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Studies in
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Studies in Isaiah

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Studies in Isaiah
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Published by
Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute
Harleysville, PA 19438
IBRI@ibri.org

Library of Congress Catalog Number 95-80673

ISBN 0-944788-88-2

Edited by Stephen E. Michaels

Cover design by James I. Newman

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Author's Preface

During my first year of teaching, I decided to read through the books of the Old Testament Prophets. I read a few chapters each evening, starting with the first chapter of Isaiah and continuing to the end of Malachi. Then I found, to my dismay, that I did not remember anything I had read. All the beautiful phrases of the King James translation of this portion of the Bible had passed through my mind, but only a blurred impression of the beautiful phrases remained.

During the next six years, most of my time was spent studying and teaching other portions of the Old Testament. Then after the resignation of a colleague, I was asked to give a course in the Prophetic Books of the Old Testament and I spent a summer preparing for this task. I prayed that the Lord would illumine my mind and enable me to discover the truths He desired me to teach. I began to ask such questions as: where are the natural divisions of each passage? what do we know about the situation the prophet was addressing when he wrote these words? which Hebrew or Aramaic words contained in the passage need to be examined with particular care? what other Scriptural passages might throw light on this one?

As I asked these questions and prayerfully looked for answers to them, the inspired words began to illuminate one another, and what had been only beautiful words began to shine with previously unexpected meaning. I began the study in Jeremiah, where the problems are much simpler than in the book of Isaiah. Students were enthusiastic about this approach. One summer, my good friend, Dr. J. Oliver Buswell, who was then president of the National Bible Institute, asked me to give a lecture on the interpretation of Isaiah, and then asked me to write it up for publication in *The Bible Today*, a monthly magazine of which he was editor. I described the method I had been using and applied it to the beginning of Isaiah. He asked for a second article, etc., and this continued for several years.

Recently, I learned that many Bible teachers had kept the issues of the little magazine and others were asking where they could get copies. The library of Biblical Theological Seminary, which had a complete file of the articles, began to receive inquiries about copies, and several inquirers paid for

photostatic copies of the entire series. This led Mr. Stephen Michaels to suggest that it might be desirable to make the entire series available in book form. I am grateful to Mr. Michaels for the effort he has expended in getting this material into shape for publication, and to Dr. Robert Newman, of the faculty of the Seminary, for agreeing to recommend that IBRI publish it in one volume. I would also like to express my thanks to students of past years whose comments have opened my mind to aspects not previously seen. May God bring blessing to many through these studies.

Allan A. MacRae
Summer 1993

Understanding Isaiah

The Book of Isaiah is one of the great masterpieces of the world's literature. It expresses in beautiful language many ideas that are so simple that a child can understand them; it also presents teachings so profound and so involved that scholars can spend their lives digging into them and constantly gaining new glimpses of God's truth.

Many verses from this great book of prophecy are known throughout the Christian world, but many others are rarely noticed. Yet Isaiah's teachings go far beyond what lies upon the surface. The more one studies this book, the more he is astonished at the marvels of divine revelation that it contains.

A few principles are of great importance for understanding what Isaiah wrote.

The first of these is the need to recognize the book's natural divisions. For this purpose the chapter divisions are of little help. In fact they can sometimes be quite misleading, for there are places where the last part of an important section and the first part of an entirely different one are united together in one chapter with no indication of the importance of the dividing point between them. Such a chapter division may cause the careless reader (and even some careful ones) to lose sight of the intimate connection of thought with what precedes or with what follows. Even verse divisions have sometimes been very poorly inserted. (Thus one Bible verse, Psalm 19:4, includes the last two lines of the first stanza of a poem and the first line of its second stanza.) Chapter and verse divisions are useful for finding references, but if taken as guides for interpretation they can be very misleading. If these artificial divisions are ignored it is not difficult in most cases to determine where important sections begin and end. When one carefully follows the trend of thought and notes how the ideas develop it is usually easy to recognize the major divisions and most of the lesser ones, and this often proves to be an important step toward determining a passage's meaning.

Another important need for understanding the book is to gain some knowledge of the historical background of its various portions. Some of this knowledge can be gathered from introductory statements in the book and from words that

Isaiah spoke. Additional facts can be learned from the

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historical accounts in the books of Kings and Chronicles. At many points in the following discussion attention will be called to helpful insights received from examination of the historical background.

While all that Isaiah wrote had a very definite meaning for the people of his own day it must always be kept in mind that Isaiah wrote not only for his contemporaries but also for future generations. That portion of the utterances of the prophets which God caused to be preserved as part of His inerrant Word had important meaning for future believers as well as for those who heard him speak. This is true not only because of the similarity of later situations to those of Isaiah's time; the teachings that the Lord led the prophets to preserve are often so expressed as to reveal great truths about God and about God's plans. Sometimes these truths are explained in detail; at other times they may be hard to understand fully until we examine related aspects of New Testament teaching.

The New Testament books often quote or refer to a passage in the Old Testament as proof of some New Testament doctrine. Sometimes the relevance of the quotation is not immediately apparent, or its use may even seem far fetched. The reason for this is that the New Testament teaching is never based on the few words that are quoted, but always on the whole teaching of the passage from which the quotation is taken. Many parts of the prophetic writings are better understood when we know how New Testament writers referred to them, and the New Testament passages are better understood when we have a real understanding of the situation and context involved in the relevant Old Testament passages.

Another principle that is vital for the understanding of Isaiah is to recognize that sometimes he has the whole nation in mind with particular emphasis upon the ungodly portion of the nation, while at other times he speaks directly to the hearts of the true believers. In many parts of the book, as in various writings by other prophets, there is a regular order of presentation beginning with words of rebuke and judgment against the nation as a whole for the wickedness and apostasy of great numbers of its people, and then turning his attention to the godly among the nation, who might be

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tempted to give way to despair as they hear of coming punishment for sin, and seeking to comfort true believers by assuring them of God's continual presence and by showing them wonderful pictures of the glorious future blessings that He plans to give. Some of these pictures are rather brief, but some are quite extensive. Recognition of this rather frequent alternation is often helpful in interpreting specific passages.

Translations

This book is based on the readings of the "King James Version." This version, which was prepared at the command of King James I of England and first published in AD 1611, is one of the best translations of the Bible ever made. Yet its present value for general use is very greatly limited, as the English language has changed greatly since the time when it was written, both as to meanings of words and as to grammatical forms and usages. From time to time reference will be made to a version that was published in 1901, which is sometimes called the "Revised Version," sometimes the "American Revised Version" and sometimes the "American Standard Version." For many years the American Standard Version was widely used, particularly by Bible teachers in the United States. Since 1952, when a committee issued the "Revised Standard Version" and tried to get it accepted as a new King James Version, the King James Version has generally been referred to in the United States as the King James Version (or the K.J.V.), though it is still called the King James Version in England. In this discussion we shall follow the text of the K.J.V. but wherever its meaning is not clear to present-day readers explanations will be given, and some references will be made to readings in the American Standard Version.

General Structure and Background

Even a casual reader of the Old Testament is immediately conscious of a great change in literary style when he reaches the book of Isaiah. It is almost like going from Mexico into the United States. A similar difference is found when one gets to the end of Isaiah and begins to read Jeremiah.

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Jeremiah presents ideas in fairly simple language, but Isaiah reiterates his thoughts in similes and metaphors, and employs many interesting and beautiful turns of expression. He is not content with describing his sorrow; he laments in poetic language. When he comes to passages of joy, he sings great songs of rejoicing.

Isaiah has a style all his own -- a style so unique that it is easy to distinguish it from other parts of Scripture. This is one reason why it is extremely unlikely that the view of the "higher critics" is true, that the book of Isaiah was written by two or more men. Some have even suggested that as many as thirty or forty writers may have written parts of the book, but it would be extremely improbable that a number of people would write in such a unified style.

Isaiah wrote principally during the reigns of three kings. In the beginning of the book he speaks of his visions in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. For practical purposes we may disregard Uzziah and Jotham. They do not play any great part in the book. On the other hand, it is probable that he wrote a substantial portion of the book during the reign of Manasseh, who followed Hezekiah.

Thus a large portion of the book was written in the reign of Ahaz, a wicked king who had little use for Isaiah and denied him access to the palace. Another portion was written in the days of Hezekiah, the good king who tried to follow God with his whole heart and was always glad to hear the Word of the Lord from Isaiah. Finally, we have the latter portion, which was probably written in the days of Manasseh, a king who was far more wicked than even his grandfather Ahaz. He persecuted the followers of God and introduced all sorts of abominations, even bringing idolatry into the very precincts of the temple itself. According to a Jewish tradition, Isaiah was pursued by the men of Manasseh. Fleeing from them into the woods, he hid himself within a hollow tree. This tree is said then to have been sawed through by the pursuers so that the body of the prophet was cut in two (cf. Heb. 11:37). This is, of course, only a tradition, and we cannot be sure that Isaiah was one of those who suffered this way, but it shows how the later Jews regarded the days of Manasseh.

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It is important to realize the general situation in Jerusalem during the reigns of these three kings. When Ahaz became king, Judah was in much the same situation as during the previous two centuries. Israel, its neighbor to the north, was made up of ten of the tribes, and was perhaps three times as large as Judah. North and east of Israel was the kingdom of Syria, with its capital at Damascus. Syria was stronger than Israel and had often defeated it in military engagements.

Near the time of the beginning of the book of Isaiah a new situation arises. Israel and Syria unite together to attack Judah. Judah is thus endangered by a nation much larger than itself, united with another nation which is still larger, and these two, acting together, are threatening to conquer Judah and put a puppet king on the throne. In this situation, the people of Judah are naturally terrified. Isaiah feels that they should turn to God for help in this great emergency, but King Ahaz is not interested in God. Instead he tries to play off the great powers of the day against each other. He has his own ideas as to how to lead Judah safely through the troubled waters that are ahead.

Secretly he sends a message to the king of Assyria, the great aggressive power which is far across the desert beyond Syria, asking him to come and protect him from Syria and Israel, and promising that, if he will do so, he will pay him heavy tribute and will become his subject. This is the situation near the beginning of the book of Isaiah. Isaiah warns against these plans of Ahaz. He says that depending on Assyria will bring nothing but trouble and sorrow for the land. He also warns against the thought of dependence on Egypt. Only in God is safety to be found. He points out that though the Assyrians will deliver the land from Israel and Syria, the result will be that in the end the nation will be right next to the great Assyrian power and that the Assyrian forces will even come into the land of Judah itself.

He declares that they will overrun most of the land of Judah, but he says that God will protect Jerusalem "like birds hovering" (Isa. 31:5). God will do this without any help from human sources. During the reign of Hezekiah, the situation predicted in the reign of Ahaz actually comes to pass. Judah is now face

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to face with the power of the Assyrian king who has destroyed Syria and conquered Israel. The Assyrian power comes down against Judah with overwhelming strength, as part of its endeavor to force all the nations to bow beneath its yoke. It appears that nothing human can protect Jerusalem. Yet God delivers Jerusalem in a most unexpected way, by suddenly destroying a large part of Sennacherib's army (Isa. 37:36).

About the same time King Hezekiah makes a friendly arrangement with the king of far-away Babylon. Isaiah points out to him that from this land of Babylon there is to come one who will destroy Judah and take the people into captivity as punishment for their sins. Hezekiah is thankful that this catastrophe will not occur during his own lifetime.

Manasseh follows Hezekiah and terrible persecutions take place during his reign, so that it becomes obvious to Isaiah and to the godly people of the land that God must punish the nation for the terrible wickedness that is being shown by the king and by the people as a whole. Punishment is so certain that the godly of the land begin to think of it almost as something which has already come.

In chapters 40 to 66 Isaiah turns his whole attention to the godly remnant and brings them words of consolation from God. He shows them that the exile is not to last forever. God will deliver His people and will pour out great blessings upon them.

The Outline of the Book

In approaching such a book as Isaiah it is helpful to see into what divisions it naturally breaks up. Here the analogy of American geography can be useful. The great chain of the Rocky Mountains forms a section of the United States that is different from anything east or west of it. In the book of Isaiah, there is a similar section, made up of chapters 36 to 39, which is distinct both from what precedes and from what follows. These chapters do not have the style of a prophetic discourse, but that of a narrative. In parts of this section one would almost think he was reading Kings or Chronicles, for these chapters are not mainly the declarations of a prophet, but an account of events in history. This naturally divides

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the book into three sections: chapters 1 to 35, then the narrative section (36 to 39), and then the section of prophetic discourse in chapters 40-66. These divisions of the book have distinctive characteristics.

Most of the material in chapters 1 to 35 begins in the reign of Ahaz. It may be entirely made up of discourses given in the reign of Ahaz or before, though parts of some sections may have been added by Isaiah in the days of Hezekiah.

Chapters 36 to 39 describe events in the reign of Hezekiah and tell of the relationship between the prophet and the king during this reign. Chapters 40 to 66, which may be called "Isaiah's Book of Comfort," were probably written in the reign of Manasseh.

The first main portion of Isaiah, chapters 1 to 35, includes a section which is rather different from the rest, though not as different as chapters 36 to 39 are from the book as a whole. This section is made up of chapters 13 to 27. Even a brief examination of these chapters shows a marked difference.

Like most of the book they are prophecy rather than narrative. Yet the prophecy is not all directed toward the people of Israel; much of it deals with other nations. Thus chapter 13 begins with the words, "The burden of Babylon"; chapter 15 begins, "The burden of Moab"; chapter 17, "The burden of Damascus," etc. A large part of the material in these chapters consists of explanations of God's attitude toward various foreign nations instead of being primarily concerned with His relation to Israel.

The last four chapters of this section (chs. 24 to 27) do not deal with any one foreign nation, but with all collectively, or with some one great world power which is not specifically named. This group of chapters is often called "The Isaiah Apocalypse," since it lifts away the veil from God's future treatment of the great powers that oppose Him.

The Isaiah Apocalypse, which is sometimes quoted in the New Testament, is one of the most interesting parts of the book. It forms a fitting conclusion and climax to the section dealing with foreign nations.

Here it is fitting that we say a few words about the last 27 chapters of Isaiah, the portion after the narrative from the days of Hezekiah. These latter chapters, while very similar in general style and viewpoint to the earlier part of the book,

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are sharply different in certain respects. They do not contain specific statements showing the historical background, as is frequently the case in the earlier chapters. They hardly mention Assyria, which occupies a very prominent position in the earlier chapters. A close study of these chapters makes it apparent that in them the prophet has turned his attention away from the sad condition of Judah under Manasseh, and is looking forward to the redemption which God has promised.

He sees the people so steeped in sin and wickedness that the exile is absolutely certain. Just how soon it will come he does not know, but he is not looking in that direction. He is looking rather at the glorious redemption which God has promised will come after the exile. He is no longer speaking to the people of Israel as a whole, but rather to the godly portion among them. He is addressing those who are believers in the Lord and who are anxiously listening to Isaiah's words and hoping for better days in the future. In addressing them and giving them words of hope he is also giving them a book which is to be treasured and passed on, in order that it may help in restoring the courage and comforting the hearts of their descendants in the exile, when the judgment of God has fallen and His redemption is approaching.

One important fact about these chapters should be noticed. They contain a high point or climax toward which everything previous looks, and from which everything subsequent is derived. This high point is the central chapter of the twenty seven, the much beloved 53rd chapter, which so clearly and vividly portrays the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross for the salvation of those who shall believe on his name.

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The first six chapters of Isaiah are rather general in nature, instead of being connected to a specific historical situation, like most of those which follow. This section may be compared to the book of Micah with its three-fold structure, since in both books each of the three large passages proclaiming God's wrath upon the wicked nation is followed by one declaring His blessing for the godly.

