third\*, another beating by "the rod of God's anger". But the Lord also appeared to bring joy to His faithful remnant, when the might of divine power blasted the might of Assyrian power outside the walls of Jerusalem. It came with "a voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the Lord rendering recompence to his enemies" (v.6; cp. 30:30).

### **Birth and travail**

Before Zion's travail came to its climax, she was (in a figure) delivered of a man-child\*: Probably the reference is to the fact that Hezekiah, "sick unto death" at the time of the Assyrian invasion, became like a man new-born before the enemy was destroyed. It is certain that Hezekiah's sickness and the over-running of the Land happened at about the same time (Passover, 701 BC; see 38:5,6; 2 Kgs. 18:13,2). It is also certain that Hezekiah, healed of his leprosy, was able to go into the temple and pray for God's help against the Assyrians (37:1).

The good king's lament was that "the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth" (37:3) — a figurative way of alluding to the recent reformation which had apparently wrought no deliverance from the violence of the enemy.

God's answer through His prophet was: "Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the Lord" (v.9).

### **Returning refugees**

So he did deliver. The "children" of Zion's travail were the hundreds of thousands of captives dragged away to other parts of Sennacherib's empire, especially Babylon, and of refugees who had fled in terror to surrounding countries to escape the unmatched cruelties of the vulpine invader.

With Sennacherib cowed and his army gone, the way was clear for the happy return home of this pathetic multitude. The captives were sent urgently back by superstitious horrified Assyrians. And the Gentile nations which had dubiously received swarms of refugees now realised that a people with such a God as Jehovah was a neighbour to keep on the best of terms with. So returning Israelites were given every possible help — "horses, chariots, litters, mules, swift beasts". It

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\*  
1. Tiglath-pileser III.  
2. Shalmaneser V and Sargon II.  
3. Sennacherib.

\*\* Jewish Targum here says "the king"!

was a form of homage to the God who was worshipped in "my holy mountain of Jerusalem" (v.20).

From among these, now returning, "I will also take of them for priests and for Levites" (v.21). For, so great was the fresh surge of enthusiasm for the renewed service of the temple, and so few the number of holy ministers available, that every man qualified to serve there was promptly brought into service\*.

Here, then, is the ready explanation of the puzzling words: "As soon as Zion travailed (i.e. *after* the travail), she brought forth her children (note the plural this time)" (v.8). It is the return of happy folk who had suffered such wretchedness during the year just past.

### **A golden age**

Now, all at once, instead of struggle, hardship, and misery, there was abundant comfort (note the triple emphasis in v.13) and a degree of prosperity such as none had thought possible, this latter thanks to a massive plunder from the Assyrians (33:3,4) and also the lavish generosity of neighbouring Gentiles anxious to "make friends" — "the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream" (v.12). Assuredly "the hand of the Lord was made known towards his servants, and his indignation towards his enemies" (v.14).

The picture given here of the titanic destruction of a proud brutal invader marches perfectly with those given in earlier prophecies (17:13,14; 29:5,6; 30:27,30-33; 31:9): "Behold, the Lord will come with fire, and his (cherubim) chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury...For by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh (LXX: in all the Land): and the slain of the Lord shall be many" (v.15,16).

From now on, for the rest of Hezekiah's reign, the regular feasts of the Lord were in full swing: "from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord" (v.23).

And apparently parts of the wreck of the Assyrian camp in the valley of Gehenna (Tophet; 30:33) were preserved as a contemporary Belsen or Auschwitz — an awe-inspiring memorial to the indignation of the Lord when challenged by the puny power of a human dictator: "And they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me" (v.24). It became a lasting assurance to the inhabitants of Jerusalem that they need fear no renewal of the horrors of war during this reign: "so shall your seed and your name remain" (v.22).

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\* This shortage had existed earlier: 2 Chr. 29:34; 30:15,17.

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## **66 (2). Theophany (v. 3-24)**

Whatever it may have meant to Isaiah's contemporaries, there can be no doubt that this last vivid prophecy, swinging between extremes of comfort and judgment, has as its intention the final great Day of the Lord. The imagery is doubtless that of Hezekiah's reign, but the real fulness of meaning is Messianic.

It begins with a ringing call to the Lord's faithful remnant — "ye that tremble at his word." They are "hated" and "cast out for my name" (v.5). Jesus told his disciples that it would be so: "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake" (Mt. 10:22).

But this malevolence, which ordinary people would reckon a bitter evil, is to be taken as a signal token of blessedness: "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you...and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake" (Lk. 6:22).

It should surely be a matter of serious concern to those who call themselves "the household of faith," trembling at God's Word, that in all the wide world there is no sign at all of this hatred for Christ's sake. To be sure, there is no approval either, only a contented anonymity on the one hand, and an unconcerned indifference or ignorance on the other. Then what sort of questions need to be asked — and answered?

### **"Where is the Promise of His Coming?"**

Yet another mark of identification of the "remnant" is a caustic jibe against expectations of a coming Messianic kingdom. "Let the Lord be glorified," will be the characteristic sarcasm against the true faith. This is an experience common to true believers in every generation. Men jeer: "You say it will come, but it doesn't. They have said this in every generation, and it hasn't. Therefore (note the sublime logic here!) it never will!"

Isaiah's earlier version is this: "They say, Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it" (5:19). But when it happens, that will not be simply in order to tidy up the errors of small-minded unbelief, though, of course, that will be one of the inevitable side-effects: "He *shall* appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed" (v.5).

They said the same thing about Moses when he was gone away into the divine presence: "As for this Moses, we wot not what is become of him" (Ex. 32:1). But all at once they saw him in their midst, reflecting the glory of God and blazing with anger at their faithlessness and crude apostasy.