Isaiah 1:1-2:25

The first of these three is Isaiah 1:1-2:5. Chapter 1 contains many beautiful passages including a few verses of blessing; the greater part of it sets forth judgment and doom upon those who have broken God's covenant and disobeyed His word. In phrases of terrible denunciation Isaiah sets forth God's disappointment over the apostasy of the nation which has been the object of His many favors, and declares his determination to punish it. The only exceptions to this general note of rebuke in the chapter are verse 18 and verses 25 to 27. Verse 18 is the wonderful evangelical promise, "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 be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." This promise seems to enter the context so abruptly that some interpreters prefer to consider it as a rhetorical question, emphasizing the sin and hypocrisy of the people. Verses 25 to 27 promise cleansing and renewal for the city after it will be freed from sin. The final verses of the chapter again stress rebuke and punishment.

After this chapter comes the first great passage declaring God's plan to bring unimaginable blessing after the carrying out of the predicted judgment. This prediction of blessing includes only three verses, since verse 1 is introductory and verse 5 is a concluding exhortation. It is almost identical with Micah 4:1-3, which is followed by further elaboration of the description of the promised peace (Mic. 4:4a,b), by a reference to the divine authority behind the promise (v. 4c), and by a frequently misunderstood exhortation (v. 5), the meaning of which is made clear by the parallel in Isaiah 2:5. The thought of Micah 4:5 is that when other nations loyally

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follow their gods, which are non-existent creatures of imagination utterly unable either to make or to carry out such glorious promises, surely those who worship One who is able to bring such wonders to pass should walk in His name forever and ever.

Isaiah 2:1 is sometimes mistakenly taken as a heading for the whole chapter, but it is really only a heading for its first five verses. After all, the chapter divisions are not part of the original Bible, and probably did not exist until they were inserted by Archbishop Stephen Langton in the thirteenth century. They appeared first in the Latin Bible and then were copied, with a few changes, into the Hebrew Bible. This occurred many centuries after the original writing of the book, and the chapter divisions are in no sense authoritative. I once heard Campbell Morgan, the distinguished expositor, say that the chapter divisions are in the wrong place in nine cases out of ten. This statement seemed to me too extreme, for in many cases the chapter divisions are certainly in the right place. I would insist, however, that we must never take for granted that a chapter division is right, but must always examine the passage to see whether the archbishop did a good job or not. In this case he seems to have done a very poor job. Between verses 5 and 6 there is a sharp break, much sharper than the break between chapters 1 and 2 or between chapters 2 and 3. It would be far better to have 2:1-5 form a chapter by itself.

The real meaning of Isaiah 2:1 is a declaration by Isaiah, that he himself received a vision of the future of Judah and Jerusalem, that paralleled the vision that Micah had also been given.

This first passage of blessing in the book of Isaiah, together with its parallel in Micah, gives one of the clearest presentations of the Millennium in the entire Bible. Both passages indicate that the situation described is one that will take place on this earth. Micah indicates this by placing its description immediately after the verse that said that God will destroy Jerusalem and cause it to be plowed as a field. The three specific locations mentioned in Micah 3:12 (the temple hill, Zion, and Jerusalem) are mentioned again in Micah 4:1-2, showing the future exaltation of the very place where the destruction is to occur. Isaiah's introductory

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statement that this is his vision "concerning Judah and Jerusalem" also makes it evident that he is describing something that will occur on this earth. Both passages clearly promise that there will be a time of external peace and safety. This passage does not promise that God will protect His people from dangers round about them. That is a great truth of Scripture, contained in many other passages (such as Isa. 4:2-6) and fulfilled in many periods of the world's history. This passage promises an entirely different type of period -- a time when it will be unnecessary to have swords or spears. It will be a time when people can sit outdoors under their own vines and fig trees with nothing to fear because God will have removed every thing that would produce fear (Mic. 4:4). Other passages in Isaiah give further information about the wonderful nature of this promised Millennium. Here we will simply note that it is unquestionably a time of freedom from external danger -- a period when the word of God will go forth from Jerusalem to judge among the nations and to put an end to everything that would cause danger or arouse fear.

In an age when the world was filled with aggressor nations, and when the various empires constantly fought for supremacy, it is no wonder that Micah felt it necessary to end his vision with the statement, "for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it," and that Isaiah thought it necessary to preface his account of it with the statement, "The word which Isaiah, the son of Amos, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem." It was a hard promise to believe in the days of Isaiah, and it is a hard one to believe today. However, we know that the word of God is sure, and that its fulfillment is certain. Were there no other passages in the Scripture dealing with the Millennium, this one alone should be sufficient to prove to us that God has promised it, and that He will surely bring it to pass.

Isaiah 2:6-4:6

After the exhortation in Isaiah 2:5, calling upon the house of Jacob to walk in the light of the Lord, who is able to bring to pass such a wonderful time of happiness and security as that which has just been described, the prophet abruptly

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turns his vision back to the terrible sin of the people of his day. Certainly there is an important dividing point in the book of Isaiah between 2:5 and 2:6. The latter verse begins a long passage of denunciation of the people for their wickedness and sinful pride, including many declarations of the punishment God will send on account of this sin. The passage ends with a terrible denunciation of the daughters of Zion for their wantonness and their forgetfulness of God. From 3:16 through 4:1 the prophet is describing the pride of these women who look entirely to personal adornment for their pleasure, instead of looking to spiritual blessing, which God is so ready to pour out.

It is hardly necessary to pause here to note that in 3:18 the words "the Lord will take away ... their round tires like the moon" had nothing to do with the tire shortage of World War II as some then suggested, but simply refer to some article of women's apparel. "Tire" is here used in the King James Version in a sense common in the seventeenth century, but obsolete today.

The Hebrew word which is translated in this verse by the phrase "round tires like the moon" is found in two other passages in the Hebrew Bible and in both of them is translated simply "ornaments." One of them, Judges 8:21, refers to ornaments on the necks of camels, and the other, Judges 8:26, refers to ornaments worn by Midianite kings. There is, of course, no reference to anything similar to automobile tires, which were unknown when the King James Version was made and are unrelated to the thought of the Hebrew word. The American Standard Version translates it "crescents" in all three passages.

In this passage Isaiah declares that a day is coming when God will bring to nothing the pride of the daughters of Zion, so that all their beautiful ornaments will disappear and in place of them will be only that which is unattractive and loathsome. This will be accompanied by a time of war, so that the men will fall by the sword and the women will be left alone. The terrible devastation which war is to bring is vividly portrayed in 4:1, where it is said that so few men will be left that seven women will take hold of one man and ask for the use of his name while living at their own expense.

This verse ends the rebuke section of our passage and leads immediately to the vision of blessing beginning at 4:2.

Undoubtedly one of the poorest chapter divisions in the whole Scripture is the one at the beginning of chapter 4. It should be at 4:2, instead of 4:1. Certain medieval commentators interpreted 4:1 as a picture of the coming of Christ, saying that the seven women here mentioned were the seven virgins, and that the one man was Christ. By such methods of interpretation one could derive almost any meaning that one desired from the Bible. It is far more natural to take the verse as the conclusion of the rebuke passage which precedes it.

"In That Day"

Isaiah 4:2 begins a brief but vivid picture of blessing which God has promised in the days ahead. Here it is necessary that we pause for a moment to look at the phrase with which the passage begins -- "in that day." We note that this phrase is used at the beginning of 3:18, and again in 4:1 and also in 4:2. It is quite obvious that not all of these refer to the same day. The passage from 3:18 to 4:1 describes a time of judgment, punishment and misery. Verse 1 of chapter 4 gives the conclusion of the section that begins at 3:18, but 4:2 begins a description of a period of glory and happiness, one that is obviously very different in time from what is described in 3:18 and in 4:1. Therefore, "in that day" can hardly be taken as always meaning "in the day of which we have just been speaking."

Occasionally we find someone attempting to interpret the phrase "in that day" as a technical term for a particular future time. Examination of the passages where it is used does not bear out this interpretation. We must beware of the error of constantly seeking for technical phrases in the Scripture. The books of the Bible were written by many different men in many different periods. While the Holy Spirit caused that there should be a wonderful unity of teaching in the Bible, this does not mean that words are always used in the same way by different writers. Paul uses the word "faith" in one way, and James uses it in a different sense. If we take the word "faith" as meaning exactly the

same thing in the book of Romans and in the book of James, we find explicit contradictions between the two books. If we read the context and see what each writer means by the word, we find that there is no contradiction whatever, but a perfect unity. Paul says that one is saved by faith, and not by works. By this he means a living faith, as opposed to the mere attempt to do what will be pleasing to God. James says that man is not justified by faith alone, but that faith without words is dead (James 2:17, 20), and here it is clear that what James means by "faith" is a mere intellectual acceptance of truth without the heart attitude which must inevitably lead to a life of righteous living. Paul's faith is a living faith which is always followed by righteous works. The faith which James calls dead is something that merely looks like faith. Paul and James are in perfect agreement, but they use the word "faith" in two different senses. In studying any part of Scripture we must be careful not to assume that a word or phrase is a technical phrase unless we have definite evidence of that fact in the Bible itself. In the case of this phrase, "in that day," it is clear from the various contexts in which it is used that the phrase simply means "in the day of which I am about to speak." This may be the same day that has just been discussed, or it may be a different day; it indicates the time which the prophet has in mind and is now about to describe. In 3:18 and 4:1 the phrase "in that day" refers to the time of destruction and punishment which was to come in the fairly near future, while in 4:2 the phrase refers to a later period of blessing.

Pilgrimage Blessing

In the study of the Scripture, as in any other type of study, one is constantly in danger of going from one extreme to the other. Thus there are some who interpret the book of Isaiah in such a way as to find in it no picture of the Millennium at all. In order to do this, they have to explain away the clear meaning of many passages. The millennial reign of Christ is so clearly taught in this book that it is hard to see how anyone who is both intelligent and honest in his interpretation can honestly study Isaiah's prophecies without seeing that they predict a millennial reign of Christ on this

earth. This, however, must not lead us to go to the other extreme, and find the Millennium everywhere. As Isaiah looks forward to the future he sees God's wrath upon sin and describes the terrible exile into which God will send His people as punishment for their disregard of His law. As he looks beyond the exile he brings comfort to God's people and describes the return from exile, the coming of Christ to die as the sacrifice for sin, the spread of the light of the gospel to the Gentiles, the protection of God over His people during their pilgrim journey, and the wonderful blessings of the millennial age. All these phases of future glory appear at one place or another in the book of Isaiah. We should strongly insist on its teachings regarding the Millennium when it deals with that theme, but should not attempt to twist passages dealing with other themes to make them also refer to the Millennium.

There is a striking difference between the description of future blessing in chapter 4:2-6 and that in 2:2-4. Chapter 2 describes a time when people can sit under their vine and under their fig tree with a complete absence of any cause for fear. Their swords will be beaten into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks because there will be no need for protection. God will have established a time when external danger shall be at an end throughout the world. Chapter 4 describes an entirely different situation, for verses 5 and 6 assume that there is a need for protection. There is a tabernacle for shadow from the heat; there is a place of refuge from storm and from rain. Evidently there will be much that can do harm but God will give protection. The picture in verse 5 of the cloud of smoke by day and the flaming fire by night forcibly reminds us of the experience of the children of Israel in their wilderness journey. This is a picture of the protection that God will give His people as they pass through the midst of dangers and difficulties in their pilgrim journey. It is not a picture of millennial glory, but rather of a time when God protects and blesses His people as He leads them through the midst of adversity. It shows God's blessing on those who shall be righteous in the midst of a wicked age.

The passage that begins in verse 2 is in sharp contrast with the previous one. After God takes away the glory of the

ornaments and apparel which meant so much to the women of Judah, those of Israel who escape are not to continue to find their satisfaction in material things, but in the wonderful "Branch of the Lord." They are to be washed and cleansed from their sins and to be holy unto the Lord.

The Branch of the Lord

This phrase "the branch of the Lord" and its parallel "the fruit of the earth" are susceptible of three types of interpretation. The first would be to take them in a strictly literal sense, as saying that orchards and vegetable gardens will be beautiful, glorious, excellent, and comely for those who are escaped of Israel. The people's glory and pleasure are to come from agriculture rather than from vain adornment. This interpretation is certainly unsatisfactory. It is hardly worthy of the grandeur of the context to think of mere agriculture as what is here described.

A second method of interpretation is to take the first phrase, "the branch of the Lord," as a figurative reference to the Lord Jesus Christ and take the second phrase, "the fruit of the earth," in its literal meaning as referring to agriculture. The third method of interpretation would be to take both of them as referring to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The whole tone of the context makes it seem rather unlikely that it is simply agriculture which is meant. The previous verse tells of the great lack of men in the land, and we would expect this verse to describe some way in which those women who are true to the Lord are to be recompensed for this great loss. The remainder of the chapter tells of wonderful blessings which are to come and these seem to be unrelated to mere agricultural prosperity, but rather to have their emphasis on spiritual matters and on divine protection from evil. In view of its use in later books it is easy to show that it is possible to consider the phrase "the Branch of the Lord" as referring to the coming Messiah.

In the King James Version (K.J.V.) eighteen Hebrew words are sometimes translated "branch." The one used here occurs in the Messianic predictions in Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:15. In both of these instances the word is used to describe a man, the divinely sent king of the Davidic line. The passages show

that it is possible to interpret the phrase similarly in Isaiah 4:2 and clearly indicate that Jeremiah considered that to be the correct interpretation of the phrase in this passage, to which he was obviously alluding. It is therefore reasonable to consider both phrases, "the branch of the Lord" and "the fruit of the earth," as referring to Christ. It is a wonderful prediction of the divine and human aspects of the person of our blessed Lord. He was indeed the Branch of the Lord, since He was divine and came from God Himself, and was, in fact, the second person of the Trinity. He was truly also the "fruit of the earth," in that He was the seed of the woman, of the race of Israel, and truly a human being. The fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is both perfect deity and perfect humanity, without any intermixture of the two natures, is one of the great mysteries of the New Testament. We cannot understand how it can be, but the New Testament clearly teaches that it is so, and it has been accepted as true by the Christian church through the ages. It is not necessary for us to think that Isaiah fully understood this great mystery. He was led by the Spirit of God to use words which would correspond to the actual facts, even though their exact meaning might be difficult to grasp until the Lord Jesus Christ would come.

The remainder of this passage of blessing promises that those who are cleansed from their sins are to find their joy and their ornamentation in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that He is to protect them from the evils and dangers round about them and to lead them on their pilgrim journey. The cloud of smoke by day and the shining of the flaming fire by night are to be upon all the assemblies and dwelling places of Mount Zion.

The Third Part of the Book: Chapters 5 and 6

Chapter 5 is a chapter of woe. It tells of God's disappointment with His vineyard. Although He has tilled it and protected it, it has failed to produce the desired fruit. The vineyard is the house of Israel. God describes the people's sin and declares that ample punishment will come. While it would be interesting to study the details of this chapter, and it could teach valuable lessons for our spiritual lives, we shall

have to move on and briefly discuss the passage of blessing which follows it.

Chapter 6 presents the third extensive passage of blessing, which, in this case, is God's promise of personal blessing to the prophet who is to be His spokesman. The chapter contains the inaugural vision of Isaiah -- a wonderful experience. It is most likely that he had this experience before he wrote the contents of the five chapters that precede it. It is one of the great exalted visions of the Bible. The prophet is in the temple, and there he sees the glory of the Lord and hears the seraphim proclaiming God's holiness. His reaction is exactly what the reaction of every true man ought to be in such a situation. He realizes his own unworthiness to stand before the King, the Lord of Hosts. He sees, as everyone who is not cleansed by the Lord should see, that he is out of place in the presence of God, and deserves nothing but punishment at the hands of the Just One.

Before Isaiah could volunteer for service to the Lord, it was necessary that he be cleansed and purified, so that God could use him. One of the seraphim brought a live coal from the altar and touched the lips of Isaiah and cleansed him of his iniquities. Only coals from the altar, representing the sacrifice which God provides for sin, can make any one of us fit to appear in God's presence.

Thus there was figuratively presented to the mind of Isaiah the necessity of that sacrifice for sin which he would later describe so beautifully in Isaiah 53. After Isaiah is purged from his sin, he hears the voice of the Lord asking who will perform a necessary service for Him. The one who is truly born again and cleansed inevitably seeks a way to serve God. True faith always expresses itself through works.

Now that Isaiah has received the wonderful blessing of this remarkable vision from God, has been purged of his sin, and has volunteered for service, he receives a terrible commission from God. He is told to go and harden those people who turn away from the commandments of the Lord. The emphasis here is upon the aspect of rebuke and punishment contained in the message of Isaiah. The tenth verse describes what will be the reaction of the people as a whole to his message. We find that this reaction was also true in later times, for our

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Lord Jesus Christ Himself applied these words to His hearers, as did also the apostle Paul.

The chapter, which is principally one of blessing for the prophet rather than for the people as a whole, ends on the note of blessing for the people. It is true that punishment for sin will continue until cities are waste without inhabitants, houses are without men, the land is utterly desolate, and the great exile has come. Yet verse 13 promises that there will still be a remnant. A holy seed will remain. After God's great judgments have been poured out upon the earth, He will still preserve a purged and cleansed group of true believers. This concludes our consideration of the first portion of the book of Isaiah. Chapter 7 begins a new section, "the Book of Immanuel." It is a section which contains many difficult problems, but which presents some of the most inspiring glimpses of truth contained anywhere in the Old Testament.

The Book of Immanuel-Chapters 7-12

We now begin the consideration of one of the most interesting and important sections of the entire book of Isaiah. Here the prophet gives us many clear and wonderful glimpses of the great future connected with our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet here it is particularly necessary to be aware of the historical background, if we are to understand the chapters as a whole and not merely to look at isolated verses.

Isaiah 7

For correct interpretation of these chapters it is vital to keep in mind that Isaiah is dealing with a wicked and hostile king, Ahaz, who reveals himself in chapter 7 as not at all interested in the Word of God. Later Ahaz went so far as to displace the brazen altar of the temple and substitute for it one built on the model of a heathen altar at Damascus (2 Kings 16:9-15). The first two verses of the Book of Immanuel (Isa. 7:1-2) sketch the historical background of the section quite briefly. Further details are given in 2 Kings 16 and in 2 Chronicles 28.

As the chapter begins, we find the people of Judah tremendously frightened. A great crisis faced them. Directly to the north of Judah was Israel, a country made up of people of the same blood as those of Judah, but politically separated from them now for over two hundred years. Israel, which was also called Ephraim, using the name of its most powerful tribe, was much larger than Judah. It contained ten tribes, while the southern kingdom had only two. Israel and Judah had fought at various times during the previous two centuries and sometimes Israel won. Now Judah was menaced by an attack not only by Ephraim, but by another nation as well. Beyond Israel to the northeast was the country we now call Syria, which in those days was called Aram. This country was much larger and stronger than Israel. There had often been wars between Syria and Israel, and Syria had usually proven the stronger of the two. When these two nations joined together to attack Judah, it looked as if little hope remained for Judah. They were intending not merely to take a little territory from Judah, but actually to end the Davidic kingship

and to put in place of Ahaz a puppet king of their own choosing (Isa. 7:6). In this situation Ahaz was terribly frightened. Isaiah 7:2 says: "his heart was moved and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind."

In the midst of this situation, Ahaz hit upon a clever scheme. It would seem likely that he told some of his leading nobles about the scheme and worked out the details of it with them, but that he kept it secret from the people as a whole. This was a scheme to enlist in his support a very large and powerful nation which was far across the desert beyond Syria. This nation was known as Assyria. Bible readers often confuse Assyria and Syria. In ancient times no such confusion was possible, for at that time Syria was called Aram. Assyria was many times as large and far more powerful than Syria. Its capital originally was the city of Asshur, and from the name of this city and of its god, Asshur, it received the name Assyria. Later on, it conquered Aram and made it a part of its realm. When the Greeks came to the Assyrian empire, Aram was the first portion of it which they entered. Consequently, they spoke of this portion as Assyria, and eventually shortened the name to Syria to indicate that section. It has become customary for us to carry this later Greek name for the region back to the original kingdom of Aram, but it is important that we avoid confusion of Syria and Assyria.

Assyria had for many centuries been carrying on wars with other nations. In the time of Ahab an Assyrian army had come clear into Syria, and had been stopped by a coalition of the kings of Syria, Israel and other neighboring nations at the battle of Qarqar in 853 BC.

The Assyrians were noted for their cruelty. They adopted a deliberate policy of seeking to frighten people so that they would not dare oppose them. If a nation that they had conquered revolted against them, no barbarity was too great for them to use in trying to make an example that would deter others from revolting.

Ahaz knew of this strong aggressive nation far to the east, and of its past endeavors to extend its conquests as far as Syria. He had heard that a new king on the throne of the Assyrian Empire, which now had its capital at Nineveh, was

showing an even more aggressive policy than the Assyrian kings of former centuries. Ahaz decided to send a messenger across the desert to the king of Assyria to ask him to send an army to help Judah. He said he was ready to take the distant Assyrian king as his overlord and pay tribute to him, if only the Assyrian king would deliver him from the terrible danger of these neighboring enemies. How easy it is in time of stress to think that the distant power is good and friendly when it is so far off that we do not think it can hurt us, but we feel that it will only provide a new source of protection to us by attacking our enemy from the other side! This is the view that Ahaz had. So, as we learn from Kings and Chronicles, he sent his messengers with rich gifts across the desert to Nineveh. Meanwhile, he set about strengthening the defenses of Jerusalem in order to resist the attacks of Israel and Syria until the Assyrians would come to his help.

In this situation, the Lord sent Isaiah to speak to Ahaz. Isaiah could not approach the king directly, for Ahaz thought it a waste of time to talk with the prophet of the Lord. These were times of great emergency and he must be occupied with the protection of the city. In order to meet Ahaz, Isaiah would have to go to a place, outside the city, where Ahaz was engaged in a defense inspection. So the Lord told Isaiah, as we read in verse 3, to go out to the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field, and there to tell Ahaz not to fear the king of Syria and the king of Israel, since God was going to protect him from them. The promise was expressed in very strong language. Isaiah said that the plan to put a puppet king in place of Ahaz would not succeed. He declared that within sixty-five years Ephraim would be broken so that it would no longer be a people, and he said, "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." In these words he was calling upon Ahaz to trust in God alone. Since Isaiah did not refer specifically to the distant heathen power, it is reasonable to assume that Ahaz was still keeping his negotiations secret.

In view of this situation we can well imagine that when Isaiah said these words Ahaz had on his face a look of impatience. He did not quite dare to tell Isaiah to get out of the way and allow him to go on with his important defense labors, for he knew that many of the people regarded Isaiah

as a prophet of God and it might injure their morale if open hostility toward the prophet were publicly displayed. At the same time he was anxious that Isaiah confine his activities to strengthening the morale of the people without interfering with the king.

That this was the attitude of Ahaz is made clear by what follows. The Lord caused Isaiah to give a further message to Ahaz, in addition to that which he had previously been directed to give at this time. Evidently, right there on the spot, the Lord added to the message the following: "Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above" (verse 11). What a tremendous offer to Ahaz. Ahaz, you seem unwilling to believe this promise. You are all excited about the danger, you don't think God is going to protect you. Well, ask God for a sign! God is willing to prove that He is able to protect His city.

The next verse looks at first as though Ahaz were pious. Actually, however, in view of the rebuke that Isaiah immediately proceeds to give to Ahaz, it is evident that the statement is not pious, but is really a wicked evasion. Ahaz says: "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD." What he means is: "I am not interested in spending time over your alleged signs. I want to move on with this important defense work."

Interpreters often make the mistake of considering what follows as a message of comfort to Ahaz from God. Actually, the beginning of the statement (v. 13) makes it perfectly clear that Isaiah is not interested here in giving comfort to Ahaz. He has already given Ahaz a promise of comfort, and Ahaz has rejected it. He is now interested in giving a rebuke to Ahaz. What there is of comfort in what follows is intended for the people, not for Ahaz. The godly among the people recognize, as Isaiah does, that Ahaz is an utterly unworthy scion of the house of David. Instead of following God and trusting in the wonderful promises that Isaiah has given that God will protect His city, Ahaz is looking to unworthy human means for defense. The people do not know about the secret scheme into which Ahaz has entered, but God knows all about it and proceeds to rebuke Ahaz, and to declare that eventually God is going to replace Ahaz on the throne of David by One who will be a true servant of God, as David

was. As God's messenger, Isaiah utters a strong rebuke: "Hear ye now, O house of David; is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign."

We note that the sign is addressed not only to Ahaz, but to the entire house of David. This house is thought of as groaning under the misery of having the throne of David occupied by a man who has turned away from God. Yet the whole house of David is at fault, for Ahaz is not alone in this attitude of unbelief and apostasy toward God. It would be only natural to expect some declaration here that in His own time God will replace Ahaz by one who will be a worthy representative on the throne of David.

We can also, of course, expect something in relation to the promise previously given, that God will protect His people. The word of comfort is not addressed to Ahaz and the house of David but to the godly people, some of whom are standing there. With this in mind, and understanding that these two elements can be reasonably expected in the sign that is to follow, we are in a position to explain what is, in some ways, a difficult passage.

The Sign of Immanuel

The prediction is as follows (Isa. 7:14-16):

"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel† 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 abhorrent shall be forsaken of both her kings."

"Immanuel" is Hebrew for "God with us."

This prediction has been interpreted in various ways. Some wish to take it all as referring to the distant future and some wish to take it all as referring to the immediate future.

†The New Scofield Reference Bible reads "the virgin shall conceive ..."

Yet there are many places in the prophetic books where the Lord caused the prophets to see the future in a way that blended the distant with the near. These elements are never confused, but sometimes they are so combined as to produce what seems to us an extremely rapid transition from one to the other.

Those who interpret this prophecy as referring entirely to the present take it as dealing only with the matter of relief from the attack of Ephraim and Syria. They consider it to mean simply this: a son will be born, and before this child is old enough to distinguish between things which are good and things which are harmful the region that is now hostile will be forsaken of both its kings. This seems quite natural in the light of the context, since the situation of immediate danger was very prominent in the minds of the king and of all the people. A tremendous objection to this view is found in the fact that it allows no element of rebuke whatever. It makes the whole thing a promise of comfort and blessing and causes verse 13 to be utterly meaningless.

The opposite extreme is to take the entire passage as referring to Christ. In view of the unworthiness of Ahaz it is quite natural to find here a prediction that God is going to replace him with His only-begotten Son, the true Immanuel, the virgin-born One. The difficulty with this view is that it seems to lack sufficient relationship to the immediate situation. It leaves altogether out of the account the difficulties of the people in the face of the attack by Ephraim and Syria, and it strikes great difficulties in the interpretation of verses 15 and 16. The suggestion has been made that verse 15 is a prediction of the simple life of our Lord as a child. This does not seem particularly reasonable, especially in view of the fact that the same phrase, "butter and honey shall he eat," is used later in the chapter (v. 22) in a description of the condition of depopulation which the exile will cause.

There will be so much produced by the cows and by the bees that the few people left cannot possibly eat it all.

Even greater difficulty is found in the sixteenth verse, which does not give much sense on this interpretation. There is no point in a declaration that before Christ is old enough to reach for the warm milk rather than for the red hot stove the king of Syria and the king of Israel, who are now such a

menace to Judah, will be gone. "Of course," one would say, "within seven hundred years these two kings will not be living. We can be sure that they will not be living even a century from now. But they may conquer Judah long before that." The only reasonable solution to the difficulty is to consider that the prediction does not refer as a whole to one time, but that part of it deals with one period and part with another.

The element of rebuke to Ahaz, which is primary in the context, finds its fulfillment in the wonderful prophecy of Christ in verse 14. This verse cannot possibly refer to anyone who was born in the time of Isaiah. Its terminology is far too exalted to indicate the son of the prophet as some have suggested. Furthermore, both sons of Isaiah were given symbolic names utterly different in meaning from the name, Immanuel, "God with us." The suggestion that it relates to Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, proves impossible in view of the fact that he was born some years before this prophecy was given. The prediction is a wonderful prophecy of the coming of the Lord in human flesh, to supply a worthy successor to King David, and cannot possibly refer to anyone born in the time of Ahaz.

The Prophecy of the Virgin Birth

While a mere human being might conceivably be named Immanuel, "God with us," it seems far more likely that this name would designate One who was actually the incarnate Son of God. Moreover, there is, of course, the reference here to the virgin birth. Most important of all, Matthew 1:22-23 quotes this verse in connection with the birth of Christ, and declares that that is its fulfillment. In answer, those who consider it all as referring to the time of Ahaz say that the word here translated "virgin" does not really mean virgin, but simply a young woman, and might refer to the king's wife or to the wife of Isaiah. Examination of this word gives us the following facts. The word is not the regular technical word for virgin. The common Hebrew word which expresses the latter technical concept occurs many times in the Scriptures. This is a different word, which occurs only seven times in the Old Testament. It refers to a young woman and seems to

include the idea that the particular young woman is a virgin. It is occasionally translated as "virgin" in our English Bible, though sometimes[†] as "young woman." A typical occurrence is found in Genesis 24:43, where the servant of Abraham is looking for a wife for Isaac. Here it speaks of a young woman coming out to draw water. Naturally the young woman for whom he is looking is to be a virgin.

It is important to note that the Septuagint translators, writing possibly two centuries before the time of Christ, translated the word in Isaiah 7:14 by the Greek word for "virgin." They considered that the passage spoke of something remarkable and mysterious, something which had not yet been fulfilled.

For the Christian, Matthew's statement settles the matter. This verse is a prediction of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is wonderfully and literally fulfilled in Him. He was actually born of a virgin, and He is certainly Immanuel, God incarnate in human flesh.

There is no known fulfillment of this verse at the time of Ahaz. Either it was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, or it was not fulfilled at all.

The next two verses present a most remarkable transition of thought. In verses 15 and 16 there was no continuation of the rebuke, but rather words of blessing for the people of God. Though Ahaz is reprobate and deserves nothing good at the hand of God, God is going to deliver the land. Verse 14 says that God will send One who is to be His true representative on the throne of David. In verses 15 and 16 Isaiah leaves aside the question of when this One is to come. He simply takes His life as a measuring stick. The unexpressed assumption is: "Suppose that this predicted One were to be born next year." On this assumption the conclusion is: "Then butter and honey should he eat, when he would know to refuse the evil and choose the good." The translation of the King James Version "that he may know" is not very good here. The American Standard Version translates it: "when he

[†]In the King James Version, this Hebrew word is translated *virgin* four times, *maid* twice, and *damsel* once; it is never translated by *young woman*.

knoweth to refuse the evil, and choose the good." The Hebrew expression used is a common Hebrew method of indicating the time when something occurs. The King James Version translation would be grammatically possible, but the other is much more in line with the usual reading of this type of Hebrew phrase. By the time that this child knows enough to reach for the warm milk instead of for the red hot poker, he will have plenty of butter and honey to eat. The present condition of war's necessity, with shortage of materials which come in from the country districts, will be at an end, and butter and honey will be plentiful. The reason is given in verse 16. Before such a child, even if born next year, would be a very few years old, both these hostile kings will be gone.