"Remember, Lord, the reproach of thy servants...wherewith thine enemies have reproached, O Lord; wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed" (Ps. 89:51). On this the Targum comments: "They revile the tardiness of the footsteps of Thy Messiah."

Malachi has the same sorry theme: "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words...In that ye say...Where is the God of judgment?" (2:17).

Peter's familiar words foretell a climax of unbelief in the last days. Scoffers will say: "Where is the promise of his coming?" — but they say this "walking after their own lusts" and being "willingly ignorant" of what the Word of God says (2 Pet. 3:3-5).

Incredibly this evil scepticism will invade the ecclesia. "My Lord delayeth his coming" (Lk: 12:45) is a sentiment which will hardly dare express itself audibly, but its very demeanour is eloquent and its converts are already many.

That theophany will one day be a fact which will in itself discriminate between the true and the false: "he shall appear — to *your* joy, and *they* shall be ashamed."

### **The Man-Child and children\***

But before ever Zion endures her great travail a man-child shall be born (v. 7). In the first century this was the resurrection of Messiah: "This day have I begotten

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\* Revelation 12 uses the very language of Isaiah 66, and — properly interpreted — teaches the same essential truths. But the wealth of other Biblical allusions there makes interpretation a more complex business. There are, however, those who maintain that the close similarities of these three Scriptures — Isaiah 66, John 16 and Revelation 12 — signify nothing at all. Very odd.

thee" (Ps. 2:7, interpreted in Heb. 1:4,5; 5:5). The Lord himself used this figure when warning his disciples of the testing time which his crucifixion would mean for them: "Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice...A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world" (Jn. 16:20,21). It was after this that the real travail came on Jerusalem.

But in AD 70, according to nature, "as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children" (v.8). With the temple destroyed, and Judaism brought to nought, there was little to hinder the warm reception given to the gospel by spiritually hungry Gentiles.

### **The Kingdom**

With the coming in of the Messianic Age, there is now only comfort and joy unquenchable for those who are Zion's true children: "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her" (v.10) — these words for gladness come six times in v.10-14, and comfort four times. The lovely figure of mother and children (very common in Isaiah: 8:3,4; 11:8; 26:17,18; 28:9; 45:10,11; 46:3,4; 49:15,20-23; 54:1; 60:16) is developed to the full, with a personal satisfaction in the prophet himself (herself?) not to be quenched. The suckling (8:3) of these new babies, naught but pleasure to both mother and children, the carrying and fondling and cuddling of them (v.11-13), all now takes on an exquisite charm which, more than anything Isaiah wrote, conveys the sense of fulfilment which Messiah's coming will mean: "Your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like the tender grass" (v.14).

There follows another satisfying picture of the gathering home of those who belong to Zion. Gone is the contempt and condescending scorn with which the people of God have been regarded. Now all the resources of Gentiledom are at their command (v.19,20). Now, to offer aid and comfort to any of Messiah's men is to offer sacrifice to Messiah's God "as the children of Israel bring an offering...unto the house of the Lord."

And those who are now the Lord's chosen, and are seen to be such, will be taken "for priests and for Levites" (v.21). It is easy to overlook that in earlier ages these ministers of God had a more important function than the offering of sacrifice at God's altar — that of being teachers of God's law: "a priest's lips shall keep knowledge." In the age to come, this essential work will have priority. There will be a whole world needing to be educated. Through that instruction also the merits of the sacrifice of Jesus will be mediated, and nations who in this age choose to ignore the God of Israel will then be glad to join in happy pilgrimage to Zion: "all flesh shall come to worship before me" (v.23).

### **Judgment**

The other side of the picture is not filled out with the same amount of detail, but the impression on the mind of the reader is every bit as vivid: "A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the Lord that rendereth recompence to his enemies" (v.6). "For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh, and the slain of the Lord shall be many" (v.15,16)\*.

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\* Verse 17, along with v.3,4, probably belongs to ch. 65:3-5. Theme and phrasing are the same; and in ch. 66 continuity is now better.

There is no escaping the plain meaning of words like these. However figurative the expressions, their gist is unmistakable — one day God will weary of mankind, and modern Sodoms like London and Los Angeles and Tel Aviv will feel the weight of His anger. In particular those Middle East nations which have stubbornly refused to recognize Israel's right to exist as God's People in God's Land will meet with retribution at the very time when they gloat over their achievement in wresting the Holy City from Zionist intruders (cp. Ez. 35; Obad. 17,18; Joel 3:18-21).

### **A memorial of Judgment**

"Their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched" (v.24). Jesus appropriated these very phrases to describe the fate of those who refuse the discipline of heaven (Mk. 9:43-48). From the context in Isaiah — "they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses..." — it would seem that when the Land of Israel is the centre of the kingdom of God, there will be deliberate preservation of some outstanding reminder of the fate of those who played the dangerous game of snapping their fingers in the face of God (34:1-10?).

But did Isaiah have to end his prophecy on such a note? The rabbis evidently thought not, for all the Massoretic copies proceed to repeat, in rather meaningless fashion, the first few words of verse 23 as an instruction to the synagogue reader to read that verse again and so end this scripture on a less forbidding note. The same device has been adopted, and for the same reason, at the end of Malachi, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes. But this does not alter the truth of what is written. The challenge of the whole of Isaiah's prophecy is wrapped up in this last chapter — there is a strait gate and a narrow way which leads to life; and there is a broad way which leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. And apparently the many are happy to have it so.

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It is beyond the author's capacity to cover all the references to such topics as: Assyrian, Hezekiah, Invasion, Jerusalem, Jesus Christ, Judgment, LXX, Rabshakeh, Sennacherib etc.

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