The Results of Ahaz' Scheme

We can well imagine the thoughts of Ahaz as he heard this prediction. He might be greatly disturbed by verse 14 -- a prediction that another king would take his place. Yet it was nothing to get greatly excited about, because the coming king was not even born as yet, and Isaiah had not stated the time when He would come. Verses 15 and 16 suggest that He might be born immediately. On the assumption of His life beginning immediately these verses use it as a measuring stick and apply it to the present time. The note of rebuke may be almost forgotten in the declaration that God is going to deliver His people.

By this time, Ahaz is feeling better. After all, this is a declaration that he is going to be victorious against these kings from the north. This may help the morale of the people, provided that it does not make them overconfident. Ahaz is certain, anyway, that it is true, in view of his secret treaty with Assyria. His present desire is to strengthen the defenses, so as to hold off the invader until the Assyrian army arrives. He knows that before long the forces of this powerful aggressor will attack Israel and Syria from the rear, and Judah will be safe. We can imagine him relaxing and waiting as patiently as possible for Isaiah to stop talking, so that he can go on with his defense inspection.

Verse 17, however, is not particularly pleasing to him. Isaiah says that the Lord is going to bring grievous days,

days worse than any since the disruption of the kingdom, "even the king of Assyria." Ahaz wonders how Isaiah comes to mention the king of distant Assyria. Could Isaiah possibly have heard that secret arrangements had already been made with this distant power?

The rest of the chapter describes the results which will follow the coming of the king of Assyria. What Ahaz has planned as deliverance from the minor nations to the north will actually result in bringing the mighty Assyrian army right next to his own land. Within a few years Israel was conquered and its inhabitants driven into exile, and the Assyrian armies soon extended their raids into Judah. The emphasis here is on the resulting devastation and depopulation. In verses 17 to 25 Isaiah vividly describes what will happen. Agriculture will be greatly decreased for lack of manpower. The land will be covered with briars and thorns, and there will be little plowing. Land that was formerly cultivated will now be left to cows and bees. There will be plenty of butter and honey, but little of anything that requires much labor to produce.

This picture of devastation is in no way a promise of comfort; it is a description of the difficulty and trouble that will result from the scheme which Ahaz thought so clever.

The full fruition of the alliance Ahaz made is shown in the historical section of the Book of Isaiah, in chapters 36 to 39. There we find an Assyrian army overrunning most of Judah and threatening Jerusalem itself. Hezekiah has to reap what his father Ahaz had sown. It is striking to note that when the emissary of the Assyrian king calls upon Jerusalem to surrender, he stands at the very place where Isaiah, only a few years earlier, had delivered God's rebuke to Ahaz for his sinful scheme and his lack of trust (cf. 36:2 with 7:3).

In succeeding chapters of the Book of Immanuel the prophet's vision continues to oscillate between the present distress and the glorious future that Immanuel will ultimately bring.

Isaiah 8

The historical background and general teaching of chapter 8 is very similar to that of chapter 7. The messages that it

contains were evidently revealed to the prophet not more than a year or two later. The wicked scheme of Ahaz to seek deliverance of his land from the two nations to the north by means of an alliance with the powerful heathen Assyrian power was probably no longer a secret, since Isaiah refers to it in more definite terms than before. In chapter 7 God had said that, if a child were to be conceived and born in the very near future, before that child would be able to make simple choices the king of Samaria and the king of Damascus would have disappeared from the scene of history. In 8:1-4 He gave a similar sign though referring to a shorter period. He said that the prophet would have a son, and that before this child would be able to say "papa," and "mama" the "riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria" would "be taken away before the king of Assyria."

Some have suggested that the child here described is the same child as the "Immanuel" of chapter 7. This is clearly impossible. The son of the prophet Isaiah could not possibly be worthy of the glorious Messianic prediction of chapter 7. Moreover, his name has a meaning utterly different in character. The name, "Immanuel," declares God's presence with His people, but the name "Maher-shalal-hash-baz" means "hasten the booty, hurry the spoil," and is a picture of coming war and plunder. Also, the interval between the birth of the first child and the destruction of the hostile kingdoms is much shorter in the case of the prophet's son.

The promise of Isaiah 8:3-4, like those in chapter 7, has in it the element of comfort for the true people of God, and also that of rebuke for Ahaz and his wicked associates. They are to be given to understand that God is abundantly able to protect His city and does not need their evil schemes for this purpose, but that great disasters will result from the Assyrian alliance. Instead of the peace and happiness that could come from God's presence, there will be booty and despoliation.

The next verses (5-8) stress the actual results of their foolish plan. Since the people are not content to trust in God and in the still small voice through which He speaks, typified here by "the waters of Shiloah that go softly," the Lord is going to bring quite another river upon them, the tempestuous force of the mighty armies of the king of Assyria, who will come up over all its channels and go over all its banks,

and not stop with the destruction of Damascus and the overwhelming of Samaria, but will actually pass through Judah, and the stretching out of his wings will fill the breadth of Immanuel's land.

Immanuel's Land

At the end of verse 8 it is interesting to notice that the land is not described as the land of King Ahaz. Ahaz is utterly unworthy of the Davidic throne. The land is spoken of here as in principle already belonging to the true son of David who is eventually to reign over it, and so it is called, "thy land, O Immanuel." It is His land which is menaced by the coming of the great Assyrian hordes.

The word Immanuel occurs not only here at the end of verse 8, but also at the end of verse 10. In verse 8 the King James Version transliterates it as Immanuel, but at the end of verse 10 as "God is with us." It is actually the same word in both cases. Mentioning the name of Him who really possesses this land brings to our attention the fact that the king of Assyria is actually powerless to destroy the land of Immanuel unless Immanuel allows him to do so. It can be done only as God permits it as a punishment for sin. He is not yet ready to do this; therefore verses 9 and 10 assure us that even though the forces of Assyria and of all its subject peoples associate themselves and gird themselves with great power in order to conquer Judah, they will be broken in pieces and their plans will come to nothing. This is the land of Immanuel and "God with us" is present in it.

This wonderful prediction would be literally fulfilled in the time of Ahaz' son, Hezekiah. As a result of Ahaz' alliance the Assyrian king had devoured the buffer states and now his realm touched that of Judah. A boastful Assyrian king named Sennacherib would lead his armies into the land of Judah, overflowing most of it and capturing its strong cities, but God would prevent him from taking Jerusalem. The angel of the Lord would destroy his army and would thus force him to return to his own land. All this is vividly described in the historical section of the Book of Isaiah, in chapters 36 and 37.

Increasing Sin

After speaking of the association of the various peoples under the Assyrian yoke in this mighty attack against Judah, the prophet naturally turns his attention back to the confederacy the Jews have made with the Assyrian king for protection against Israel and Syria (verses 11-12), and reiterates the fact that the safety of God's people is not to be found in such alliances with wicked nations, but in obeying the Lord and seeking His protection. The people have gone on in this wicked way and it is inevitable that they become increasingly apostate. In view of this situation, Isaiah calls upon the true people of God (v. 16), to bind up the testimony and seal the law among the true disciples, and to wait for the salvation of the Lord.

Verse 18 reads: "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." In this context this seems at first sight to mean that the prophet and his two sons who have symbolic names -- "Shear-jashub" (a remnant shall return) and "Maher-shalal-hash-baz" (hasten the booty, hurry the spoil) -- are signs and indications in Israel of the future will of the Lord. Yet we find it quoted in Hebrews 2:13 with a different meaning, and in this passage this other meaning seems to fit the context even better. The book of Hebrews quotes the words "Behold I and the children whom God hath given me" as the words of Christ. This proves the correct interpretation of Isaiah 8:18 to be that the prophet is quoting the words of Immanuel, whose true children, the remnant of Israel, are preserving the true faith in the midst of an apostate age. Even though the mass of the people turn away from the Lord, the true believers are to guard His Word and show forth His righteousness in their lives, and thus be signs and wonders among the people, keeping alive the knowledge of the true God. Whenever God's people are a small group in a wicked nation they have to perform this function, whether in the days of the Old Testament or during the long history of the Christian church.

Verses 19 and 20 show the inevitable results when people fail to seek their guidance from God's Word. They turn to familiar spirits and "unto wizards that peep and mutter."

They should not seek advice for the living from the dead, but rather should seek the living God. This message is equally vital for our own day. If we do not seek our direction in life from God's law and His testimony, there is no true light for us at all, and the result is bound to be what is described in verses 21 and 22, -- darkness and misery, with people blaming their leaders and blaming the Lord, instead of blaming the sin within themselves. All this is to find its beginning in the coming of the terrible Assyrian invasion, which will sweep over the northern kingdom and on into Judah.

Isaiah 8:22-9:1: A Startling Transition

In Isaiah 8:21, we have a vivid picture of people in terrible misery as a result of sin. In 9:2-3 we have a picture of people in great rejoicing because God has brought wonderful light to them. The two verses between (8:22 and 9:1) are very difficult to translate literally. They are highly poetic, and contain a number of phrases which are susceptible of two different interpretations. This is abundantly clear if one simply examines the translation of 9:1 in the King James Version, and compares it with that in the American Standard Version. Various commentators show a remarkable diversity of opinion as to the point at which the theme changes from rebuking sin and declaring future punishment to giving a wonderful promise of God's blessing upon His people.

Although it is difficult to decide exactly where this change occurs, it is clear that it happens somewhere between 8:21 and 9:2, and that the region where it begins is described in 9:1 as "the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, . . . the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the nations." This area is either designated as a place of special gloom and anguish (as in the King James Version), or as the place where light breaks out with special glory (as in the American Standard Version). It would be foolish to argue about which rendering to prefer, since the context clearly shows that both characteristics could properly apply to this region. The only uncertainty is to know at which exact point in the statement the prophet ceases to describe the misery of the area and begins to indicate its later joy. This is the area in northern Palestine where the Assyrian army naturally began its

invasion into the land of Israel. It was there that the people first felt the terrible force of the attack of the heathen hordes which came as a result of their sin, and, more immediately, as a result of the wicked scheme of King Ahaz. Eventually this sorrow and darkness will be replaced by the joy and light that will result from the coming of the One who will replace Ahaz as the head of the house of David.

The New Testament tells us that our Lord Jesus Christ appeared privately to a few people in the temple at Jerusalem shortly after His birth and again at the age of twelve, but His first great public ministry occurred in Galilee, in the region described in Isaiah 9:1. Matthew 4:13-16 points out that His preaching in that area was a direct fulfillment of this passage. There have been interpreters who have thought that Matthew was simply picking from the Old Testament a geographic phrase with no connection with Christ, and then claiming that it was a fulfillment of the Scripture because it happened to be the place where He preached. Actually, of course, the passage is definitely fulfilled in the coming of the great light through the first preaching of Christ, in the very area where the great darkness of the Assyrian invasion had first descended.

Matthew quotes parts of 9:1 and 9:2 as showing how Christ fulfilled these verses. When the Jews took over the chapter divisions of the Latin Bible into the Hebrew Bible, this is one of the comparatively few places where they altered it (cf. American Standard Version margin). Some think that they did this in order to separate the two verses which Matthew quotes together. Whether that is or is not true, the fact is that there should not be a division at either place, for the verse is definitely and closely connected both with what precedes and with what follows. There should be no chapter division before verse 7.

The Prince Of Peace

The rest of the glorious Messianic passage at the beginning of chapter 9 continues to relate itself to the Assyrian invasion, and at the same time to point out the great changes which are ahead. Verse 3 describes the great joy which will come to the people. Here the King James Version and the

American Standard Version seem to differ greatly. In the first half of this verse the King James Version says, "Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy." The American Standard Version says, "Thou hast multiplied the nation; thou hast increased the joy." There is a Hebrew word which means "not" in one spelling, and "to him" in another spelling. Both spellings are pronounced the same, and both have been transmitted to us. Consequently, we do not know for certain which was the spelling of the original. However, it does not affect the thought of the verse at all. It either means that the nation was multiplied without its joy being increased, but now great joy comes; or it means that the nation is multiplied and great joy is increased, such tremendous joy as is here described.

Verse 4 gives the reason for the joy. It is the destruction of the rod of the oppressor. As in the day of Midian, when Gideon suddenly had his men break their pitchers and show forth the light of the coming of God's deliverance, here the coming of Christ causes the light suddenly to shine out and shows the certainty of the coming deliverance from sin and oppression that results from sin through the death of Christ on Calvary's cross.

Verse 5 points out the eventual results of the coming of the Prince of Peace. The cruel Assyrians would come with confusion and noise and garments rolled in blood, but all this is to be burned and given to the fire. Wars are to come to an end when the reign of the Prince of Peace is finally consummated.

A Child is Born

All this is to be introduced, in the first instance, not by the coming of a great conqueror but by the birth of a child. Verse 6 describes the coming of this child in poetic language. Two parallel phrases are used, "a child is born" and "a son is given." This unusual manner of statement might possibly be considered as simply presenting the coming of a child who is to be a son of David. It would not in itself prove the two natures of Christ but when we compare it with the statement which Isaiah has already given in 4:2, in which he described the Messiah as both "the branch of the Lord" and "the fruit

of the earth," it is easy to see that God has, in these two passages, given a clear glimpse of something that would be fully explained later on, that our Lord would be the child of Mary and truly a human being, and at the same time truly the Son of God, given to the world for its salvation.

The next statement -- "the government shall be upon his shoulder" -- shows that this wonderful child is to be the true successor of David, able to carry the burden of directing and controlling the affairs of God's Kingdom.

The remainder of verse 6 describes the wonderful characteristics of this blessed Immanuel. Some endeavor to take all of this series of phrases as simply a name, and to make a long sentence out of it. Thus the translation of *The Holy Scriptures* published by the Jewish Publication Society in 1917 says "And his name shall be called 'Pele-joez-el-gibbor-Abi-ad-sar-shalom" and says in a footnote: "That is *Wonderful in counsel is God the Mighty, the Everlasting Father, the Ruler of peace.*" Sentence names of this length can hardly be paralleled in ancient literature. It is much more reasonable to consider that the name, like the name Immanuel, is a description of the character of the incarnate Christ, expressed in five descriptive statements, the first two each consisting of one word, and the last three each consisting of two words. Obviously this description of the child that is to be born could not fit any mere human being. Although human in every sense of the word, He is also God Himself, and the infinite mystery of the Trinity is suggested, when this child can be called "the everlasting Father." Here as at a considerable number of other places in the Old Testament, great mysteries are stated in ways that would be difficult to understand when they were originally given, but that are easily seen, in the light of God's later revelations, to reveal divine truths. It would be utterly impossible to give such names to a mere human being. Even more clearly than by the name Immanuel, they teach that the coming Prince of Peace is actually to be "the mighty God, the everlasting Father," who is to come in human form.

Verse 7 points out the wonderful increase of the government and power of this One who is to begin His preaching in the land of Zebulon and Naphtali, and who is eventually to bring an end to all war and misery. His government, along

with the peace and well-being which He establishes, is to increase and to keep on increasing, and nothing will be able to put a stop to it. It will slowly spread through the world with the spread of His Gospel. Later on there will be a sudden tremendous extension of it over the whole earth when He returns in person to set up His wonderful kingdom of righteousness. He will eventually bring to an end everything that is evil and harmful, and will establish judgment and justice throughout the whole world. No hostile power will ever be able to destroy what He will establish. All this is to be the result, not of human effort or human striving, but of a mighty act of God, because "the zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."

It is utterly ridiculous to read chapter 9 of Isaiah as a complete unit, leaving out its connections with chapter 8 and with chapter 10. We have here the last part of one passage and the first part of another. Between verse 7 and verse 8 there is a very sharp break. This is made especially clear when we note that a stanza of poetry expressing God's rebuke against the sin of His people begins in verse 8 and that this stanza ends in verse 12 with the refrain "for all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still." Another stanza begins with verse 13, continues to verse 17, and ends with the same refrain. Still another stanza begins in verse 18 and ends with this refrain at verse 21. The fourth stanza begins with verse 1 of chapter 10 and ends with the same refrain in verse 4. It is absurd to have our Bible printed in such a way that one of these four stanzas is separated from the others by the chapter division at the beginning of chapter 10 and that the first three are united with the entirely different portion of the book of Immanuel that ends at 9:7.

This poem is a presentation of God's rebuke against the sin, pride and unbelief of His people, and is a declaration that He is going to bring terrible punishment upon them because of it. It is a wonderful poem of God's judgment, and should certainly be read as a unit.

Isaiah 10:5 begins a new section of the book of Immanuel.

Isaiah 10

Up to the present point in the book of Isaiah two main thoughts have constantly been stressed: (1) rebuke to Israel for its sin and rebellion against God; (2) consolation for those who are true to the Lord, and assurance that in the end God will establish His perfect will upon the earth.

In the book of Immanuel, the first of these themes has centered largely around the unbelieving plan of Ahaz to secure help from the Assyrians against the two kingdoms to the north. He has been told that his plan will not give him safety at all; its result will be the removal of the barrier states and this will bring the dreaded Assyrian force right next to his own nation. He has even been told that the Assyrian army will actually overrun, not merely the kingdoms to the north, but also large portions of Judah itself. Although there have also been passages of rebuke to the people as a whole for their sin and unbelief, the great stress has been upon the wicked alliance entered into by King Ahaz. There have also been a number of passages in which God has brought comfort to the true believers among the people of Judah by assuring them that in the end He will replace Ahaz with a king who will be absolutely true to Him and who will fulfill the glorious Messianic promises -- one who will put an end to war and oppression and establish peace throughout the earth.

It is possible that the passage beginning at Isaiah 10:5 was written some time after the earlier portion of the book of Immanuel, since in verse 11 we find the king of Assyria boastfully declaring that he will treat Jerusalem the same way in which he has already treated Samaria. This suggests that when this chapter was written Ahaz' conspiracy has already produced the predicted result, and the Assyrian army is actually threatening Judah.

In verse 5 a new thought is introduced and discussed, along with a number of recurrences of the two main themes already mentioned. This new thought is the question of the relation of the great wicked heathen power to the Lord. Isaiah lived in a day when evil appeared to be triumphing. In the whole history of the world no greater or more wicked aggressor has ever appeared than the Assyrian Empire. A

distinguished French orientalist has described the Assyrian policies in the following rather extreme language:

Assyria was the nest of the bird of prey whence, during nearly ten centuries, set forth the most terrible expeditions which have ever flooded the world with blood. Asshur was its god, plunder its morality, material pleasure its ideal, cruelty and terror its means. No people was ever more abject than those of Asshur; no sovereigns were ever more despotic, more covetous, more vindictive, more pitiless, more proud of their crimes. Assyria sums up in itself all the vices. Aside from bravery, it offers not a single virtue. One must leaf over the whole of the world's history to find here and there, in the most troubled periods, public crimes whose frightfulness may be compared with the horrors daily committed by the men of Nineveh in the name of their god. The Assyrian is not an artist, not a man of literature, not a lawgiver; he is a parasite, basing his organization of pillage on a formidable military power.†

On various occasions prior to Isaiah's time, the Assyrian armies had marched out beyond their borders, attacking, ravaging, pillaging, and destroying the country far and near. Assyria was the first nation to introduce a policy of calculated frightfulness in order to fill its opponents with fear and thus force them to submit to its yoke. In Isaiah's day the power of the Assyrians had grown far greater than ever before, and it appeared that nothing was able to withstand their attack. Isaiah pauses in the midst of his denunciation of the wickedness of the Israelites and his promise of blessing and comfort to the righteous among them, to examine the fateful question: What is the attitude of God toward this great hostile power? Did the Assyrian power come into existence despite the Lord's will? Is it something which God could not help? Is it, rather, something which God, in His inscrutable wisdom, has permitted? Isaiah's answer to the problem takes in a wide sweeping view of history, and envisions the greatness of God in a way hardly to be paralleled in ancient non-Biblical

†De Morgan, *Premieres Civilisations*, 1909, 340 f., quoted in Olmstead, *History of Assyria*, New York, 1923.

writings. The thought which he presents is brought out clearly in the very first verse of this passage, where God calls the Assyrian "the rod of mine anger, the staff in whose hand is mine indignation!" In verse 15 the same thought is brought out, where the Assyrian is called the axe or saw in the hand of God. Isaiah declares that the Assyrian is not a great and terrible scourge which has come into existence in spite of God, or something which God has merely permitted; but that he is actually part of God's plan and an instrument in God's hands. Surely, no greater view of the majesty and glory of God has ever been expressed. In verse 6, it is clearly stated that the Lord will use the Assyrian as His instrument to punish those who are untrue to His covenant.

The Assyrian's View of Himself

Verses 7-14 present another phase of the problem. Although the Assyrian is an instrument in God's hand, he himself does not recognize this fact. He thinks that he has done all his great works by his own strength and force. He boasts of his power and might, and thinks that nothing will be able to withstand him.

God's answer to this presentation of the wickedness and pride of the Assyrian is a declaration that even though the Assyrian is an instrument in God's hands, he is going to be punished for what he has done, because he has done it in his own wicked heart and has refused to give God the glory.

A good parallel to this is found in the acts of King Jehu, as related in 2 Kings. God commanded Jehu to put an end to the wickedness of the house of Omri, which reached its climax in the actions of Ahab and Jezebel. Jehu carried out the command with a cruelty and brutality which had never been ordered by the Lord. He made serving God a pretense for securing his own wicked ends. Consequently, Hosea 1:4 declared that the blood of Jezreel -- the place where the house of Ahab was slaughtered -- would be brought down upon the head of the descendants of Jehu. Even those who are instruments in the hand of God may find themselves culpable for what they perform, if they do it in a way that is different from His command, and if they seek their own ends instead of God's glory.

In verse 12 it is declared that after the Lord has carried out His full will regarding Zion and Jerusalem He is going to punish the king of Assyria. In verse 15 the king of Assyria is likened to an instrument in the hand of God and Isaiah points out how absurd it is that an instrument should boast itself against the one who uses it. Then verses 16-19, using the picture of a forest, show the terrible punishment and destruction that will end the Assyrian Empire.

Deliverance

This naturally leads us, in verses 20-23, to the other side of the picture, God's mercy on His own. Israel will not always be trusting in wicked plots and conspiracies such as that of Ahaz. She will cease to lean upon him that smote her. She will lean upon the Lord. Although God is going to bring a great consumption, in punishment of wickedness in the midst of the land, yet a remnant is to return and to be delivered. We thus have again the note of blessing to God's faithful people, mingled with references to the punishment which He will bring upon the wicked in Israel.

In verses 24-27 a specific revelation of the inscrutable will of God is given. Although the Assyrian is to overrun the greater part of Judah and to be a tremendous threat to the people living in Jerusalem, yet, for the present, God will deliver His city from them. Despite the boastful threats of the Assyrians, God will not allow them to conquer Jerusalem, but will make an overwhelming destruction of them, comparable to that in the days of Gideon. It will be like the event when the Israelites marched through the Red Sea. As Moses' rod, stretched out over the sea, was the instrument God used in showing that He was going to divide the sea and deliver the people by His own omnipotent power, even so God is going to deliver them from Sennacherib by His own interposition without their having to fight at all. This was marvelously fulfilled when the angel of the Lord smote the great host of Sennacherib, as is described in chapters 36 and 37 in the historical portion of the book of Isaiah.

Recapitulation

We have now reached verse 27 and all the teaching of the chapter has been given. From verse 28 on, the teaching is repeated in such a form as to drive home its main outline. Verses 28-32 give a vivid picture of the possible coming of an Assyrian army. Town after town north of Jerusalem is described and one imagines the Assyrian army coming closer and closer, and the inhabitants fleeing for safety. It reaches its climax in verse 32, where this army comes right to the very edge of Jerusalem, and the city's capture seems absolutely certain to follow.

Some writers have said that this proved to be a false guess on Isaiah's part, since Sennacherib's army did not actually follow this route but came down the seacoast and, as a result the messengers who brought threats of an Assyrian attack came from the west instead of from the north. It is not necessary, however, to consider that Isaiah is here predicting the route of an army. He is merely picturing vividly the fear which is aroused among the people by the fact that the Assyrian horde is right next to them and may attack at any time.

Just when the Assyrian army is pictured as if about to take Jerusalem and utterly destroy it, we find in verse 32 the declaration of God's sudden and miraculous interposition. The Assyrian is again likened to a forest, as has already been done in verses 17-19. Here he is compared to the great forest of Lebanon, which was outside the domain of Israel. Assurance is given that the Lord "shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one."

The tenth chapter of Isaiah ends with a description of the downfall of the mighty Assyrian Empire. It is compared to the forest of Lebanon, and described as falling utterly to the ground. Thus all the worldly forces which oppose the will of God are eventually to be humbled.

The chapter contained a vivid picture of the true meaning of the rise of the Assyrian Empire and of its ultimate fate. All this was literally fulfilled in history. An inspired account of the terrible downfall of Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, is presented in the three chapters of the book of Nahum.

Isaiah 11

Chapter 11 begins with a contrast. The worldly empire falls never to rise again, but the kingdom of David, which is pictured as also being lopped down to its very roots, sends forth a new shoot, and out of its roots there comes a Branch. (Although the same figure is involved, the Hebrew word for "branch" used here is not the one used in Isaiah 4:2 and in Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:15.)

The following section may be divided into two parts. Verses 2-5 describe His enduement and His actions; verses 6-9 portray the characteristics of His kingdom.

In verses 2-5 the main emphasis is on what He is rather than on what He does, although the latter aspect is also included. His actions are confined to verse 4, while the other three verses tell about His wonderful character.

In Isaiah 9:6-7 and 4:2 the deity of the Messiah was emphasized. The present verses barely touch upon that aspect of His character. Instead they stress His infilling with the Holy Spirit and the righteousness of His actions.

Verse 2 gives a wonderful description of six different aspects of the power of the Holy Spirit which are manifested as He rests upon the Messiah. It would be interesting to examine each of these aspects to see the great part it played in the work of our Lord during His earthly ministry. Verse 3 stresses the righteousness of His judgments. It reminds us forcibly of the statement in John 2:25 that He did not need that anyone should tell Him what was in man, for He knew what was in man. His eyes pierced to the very center of the character of each one with whom He had to deal. This wonderful insight is to be manifested far more widely in future days.

The only verse in this section of the chapter which describes His activities (v. 4) seems to center upon things He has not yet done. We note that He is to judge the poor, to reprove with equity for the meek of the earth, to smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and to slay the wicked with the breath of His lips. All this describes the activity of a powerful ruler rather than that of a teacher. It is hard to imagine that it is a description of His activities at the time of His first coming, but much more natural to think that it

refers to things yet to be done. This interpretation is proved correct by the fact that in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 Paul quotes one of its phrases, "with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked," as something which in his day was still future.

Paul Interprets Isaiah

This prediction which Paul quotes from Isaiah 11:4 requires further consideration. The word "wicked" is used in the singular. In Hebrew, Greek, and most other languages, it is common to use an adjective as a substantive to indicate either singular or plural. English has gone its own way in this regard; its use of an adjective as a substantive usually implies that it is plural. Thus when we speak of "the quick and the dead," we mean living individuals and dead individuals. We would not use the phrase to indicate just one of each type, as most other languages could readily do. In Paul's quotation of this verse, he also used the Greek word "wicked" in the singular. Pointing the Thessalonians to something which, he says, is yet to occur, he declares in 2 Thessalonians 2:8: "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." In the American Standard Version, the phrase which the Authorized translates "that Wicked" is rendered as "the lawless one." The Greek clearly indicates that Paul referred to an individual as the one whom the Lord would destroy with the spirit of His mouth.

Here there is another very interesting variation between the King James Version and the American Standard Version, which says "the breath of his mouth." The Hebrew word used in Isaiah 11:4 and the Greek word in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 are both sometimes rendered "spirit" and sometimes rendered "breath" or "wind." It would seem that the American Standard Version is right in using the same translation in both instances, since they so clearly refer to the same event, and because the context makes it clear that "breath" is what is meant.

We might note that this wonderful action of destroying a great prince of wickedness simply with the breath of His lips

implies the deity of the Messiah, though that fact is not stated here.

The Apostle John, in the Revelation, again refers to this verse in Isaiah, and his interpretation must, of course, fit in with Paul's interpretation. In Revelation 19:11ff., John describes the coming of One whose name is called "the Word of God," and who has on His thigh a name written "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." In verse 15, he says of this One, that "out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron." Again, in verse 21, he says, "and the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth." John and Paul describe as something future to their day the event here predicted by Isaiah, when this wonderful ruler, the "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS," is to smite the wicked one with the rod of His mouth, and to destroy him with the breath of His lips.

When we look at the promise of the complete victory of the Messiah which this verse describes, we cannot but think of the wonderful promises in Psalm 2, Psalm 110, and else where, which describe the coming triumph of God's Son.

Universal Peace

Verses 6-9 describe the character of the kingdom of this One who is to slay the wicked one with the breath of His lips. A wonderful picture is here presented to us, portraying a time of absolute peace and safety. No longer need peaceful animals fear those which destroy and kill. All shall dwell together in unity. The passage is summed up in verse 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." Here is pictured absolute safety covering the whole earth just as completely as the sea is covered by the water. Not a bit of it is to be in danger of destructiveness or cruelty. Certain commentators have dwelt upon the passage as teaching that the change in the wolf and the leopard from creatures of fierceness to creatures of gentleness is a figurative description of the change in the human heart through conversion. This change in human

beings is a wonderful teaching of the Word of God and can be well illustrated by the change in the wolf and the leopard here described. However, it is certainly not the primary teaching of the passage, for the emphasis is clearly not upon the change in the wolf, but upon the change in the condition of the land. The sucking child will no longer be in danger if it happens to play upon the hole of the asp, for no creature can harm it. It is a wonderful picture of the removal of all external danger, brought about through the reign of the Messiah.

This marvelous picture of external peace and safety forms a counterpart to Micah 4:1-4 and to Isaiah 2:2-4. Even if one were to omit from consideration all other passages of the Bible dealing with the Millennium, one could not but admit that these three passages alone would be sufficient to establish the fact that God has predicted that there is to be upon this earth a time when no one need fear injury from any external attack. All three passages indicate that the divine ruler is to enforce righteousness throughout the world so that nothing external need be feared by any of His people. Whether Isaiah 11:6-8 is to be taken figuratively or literally, it cannot be denied that what it presents is a time of external peace and safety. This period has been generally referred to by Christians as "the Millennium" because Revelation 20 indicates that it is to be a thousand years in length. Isaiah gives no indication of the length of the period; its actuality, however, is so clearly taught by him that "the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein."

Spiritualization

Like all other literary works, the Bible contains many figures of speech. We can never say that a passage in any book must be interpreted entirely literally, but must examine each portion of it to see whether it is to be taken as literal or as figurative. Thus, when we speak of the sun rising, none of us means that the sun actually comes up, but that it appears to come up, since the earth in that direction sinks down below the line of the rays of the sun. When we say that a man was "a lion in the fight," no one would think that we meant that he actually fought with claws and teeth, but

rather that he showed such courage as is typical of a lion. It would be entirely proper to suggest that the animals in this passage should be taken figuratively rather than literally, and one is required to consult parallel passages in Scripture to see which is the correct interpretation. It should be noted, however, that from either viewpoint the passage must be interpreted as indicating a time of external peace and safety on this earth, such as requires a "Millennium" for its fulfillment.

In mentioning the possibility of taking the passage figuratively, we must not be understood to suggest that the method known as "spiritualization" would be valid. This term is often used to indicate taking a passage so figuratively that every thing in it is a figure and there remains nothing solid on which to stand. A little salt on a fried egg increases its flavor, and a little use of figurative language in a generally literal passage increases its clarity and beauty, but if one pours a whole cupful of salt on a fried egg it ruins it, and if one attempts to interpret a passage as being entirely figurative it loses all significance. One must honestly and fairly examine each passage to see what it means in the light of the context. There is no room in sound Biblical interpretation for so-called "spiritualization."

Removal of the Curse

Considering, then, the question whether this passage is to be taken literally or figuratively, we note that if it is taken literally there is a thought introduced which we do not find presented in either Micah 4 or Isaiah 2. This is the thought that the animal creation is also to share in the blessings of the Millennium. This would indicate the removal of the curse which now rests upon the earth as a result of the sin of man. It is a remarkable thought and certainly not one to be accepted upon the basis of this passage alone, unless we find other passages in Scripture which fit with it and thus give us warrant for taking it as a glorious promise of the Lord.

We do indeed find such a passage in Romans 8:20-23, where the Apostle points out that the corruption of the creation is a result of the sin of man, and that it will be removed at the time when we ourselves receive the redemption

of our bodies. Genesis 3 tells us that God brought the curse upon the animal creation after Adam's sin. All who are familiar with the works of nature know that this curse is a reality. Thorns and thistles spring up of themselves; it takes hard labor and sweat and effort to make good crops grow. The poet describes nature as "red with tooth and claw." In all nature we find bloodshed and suffering. These are features of the corruption which man by his sin has brought upon the world. Paul very clearly states what Isaiah here so beautifully suggests, that this curse is to be removed, and that nature is no longer to be typified by cruelty, but rather by kindness and friendship. In view of these other passages in the Scripture, it seems reasonable to consider that Isaiah 11:6-8 is to be interpreted literally as showing the actual change in the physical creation which Paul describes as occurring at the time of the resurrection of the body.

Calvin and the Millennium

The great expositor, John Calvin, in his commentary on this passage, has very clearly pointed out its bearing in this regard, as follows:

The prophet's discourse... amounts to a promise that there will be a blessed restoration of the world. He describes the order which was at the beginning, before man's apostasy produced the unhappy and melancholy change under which we groan. Whence comes the cruelty of brutes, which prompts the stronger to seize and rend and devour with dreadful violence the weaker animals? There would certainly have been no discord among the creatures of God, if they had remained in their first and original condition. When they exercise cruelty toward each other, and the weak need to be protected against the strong, it is an evidence of the disorder which has sprung from the sinfulness of man. Christ having come, in order to reconcile the world to God by the removal of the curse, it is not without reason that the restoration of a perfect state is ascribed to him; as if the prophets had said that that golden age will return in which perfect happiness existed, before the fall of man and the shock and ruin of the world which followed it. Thus, God speaks by Hosea, "I will make a covenant with the beast of the field, with the fowl of

the heaven, and with the creeping things" (Hosea 2:18). As if he had said, "When God shall have been reconciled to the world in Christ, he will also give tokens of fatherly kindness, so that all the corruptions which have arisen from the sinfulness of man will cease."

In a word, under these figures the prophets teach the same truth which Paul plainly affirms, that Christ came to "gather together" out of a state of disorder "those things which are in heaven and which are on earth." (Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20.) It may be thus summed up: "Christ will come to drive away everything hurtful out of the world, and to restore to its former beauty the world which lay under the curse."†

Time of the Millennium

We now come to a very interesting and important question. When is this wonderful change in the creation -- this glorious Millennium which Isaiah describes -- to occur? It would certainly seem reasonable to think that the situation described in verses 6-9 is to follow upon the events described in verse 4. It is hardly logical to think that He slays the wicked with the breath of His lips only at the end of a long period in which there has been no cruelty or suffering. It would be much more reasonable to think that such action on the part of the Lord introduces the period.

The picture in Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 describes a situation brought about because the Word of the Lord is going out from the place where He has His throne. He is represented as physically present with His people. It would seem necessary then to think that this comes after the return of the Lord to this earth.

If Isaiah 11:6-8 is to be taken literally, as other passages in Scripture seem to require, then it surely must follow the return of Christ to earth. There is no suggestion anywhere in Scripture that the curse upon the physical creation will be removed before the return of Christ.

†Calvin, Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Edinburgh, 1850; Vol. 1, pp. 383-4.

The clinching evidence that this millennial period comes after Christ's return rather than before is found in the New Testament parallels to Isaiah 11:4 that we have already examined. As we have seen, Paul refers to the coming of Christ as a future event -- as something which will be connected with the action of the Lord in slaying the wicked with the breath of His mouth. We noticed also that John refers to these same events in Revelation 19. John immediately follows this with Revelation 20, which has the glorious picture of the thousand year period, when Satan is bound for a season in order that he may not deceive the nations. It is surely a travesty on interpretation to suggest, as some do, that binding Satan for a season so that he may not deceive the nations means keeping the saints in heaven safe from injury. The passage is introduced by a description of His slaying the wicked with the breath of His mouth, and is clearly intended to parallel Isaiah's description in 11:6-9.

Three Views

All who stand for Biblical inerrancy believe that Jesus Christ will return to this earth in physical form, but there are three prevalent attitudes regarding the circumstances connected with His return. Within each of these attitudes there may be a great deal of difference of opinion as to details. One of these, which is called premillennialism, is the view that after He returns He will set up His kingdom of righteousness upon this earth and reign here in great glory for a thousand years. The second view, called postmillennialism, holds that before Christ comes back there will be a long period of righteousness, peace and freedom from external danger, brought about as a result of the widespread preaching of the Gospel. The third view, which is known as amillennialism, holds that Christ will return to an unconverted world, and that upon His return He will immediately hold the last judgment, without introducing any earthly kingdom either before or after His return.

If we restrict our attention for the moment to the three passages we have just been considering, Isaiah 2, Isaiah 11, and Micah 4, we find that certain definite statements can be made regarding these three views of the return of Christ. If

these three passages are taken literally, they clearly point to a premillennial return of Christ, since they describe a time of perfect righteousness and external peace and safety when the King Himself is reigning in Jerusalem. If they were to be taken somewhat figuratively and the picture of the animals in Isaiah 11 considered as a figurative representation of conditions among human beings, they could fit the postmillennial view of a period of widespread righteousness upon this earth prior to the return of Christ. However, there is no fair way of interpreting these passages which is consistent with an amillennial view of the return of Christ. One wonders how a man who is ready to accept the Word of God as final and conclusive on all points with which it deals can honestly and fairly examine these passages and still be an amillennialist, since amillennialism requires that a number of clear passages of Scripture be completely ignored. Probably many people hold that view in ignorance. It would seem that on the basis of these passages alone amillennialism could be ruled out as impossible to those who are willing to make an intelligent and careful study of the Bible.

Amillennialism and Postmillennialism Unscriptural

When it comes to postmillennialism, the matter is a little less clear. These three passages alone do not establish premillennialism as compared to postmillennialism, but when it is noted that the promise of the removal of the curse during the Millennium, which is strongly suggested in Isaiah 11, is borne out by the statement of Paul in Romans 8, it begins to appear very likely that postmillennialism is wrong. If one adds to this the fact that Isaiah 11:4 is quoted by Paul as something future, and that John uses it in Revelation 19 as introducing his account of the millennial reign of Christ on earth, it becomes increasingly probable that the promised period of external peace is something which is to be brought about by the coming of the King.

The Bible strikes at the root of all human pride. Humanity cannot bring in the Age of Glory by great schemes and plans for human organization. Sinful man cannot work out means of world betterment that will ultimately succeed. Not even by the glorious preaching of the Gospel can humanity

bring in the Age of Glory. It can only come as a result of a divine action. Christ himself will destroy the wicked one with the breath of his lips; by His own power He will set up His great kingdom of righteousness upon this earth. These three passages taken alone prove amillennialism to be impossible; taken in connection with the remainder of the Scripture they strongly suggest that only the premillennial view does full justice to the facts of the Bible.

Isaiah 11:10-16

The remainder of this chapter describes events which are to take place just prior to the beginning of the Millennium. Verse 10 parallels the description in Micah 4:2 and Isaiah 2:3 of the coming of the nations to seek the root of Jesse.

The verse ends with a curious phrase: "His rest shall be glorious." The Latin Vulgate translates "resting place" as "sepulcher," and takes this to be a prediction of the glory of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. It is so interpreted by the Roman Catholic Church. The American Standard Version renders the word "rest" as "resting place." The Hebrew word bears out this interpretation, for it has a preformative which quite generally indicates a place. Yet examination of the cases where this word is used in the Hebrew Bible show that there is not even one place where it is used to indicate a sepulcher. It is never used of a grave, but rather of a place where there is real rest. It would be better to relate it to the call of Christ to come unto Him and find rest. The nations are to come to Jerusalem, because it is there that the Lord will provide His place of rest for them.

Verses 11-16 describe events just prior to the beginning of the Millennium. Many of these events, doubtless, are still future, and it is difficult for us to understand exactly how these predictions will be fulfilled. Perhaps some of the details will become clearer as the time approaches.

In the political sphere changes sometimes occur very rapidly. These events may happen very soon; yet it is also possible that there may still be quite an interval of time before they occur.

We cannot necessarily be sure what each detail of these verses represents, but we can be sure that they describe real

events. Scripture is not a book of riddles or of vague promises, but a book of definite, specific statements, sometimes expressed in beautiful, poetic language, but always true and dependable.

Isaiah 12

This brief chapter concludes the Book of Immanuel, expressing the happiness of God's people as they rejoice over the coming fulfillment of its glorious promises and give praise to the Holy One of Israel. Its words are particularly well suited to express the joy of everyone who has found salvation through faith in the One whose miraculous birth is predicted in Isaiah 7:14, 9:6 and 11:1, His light-giving preaching in 9:1-2, His wisdom in 11:2-4, His glorious kingdom in 9:7 and 11:6-9, and His deity in 9:6. It can describe the happiness of those who know that because of what Jesus did at Calvary the anger of the God who hates sin has been turned away from them (v. 1), God has become their salvation (vv. 2 and 3) and He dwells in the midst of His people (v. 6).

Isaiah 13-27

The material in these chapters can be divided into two parts. In its first eleven chapters, passages of varying length are frequently introduced by the phrase: "the burden of" Its last four chapters (24-27), which no longer use this introductory phrase, are sometimes called "The Isaiah Apocalypse," because in them the prophet draws aside the veil and gives a glimpse of the wind-up of our age. They contain some of the Bible's most important statements about the resurrection of the just and the end of the age, and they have marked similarities to Daniel and the Revelation. It is a pity that they are not more widely understood, for they include some of the finest treasures in the Book of Isaiah.

The first of the two parts of our present section seems to many readers to be a portion that may well be skipped over in haste. They think of it as consisting merely of denunciation of nations that disappeared long ago, and that are now of interest only to students of "musty volumes of forgotten lore." The impression many people have of them is compared by George Adam Smith to that of a man trying to hack his way through a jungle.

When we examine these chapters we find that this superficial impression is far from being true. Although careful study of contemporary history is needed to gather the full meaning of some of them, even the most casual reader is sometimes surprised and pleased to find in them unexpected gems of religious thought, just as vital today as when they were first written.

Isaiah 13-23

This section contains headings which divide it into twelve parts. Nine of these are introduced by such a phrase as "The Burden of Babylon," or "The Burden of Tyre." In one, the word "burden" occurs in the introductory sentence. The remaining two are passages of woe upon Ethiopia, alone or in association with Egypt. Thus it would not be at all wrong to call the whole section "The Burdens."

Since so many of these chapters consist of declarations of woe or misery to come to ungodly nations, it would be natural to assume that a "burden" means a curse, or a declaration of

God's wrath. The Hebrew word literally means "something lifted or carried." A natural conclusion would be that the word denotes a burden of coming misery to be laid upon an enemy of God. Yet this interpretation must not be adopted unless it fits all cases, and some of the burdens prove on examination to contain promises of blessing as well as threats of punishment. Thus the burden of Egypt (ch. 19) ends with a prediction of a wonderful time of blessing when a regenerated Egypt will stand among the people of God as a companion to Israel. It is necessary to conclude that in most of its occurrences in this section the word "burden" does not mean a weight of punishment laid upon a nation, but a message or revelation carried by the prophet. It is used to introduce special prophetic declarations, generally (but not always) about foreign nations. A burden may be as long as two chapters, as in 15-16, or as short as two verses, as in 21:11-12.

Seven of these burdens have names that are well known to all Bible readers: Babylon, Moab, Damascus, Egypt, Dumah (Edom), Arabia, and Tyre. Two of them bear picturesque titles which do not indicate a particular place. These two are "the burden of the desert of the sea," and "the burden of the valley of vision."

Sometimes our section is called "prophecies against foreign nations." Such a title is not strictly accurate. One of the burdens (ch. 22) is not concerned with a foreign nation, but with Judah itself. This is called "the burden of the valley of vision." It describes the wrath of God against the human pride of the people of Jerusalem, and shows His dealing with individuals in the time of Isaiah. These individuals, Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, and Shebna, are mentioned in the historical sections, in 2 Kings 18-19 and in Isaiah 36-37.

Survey of the "Burdens"

The first and longest of the burdens, that against Babylon, occupies nearly two chapters. In Isaiah's day Assyria, rather than Babylon, was the great enemy. Babylon was of comparatively little importance at that time. Yet Assyria has no burden (though it is mentioned several times in chapter 20), and Babylon has the longest and most prominent one. Isaiah

39 states that God revealed to Isaiah that the land of Judah would ultimately be conquered by Babylon rather than by Assyria. Babylon here stands for a symbol of all the great enemies of God. In chapter 14 some of the language seems to go far beyond what might properly be said of the actual King of Babylon.

The second burden, which has only five verses, is directed against Philistia. The Philistines are well known to all Bible students. Yet the average reader of the English Bible would be easily misled by the fact that in 14:29 and 31 the King James Version translates "Philistia" as "Palestina." Our English word Palestine is derived from the name of the Philistines, but has been extended to cover the land of Israel as well as that of Philistia. The Philistines are the subject of the "burden" and the American Standard Version rightly renders the word as "Philistia." The King James Version renders the word as "Palestina" in a few Scripture passages and as "Philistia" in a few others. The gentile of this word is always translated "Philistine."

The burden of Moab, although less than half as long as that of Babylon, is divided into two chapters. It contains more names of places than any other "burden". Chapter 17 declares God's wrath against Damascus, a theme of great interest in the early days of Isaiah's ministry, since Damascus was the capital of Aram (Syria). The sections that begin in chapter 7 and in chapter 28 both deal with the time of crisis when the king of Damascus and the king of Samaria united against Judah.

The fifth message does not contain the word "burden" at all, but is clearly a new section, since it deals with Ethiopia, a land in the opposite direction from Damascus. Since Isaiah 17:12 begins like 18:1, an argument might be made for starting the section there, but our present division is probably correct.

References to Ethiopia do not occur as frequently in Bible history as to the other nations mentioned. Ethiopia was especially important to the Israelites at the time of Isaiah because an Ethiopian became king of Egypt and the two nations were united for a time. Quite logically the denunciation of Ethiopia is followed by the burden of Egypt. Although this is confined to one

chapter, it is longer than the two chapters devoted to Moab. This burden is remarkable for the unique passage of blessing with which it ends (19:24-25). The seventh burden is introduced by a phrase describing the time at which it was given. Its position is logical, right after the burdens of Ethiopia and Egypt, since it combines the two in one prediction that both would fall captive to Assyria. This prediction was fulfilled in Isaiah's lifetime. The eighth burden deals with a region already discussed, though its title, "the burden of the desert of the sea," leaves the reader guessing as to its content. It proves to be a dramatic picture of the coming of news of the final destruction of Babylon. Its precise relation to the actual events involves some interesting problems. The two verses entitled "The burden of Dumah" do not contain specific denunciation of Edom, and thus differ from all the previous burdens. The reference seems to be to the desert hills of Edom, where a watcher on Mount Seir might be imagined as eagerly looking for the end of the long night. The cryptic answer to the anxious inquiry hints of greater mysteries to be fulfilled before God's plan is complete.

After Edom the seer's vision moves south and east, to predict the doom of the Arabian tribesmen.

As already noticed, the eleventh burden deals with Judah, reminding Isaiah's hearers that God's declarations of wrath against wicked enemies do not excuse those who have enjoyed His goodness from living up to the standards He has placed before them. There is no excuse for haughtiness of spirit or human self-sufficiency among the true followers of God. His standards are so high that no human effort can attain to them. Only a broken spirit and a contrite heart, with a sincere acceptance of the salvation given freely through the finished work of Christ, can avail before God.

The last of the burdens deals with the great merchant city of Tyre. Much both of good and of harm came to the surrounding nations through this great mercantile city. Though the chapter speaks most prominently of Tyre, it also refers to Sidon (Zidon), the other merchant city of Phoenicia, which at this period was closely connected with it. It is interesting to note that the third of the great Phoenician merchant cities -- Byblos, further to the north -- gave its name to

the Greeks to mean "book," and so led to the origin of our word "Bible."

Isaiah 13-14: The Burden of Babylon

These chapters may be divided roughly into the following sections:

- 13:1 Title.
- 13:2-5 The Lord summons great hosts to battle.
- 13:6-18 A vivid description of upheaval and turmoil.
- 13:19-22 A picture of lasting desolation of the city of Babylon.
- 14:1-2 Blessing on Israel, including the supremacy of the Israelites over their previous oppressors.
- 14:3-20 A description of the fallen king of Babylon.
- 14:21-23 Summary of the destruction of Babylon.
- 14:24-28 Destruction in Israel of the Assyrian forces.

In these two chapters we have a vivid picture of disaster and destruction. A mighty city is overwhelmed and left as a permanent ruin. A haughty king tries to make himself equal with God, but fails and is cast into the pit, while his body lies unburied and dishonored. The section is entitled "The Burden of Babylon," and the name Babylon is used several times in the course of it. Should it be interpreted as a literal destruction of the city of Babylon which existed in the day of the prophet, and of the fate of its king? Or does the name "Babylon" here stand as a figure for something else?

It is a reasonable principle of Bible interpretation that in any passage the natural interpretation is to be accepted unless some other is clearly indicated. Occasionally someone says that he takes everything in the Bible literally. This statement merely proves that he knows very little about the Bible. Like all other literary works, the Bible contains many figures of speech. It is absurd to speak of taking everything in it literally. At the same time it is reasonable to say that we should try to take something as literal unless there is clear evidence that it is figurative. The great bulk of our material is bound to be literal but in the course of it there are scattered figures of speech. These figures of speech do

not necessarily make for vagueness or lack of clarity. They may actually present an idea more clearly than could be done in literal speech. When we say of a man, "He was a lion in the fight," we do not mean that the man actually was transformed into a four-footed beast in the midst of the battle. We do not mean that he roared, that he clawed with his fingernails, or that he chewed up the enemy with his mouth. We simply mean that he showed those qualities of courage and of ferocious onslaught which are thought of as typical of a lion. It is a figurative expression which gives the idea with greater clarity than could be done in equal space with literal language. In addition, it often greatly increases the beauty of a statement.

In any passage we must usually accept the literal meaning if it makes sense. However, we must recognize the possibility of finding evidence that some sort of a figure is involved.

There is a good illustration of this in Judges 14:18: "And the men of the city said unto him on the seventh day before the sun went down, What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion? And he said unto them, If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle." In this verse we may ask whether "lion," "honey," "plow," and "heifer" are to be taken literally, or as figures. Earlier in the chapter we read that Samson met a young lion and killed it. Later he returned and found that bees had made honey in its carcass. There is no question that these terms are to be taken literally. In verse 18 the same matters are referred to in the answer given by the men of the city, and there is no doubt that "lion" and "honey" are again used literally. Yet when Samson answers, it is equally clear that he is using "plow" and "heifer" in a figurative sense. The meaning is just as clear as if he had used literal terms but if we had only the one verse before us we might have difficulty deciding which terms were literal and which were figurative.

A similar question faces us in Isaiah 13 and 14. Are these great cosmic statements to be interpreted as figurative descriptions of the upheavals accompanying the downfall of Babylon, or is Babylon to be taken as a figure for something else to which these expressions might more suitably be applied? When we find great historical difficulties in the application of certain statements to Babylon, we are led to

feel that perhaps Isaiah is not describing Babylon at all, but speaking of the great world powers that oppose God. Perhaps it is not the actual king of Babylon who is described, but Satan, the leader of all that is wicked. In order to make a proper decision on this important matter we must examine the various statements and see their relation to what we know about the history of Babylon.

A. Problems in the Predictions in Isaiah 13-14

1. *Strangeness of such a reference to Babylon in Isaiah's day*

At the time of Isaiah, Assyria was the great world power. From their capital city of Ninevah, the Assyrian kings were continually extending their domain by force of arms. With planned brutality and calculated cruelty they conquered nation after nation. During the period of Isaiah's ministry both the Syrian kingdom with its capital at Damascus and the kingdom of northern Israel fell into the hand of the Assyrian conqueror. The city of Babylon was at this time far from being a world power. In fact it was usually subject to Assyria, although occasionally striving vigorously to regain its independence. When Isaiah wrote most Israelites never thought of Babylon as a possible menace to them. Consequently, it seems strange indeed that Isaiah should begin this section of discussion of various foreign nations with two chapters mainly devoted to Babylon. Surely one would expect that Assyria, rather than Babylon, would be the great world power under discussion.

The critical theory of the book of Isaiah, as first presented, was very simple. It supposed that Isaiah had written his book at about 700 B. C. and that a century and a half later, as the exile was approaching its close, someone had written a new book in the spirit and viewpoint of Isaiah. This second book was easily to be distinguished from the first because Babylon instead of Assyria was the great enemy. The exile was not predicted, but presupposed, and predictions were given of a mighty deliverance which God would soon bring to His people. In Isaiah 41-52, much stress is laid upon the coming downfall of Babylon, the great conquering nation.

The simple form of the critical theory assumed that two books by different authors simply came to be written on one scroll, and that it was eventually forgotten that they were two distinct books.

It was not very long after this theory was first advanced before its supporters realized that it could not be maintained in this simple form. The argument which seemed so strong for thinking that chapters 40-66 were not the work of Isaiah applied with equal force to many sections in the earlier part of the book. Outstanding among these sections were chapters 13 and 14, where Babylon seems to be regarded as the great world power. Consequently those who accepted the theory of the two Isaiahs also took chapters 13 and 14 away from the writings of Isaiah and supposed them to have been written 150 years later, and then to have been interpolated into the midst of Isaiah's work. Similar positions were taken regarding many other chapters in the first part of the book. Thus the apparent simplicity of the critical theory proved to be illusory. In view of the situation in Isaiah's day it seems very strange that Babylon instead of Assyria should occupy the first place among the great world powers against which the Lord gives His judgment, and that no part of Isaiah 13-23 should be entitled, "The Burden of Assyria."

2. The relation of 14:24-28 to what precedes

In these four verses the Lord speaks not of Babylon but of Assyria. If this were written in the time of Babylonian supremacy one might think of Assyria as a previous great power whose name was now used as a figure for the present great power of Babylon. However, the description in these four verses is clearly a prediction of God's deliverance of the Jews from the attack of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria in Isaiah's own day. That deliverance is described in more detail in Isaiah 36 and 37. There is nothing in connection with the relation of the Jews to the Babylonians to which these verses could possibly be referred. They fit perfectly if the word "Assyrian" is taken in the literal sense. Then, however, the question arises, "Why should a passage predicting the destruction of the hosts of Sennacherib, an Assyrian

king, be placed immediately after a long declaration of God's judgment against Babylon? To this question, the destructive critic has a ready answer. He supposes that a section written by the true Isaiah has simply been added to a writing from a later hand describing Babylon. Thus the views of the critics reduce our present book largely to a haphazard jumble. To the Bible believing student such an explanation is not satisfactory. There must be some way in which the two passages reasonably and logically fit together.

3. Lack of specific Babylonian local color

Between Isaiah 41 and 49 there are a number of instances of definite Babylonian color. Thus there is the reference to the two-leaved gates in Isaiah 45:1, and the mention of the names of certain Babylonian gods in 46:1. Practically nothing of this type is found in chapters 13 and 14. While Babylon is mentioned several times, about the only instances of specific local color are the phrase in 13:19, "the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency," and the reference in 13:17 to the Medes as the people raised up against Babylon. Aside from these two verses the statements are of a general nature such as could apply to almost any nation.

4. Great Cosmic Occurrences

Chapter 13 begins with a picture of the Lord gathering nations "from the end of heaven" (v. 5). Verse 6 says that "the day of the LORD is at hand." Verse 9 reads: "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." Verse 10 continues with the words: "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." In verse 13 we read: "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." It is highly questionable whether the actual conquest of the Babylonians by the Persians would properly fit these terms. Their use suggests that the predictions may actually deal with events

far greater than even the overthrow of the Babylonian empire.

5. Sudden destruction

Chapter 13 quite definitely gives the impression that the overthrow of the defenders of Babylon results in the destruction of the city, and that it is consequently reduced to a condition of utter desolation. While it is not explicitly stated that the city is destroyed as a result of a great conquest, this is by far the most natural interpretation of the prediction. We read in verses 6-18 a vivid description of upheaval and turmoil, and then in verse 19ff. we have a picture of utter desolation, at a time when the city of Babylon will have become a wild and desolate spot inhabited only by doleful creatures and dragons. Historically this does not fit the conquest of Babylon by the Persians. When Cyrus, the Persian emperor, came into Babylon he represented himself as the deliverer of its people from tyranny. Daniel 6 describes Daniel as living in Babylon under the kingship of Darius the Mede after Cyrus had conquered the land and established Darius as his representative there. Thus Daniel pictures Babylon as continuing to be a great city. It contains no hint that any far-reaching destruction immediately followed the conquest of the city by the Medes. Actually, Babylon continued to be a great and important city for many centuries after the Persian conquest. It was only gradually that the city declined. Centuries later, as a result of the shifting of the course of the river and the moving of commerce to cities which were built later, the greater part of the city came to be simply a waste.

6. Predicted supremacy of Israel.

The greater part of these two chapters is devoted to describing God's victory over His enemies, but the three verses in the middle of the section (14:1-3) describe God's blessing upon Israel. Verses 1-2 read as follows: "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."

These verses say that those who have taken the Israelites captive and held them in subjection are to be taken captive by the Israelites and that the Israelites will rule over them and will possess them for servants and for handmaids. No such political reversal followed the actual overthrow of Babylon. When Cyrus conquered Babylon he gave the Jews permission to return to their own land and ordered that they receive help from the royal treasury in this undertaking; yet the Jews who returned were a comparatively small group, and in Jerusalem they were constantly troubled by enemies. At one time they were told to stop their work of rebuilding and it was only after a long period of time had elapsed that they received permission from the Persian government to continue it (Ezra 4:4-24). Their position was a rather precarious one. It was a great joy to them to be back in Jerusalem again, but no one could possibly consider the condition of the Jews when they returned from Babylonian captivity as fulfilling the wonderful statements of Isaiah 14:1-3. Surely this casts considerable doubt upon the idea of relating the whole of this section to the actual literal Babylon.

7. The character of the king of Babylon

In 14:4-20 a vivid picture is given of the pride of the fallen king of Babylon. He is described as one who is constantly boasting of his great power and of the destruction he causes. He is the oppressor (v. 4), the one "who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke" (v. 6), "which didst weaken the nations" (v. 12), that "made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms" (v. 16) who "made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof" (v. 17). His own people regard him, not as a builder but as a destroyer, for it is said of him in verse 20 "because thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people." The picture seems to describe a man whose pride is in military conquest and destruction. It could fit Hitler or Napoleon, and it could be appropriately

used of many of the Assyrian kings, but it is hardly typical of the kings of Babylon in the time of the Israelite oppression. Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest of the kings of the neo-Babylonian empire, lumps his great military exploits together in his inscriptions and says comparatively little about them. It would appear as if he regarded them as a necessary chore, of which he might boast in a general way, but which did not interest him nearly as much as his great building achievements. He liked to think of himself as a builder rather than as a destroyer. In his inscriptions he devotes a great deal of space to describing the buildings he erected and dwells at length on his renovation of temples in cities all over Mesopotamia. The book of Daniel describes Nebuchadnezzar as looking out over the city and saying: "Is not this great Babylon that I have built?" (Dan. 4:30). Daniel's portrayal of Nebuchadnezzar fits the picture of him in the cuneiform inscriptions, but the description of the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14 does not.

Another element of the picture in Isaiah 14 is stressed particularly in verses 12-14: "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." This portrayal of one who aspired to "be like the most High" hardly fits any king of Babylon or even of Assyria. All of these give credit for their victories to their various gods. We read of Beishazzar, the last king of Babylon, in Daniel 5:4, that he and his family "drank wine and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood and of stone." Certainly such a description would not fit Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest of the neo-Babylonian kings, for we read in Daniel 4 that God punished him for his pride in his great building exploits and that he thereupon issued a proclamation declaring the glory of "the high God," "the King of heaven" (Dan. 4, esp. vv. 1-3, 37; note also 2:46-47; 3:26-29). Surely Isaiah's picture of a king who had designs on God's throne and desired to ascend into heaven and to exalt his throne above the stars of God would seem to refer

to a mighty spiritual being rather than to any known king of Babylon.

8. The fall of the king of Babylon

Within this passage there is a description of the fall of the king of Babylon. He is described in 14:19-20 as one who is cast out of his grave like an abominable branch, thrust through with a sword, and not joined with his ancestors in burial. Elsewhere he is pictured as humiliated, cast aside, brought down into the pit (14:9, 15). There is no king of the neo-Babylonian empire of whom we can say that such a fate befell him. We know that it did not come to any great boastful king who ruled over that empire, and certainly not to Nebuchadnezzar, the only one who comes anywhere near fitting the description in this chapter. It is hard to find in Babylon any fulfillment of this prediction.

Thus we have noticed the lack of specific references to Babylon in these chapters, and we have seen that their description of the king does not fit any known Babylonian king, while the prediction of the fate of the king and of the land hardly tallies with what happened to the actual Babylon. Surely there is a vital problem of Bible interpretation before us.

B. Consideration of Various Hypotheses

It is a vital principle of Bible interpretation that we take whatever is clear and stand upon it and then go from the clear to the obscure. We should not try to explain an obscure point before first examining other passages which are clear. We should take our stand on what is definite and positive in the Word of God, and not upon superficial interpretations or unwarranted inferences. This does not mean that we are not to make hypotheses. Hypotheses and guesses are often extremely useful. There is no objection to making guesses provided they are labeled as guesses. When we have a group of data to consider, whether in a scientific field or in the field of Bible interpretation, we should follow proper procedure. After careful study of the

data, we should form a theory, and then see if the data will fit together under this theory. We should definitely consider it as a theory or a guess until we have made sure that the data actually agree with it. Only then are we ready to take it as a standpoint upon which we can step forward to make further gains in our understanding of the subject.

There are three standpoints which might be considered in relation to Isaiah 13-14:

1. That it is a specific prophecy of the future of Babylon, given at the time of Isaiah

This certainly is the most obvious and natural interpretation. The attempt should be made to fit this interpretation with the facts, before any great amount of consideration can rightly be given to any other interpretation. Yet it proves to be very difficult to fit this interpretation with the facts. We have already noticed how strange it seems for Isaiah simply to put Babylon at the head of the list of foreign nations toward which he is declaring God's judgment, and to omit Assyria altogether from the list. We have also noticed that there are many things in the description of the city of Babylon and of the king of Babylon, which do not seem to fit the actual situation. While the prediction of the future desolation of the city of Babylon was literally fulfilled of most of the area where it had stood, the words about a sudden overwhelming destruction do not fit the historical facts about the conquest and later slow decline of the great city itself, and the description of the fate of the king does not even partially correspond to the fate of any known king of that city.

If we could think of no other proper hypothesis, it would be worthy of consideration whether discovery of further historical evidence might eventually prove that the picture of a king of Babylon in these chapters is after all a correct one, and that our other historical information is in error. It seems very unlikely that enough entirely new material would turn up to necessitate such a great revision of the known history, and when it comes to the predictions of the fate of the city and also of the king it is extremely hard to see how new discoveries could overturn the evidence that is already

available. Under these circumstances we are certainly warranted in examining other interpretations.

2. The Critical View

The view which the critics take is that most of chapters 13-14 and of 40-50 were written at a time shortly before the end of the Babylonian captivity, when an unknown writer described the situation as he knew it. Presupposing exile and Babylonian captivity, he predicted a great deliverance as about to take place. If one accepts this view of chapters 13-14 he must say that the deliverance did not take place as predicted. When Israel was released from Babylonian captivity they did not make their captors into captives and servants. They were in no sense victorious or supreme over Babylon. There is no evidence of any king in Babylon at that time who fits the description given here or whose body was cast out in the manner described. Under these circumstances it could hardly have been written at the end of the exile, unless it were done by a false prophet who made many bad guesses that did not come to pass. From a viewpoint of destructive criticism such an interpretation is possible. From the viewpoint of the Bible believer the whole exilic theory is utterly unsatisfactory.

3. That Isaiah is not speaking of the literal Babylon, but using the term in a figurative sense

We can find an altogether satisfactory explanation if we conclude that Isaiah puts these two chapters at the very beginning of his discussion of foreign powers because he is dealing with something that sums up all the great world powers that oppose God, and that may reach its climax in one great figure that is to be the supreme enemy of God at the end of the age. For such a description the name of Babylon was quite appropriate, since it was the name of the particular power that would eventually conquer Judah (Isa. 39:6-7). In addition, Babylon had been a great power in the days before the rise of the Assyrian empire and memories of its ancient greatness may have survived, making it a natural figure for

a great future world power. Babylon, as used in this figurative sense, could include the great Assyrian aggressor of Isaiah's day and all those of later times, paralleling the use of the term Babylon in Revelation 17-18.

According to this view what is meant here by Babylon includes Babylon itself, but also includes far more. Certain elements in the descriptions and predictions are exemplified in the literal Babylon. In addition, in the providence of God, the city declined to such a point, long after its actual conquest, that most of it eventually became a desolate wilderness fitting the description in Isaiah 13:19-22. Here we have a foretaste of the fate of all those wicked powers which oppose God.

According to this view the picture of Babylon leads into a reference to the great central spiritual figure which is at the head of the ungodly world, including all the empires that oppose God. This king is Satan, the great enemy of the people of God, the one through whom sin came into this world. Isaiah shows the disaster which is to come to him, as he is cast into the pit, as described in Revelation 20:1-3.

This interpretation of the passage seems to me by far the most satisfactory. Babylon here is a figure standing for a great succession of ungodly powers in which the literal Babylon is included as one element. Its climax is not the literal Babylon of the century after the time of Isaiah but is rather some great combination in opposition to God which is to be active at the end of the age. The king of Babylon here referred to is no literal king of Babylon but Satan himself -- the great "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). It is to be noted that according to this view Isaiah 14:24-28 is not a separate section haphazardly joined to what precedes, but is indeed a vital part of the burden of Babylon. It accurately describes the way God will deliver His people from Assyria, which is part of the totality that the section includes under the figure of Babylon. God gave this marvelous deliverance in the lifetime of Isaiah, when the great army of Sennacherib perished in the land of Judah in a single night. This was a foretaste and an earnest of the fact that ultimately God will completely destroy "Babylon" and its wicked king, "the prince of this world" (John 14:30; 16:11).

Isaiah is not speaking of the literal Babylon but is using the term figuratively for the series of great powers which oppose the will of God. Babylon is only one member of this series, which reaches its climax in the powerful forces that will vigorously oppose God at the end of the age.

Thus the term "Babylon" here includes Babylon itself, but also includes far more. The actual Babylon is merely one example of what is meant here.

We shall run through the two chapters again, taking as our starting point the idea that the subject of the two chapters is not one particular kingdom, but that it includes the whole series of great powers that oppose God's will and God's plan.

The title (v. 1) is followed by four verses which vividly describe the assembling of great hosts, summoned to battle by the Lord Himself, "to destroy the whole land" (v. 5). This description goes far beyond anything that occurred in connection with the downfall of the literal Babylon. The passage summarizes the direction of God's forces all through the ages, but will find its true culmination in the great events at the end of this present age.

Isaiah 13:6-18: A Vivid Description of Upheaval and Turmoil

In this passage there is little that can be properly applied to the conquest of Babylon in the sixth century B. C., except for the fact that the Medes, who are mentioned by name in verse 17, were part of the force which conquered Babylon. The terminology of these verses goes far beyond anything that could properly be applied to the time when the city of Babylon was conquered by Cyrus the Persian and incorporated into his empire. This is a picture of great cosmic events when God's forces will completely destroy all opposition. Verses 10 and 13 suggest great upheavals in the universe itself. It is possible that some of these terms are used figuratively, but even then they would hardly fit the history of Belshazzar's defeat. The term, "the day of the Lord", is used twice, in verses 6 and 9, in describing a time when the land is to be made utterly desolate, and this does not fit with what happened after the Persian victory. After

Cyrus conquered Babylon many of its people felt that he had come as their deliverer. The land continued to enjoy a large measure of prosperity. Little if any devastation occurred, when the Babylonian rulers lost their positions of authority. In fact Daniel, who had been a high officer under Nebuchadnezzar, held a top position under the new rulers. This chapter of Isaiah describes the overwhelming power of God as He annihilates all that is wicked and subdues everything that opposes His will. The greater part of its fulfillment is still future.

It is necessary to pause for a minute at verse 12: "I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir." Some of the rabbis have interpreted this in a Messianic sense. In the direct context the most obvious interpretation is that the depopulation and destruction is so great that gold and precious things are worth nothing in comparison with the need of manpower for defense. It reminds us of the cry of Richard III, "My kingdom for a horse!"[†] Yet, in a passage dealing with such great cosmic events, accomplished solely by God's power, one must recognize the possibility that this verse does indeed refer to something far precious than further manpower for more defense. Surely it points to the One through whom alone deliverance may be obtained from the terrible results of sin. All those who will suffer the miseries described in this chapter could have escaped if they had only accepted the offer of the Man who is indeed more precious than fine gold, the One who alone could have given them redemption and deliverance.

A Picture of Lasting Desolation

Isaiah 13:19-22 presents a terrible picture of lasting desolation. The word "Babylon" is used in the first of these five verses; yet we notice that this description has been only partially fulfilled in the case of the ancient city of Babylon. The desolation of Babylon did not come immediately after the conquest by the Persians, nor was it a result of destruction in

[†]Richard III, Act V, scene 4, line 7.

war. Babylon slowly declined until finally most of the city was in the situation here described. The picture given here suggests a sudden great catastrophe which results in overwhelming desolation that lasts a long time. It is a picture of the ultimate desolation of all that opposes God's will, and reaches its climax in the great catastrophe at the end of the present age. It parallels the description of the desolation of Edom in Isaiah 34. The condition of historic Babylon in recent centuries has been merely a foretaste of the complete fulfillment which is yet to come.

The passage ends with the words "and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged." It is necessary for us to recognize that this is looking at it from God's viewpoint. The time of wickedness seems very long from our human viewpoint, but from God's viewpoint it is really short. We know that He will indeed accomplish His great work, and we can rest our souls in patience, knowing that His purposes are certain of accomplishment.

Blessing on Israel

Isaiah 14:1-3 describes Israel's future happiness. This description is a specific declaration of God's mercy upon the Israelites, and describes them as having a power over their former oppressors such as has never come to Israel during the present age. It portrays something that is still future.

Verse 3 mentions the condition of the Israelites when God bestows His great mercy upon them, and introduces the taunt against the king of Babylon that follows.

The Fallen King of Babylon

Isaiah 14:4-20 deals with the leader of the great world power that opposes God. The great stress upon his personality and the fact that so much space is given to him show the importance of individuals in the world. Great personalities accomplish great things. It has been customary in many views of history to think that men are merely tools of their age. This may be true of the great mass of people, but great events are generally brought about by great men. If one would remove from the sixteenth century the influence of

three great figures, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ignatius Loyola, the subsequent history of the world would be vastly different. These men stood for varying principles and their attitudes differed at many points, but the influence of each of them has gone out into all the world. Each had a comparatively humble beginning. No one of them accomplished what he did by position or by physical force. Each of them made use of the movements and situations of his day, but the outcome would have been very different if any one of these three men had been absent from the scene of history.

This passage shows that among the great forces that oppose God there is a personality that is dominant and central. This personality, particularly described in verses 12-14, exalts himself against God and desires to establish himself as supreme in the heavens. He declares that he intends to exalt his throne above the stars of God and to be like the Most High. There is no record of any king of Babylon that fits this picture, either in the character of the man or in the end to which he came. It is a picture of a great personality who is behind Babylon and behind all the great forces that oppose God. He is the central ruler in all the wickedness of the world. The name "Lucifer" in the King James Version of verse 12 is the Latin equivalent of the Hebrew word used in the verse. It indicates the morning star, and its bearer is further designated as "son of the morning." The American Standard Version has "daystar" instead of "Lucifer." Our passage describes an individual who was not content with a very great position in the universe, but desired a still greater one, and tried to usurp the place of God Himself. Some of these verses describe the condition of rest and quiet which follows the removal of the great wicked leader, but the emphasis is principally upon the manner of his fall. The lesser forces of evil are astonished as they see how he has been brought down, so that he is now no greater than any of them. He who made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof, and would not open the houses of his prisoners, is to be cast out of the grave like an abominable branch, thrust through with a sword. He is as one who goes down to the pit. Surely this is a picture of Satan cast into the pit, as described in Revelation 20:2-3.

Summary of Destruction of Babylon

Isaiah 14:21-23 recapitulates the destruction of "Babylon." First, the prophet stresses the great slaughter and destruction of the land; second, the end of its wicked leadership; third, the continuing state of desolation. Thus these three verses summarize the dire predictions that have gone before.

Destruction of Assyrian Forces in Palestine

Under this interpretation of the two chapters, Isaiah 14:24-28 is a vital and remarkable part of the section. After describing the ultimate end of the forces which oppose God, the prophet now portrays a defeat which will be suffered in the near future by the contemporary representative of these mighty forces.

In earlier chapters of the book, and also in later ones, considerable prominence is given to Isaiah's rebuke to Ahaz for his unholy alliance with Assyria. In Isaiah 7-8 and 28 the prophet pointed out that the plan of the king to secure relief from the Syro-Ephraimitic threat through alliance with wicked Assyria would actually put Judah into a position of terrible danger. The Assyrian forces would not stop with overcoming Syria and Israel. Removal of the buffer states would bring them right next to Ahaz' own kingdom. Eventually they would sweep on into Judah.

In our present passage, given in the year in which Ahaz died, Isaiah promised a measure of relief from the terrible consequences of Ahaz' wicked scheme. The Assyrians would indeed overrun a great part of Judah. Nevertheless they would not completely conquer the land. God would protect Jerusalem from them. This is specifically predicted in Isaiah 30 and 31, and its fulfillment in the days of Hezekiah is recorded in Isaiah 36-37 (and also in the parallel passages in Kings and Chronicles).

Isaiah 14:24-28 is a prediction of this marvelous deliverance from Sennacherib. As an earnest of the eventual destruction of all the forces of ungodliness, God would destroy the Assyrian armies right in the land of Palestine. Isaiah declares that this is the purpose which God has planned and

that no one will be able to disannul it. His hand is stretched out and no one can turn it back.

A Verse Dating A Burden

Verse 28 reads: "In the year that king Ahaz died was this burden." Some interpreters consider this verse to conclude the previous section, while others think that it begins the following one.

It would be very appropriate to think of verse 28 as finishing the prediction about the destruction of the Assyrian army in the land of Palestine. Isaiah is promising the people deliverance from the terrible results of the wicked plans of Ahaz, which are sure to bring the land into frightful misery. Surely the year in which Ahaz died is a very appropriate time for this burden to be given.

Such an interpretation does not necessarily mean that the entire burden of Babylon was given as early as this. The greater part of it (13:1-14:23) might have been revealed to the prophet after the great prediction of chapter 39, that Judah would be taken captive to Babylon instead of Assyria. Then Isaiah might have been led to put 14:24-27 at the end of the "Burden of Babylon." This passage, given some time before, in the year in which Ahaz died, and now wonderfully fulfilled in the defeat of Sennacherib, might appropriately be placed at the end of the more distant prophecy. The nearer event would serve as an earnest of the certainty of the fulfillment of the later ones. This type of arrangement is not unique in the prophecies. It parallels the statements of the man of God who appeared to Jeroboam at Bethel, as described in 1 Kings 13:1-5, where a prediction of a distant event was followed by one close at hand.

Thus there was a good reason for the insertion of verse 28 here. It shows that the previous four verses, though logically coming after the main body of the burden of Babylon, were written some time before it. They are not a prediction after the event, but a reminder of the fact that God had promised, long before it happened, that He would destroy the Assyrian army in the land of Palestine. The fact that this nearer prediction was so strikingly fulfilled would give added certainty that the later ones will also come to pass. Thus

verse 28 can very reasonably be considered as the conclusion to verses 24-27.

In many Bibles verse 28 is placed at the beginning of a new paragraph which includes the rest of the chapter, making it the beginning of the next section instead of the end of this one, and causing the following verses to be misunderstood.

Philistia Told Not to Rejoice

We have already observed that Isaiah 14:29-32 deals, not with Palestine as a whole, but with Philistia, as correctly translated here in the American Standard Version, and elsewhere in both the King James Version and the American Standard Version. The fact that verse 28 precedes this section has misled many interpreters into taking that verse as the introduction to this section instead of recognizing that it actually refers to the giving of the previous prediction of the downfall of Sennacherib's army (vv. 24-27). This leads them to take the statement in verse 29, "the rod of him that smote thee is broken," as referring to the death of King Ahaz. They then try to find among Ahaz' descendants men to correspond to the next two elements of the verse.

This interpretation is impossible for the following reasons:

1. The verse says "the rod of him that smote thee is broken." This sounds more like a reference to the loss of a king's army than to the death of the king himself. It would better fit the destruction of Sennacherib's army than the death of Ahaz.
2. There is no evidence to suggest that the Philistines would think of Ahaz as one who smote them. On the contrary, 2 Chronicles 28:18-19 tells us that the Philistines themselves had smitten Ahaz.
3. The next two elements of the verse would make Hezekiah a cockatrice (American Standard Version adder) and Manasseh a fiery, flying serpent. To anyone who knows the character of Hezekiah it is immediately apparent how absurd it would be to speak of this godly man as a cockatrice.
4. Verse 31 speaks of the future destruction of Philistia as coming from the north. Judah was not north of Philistia but east. The armies from Mesopotamia

always crossed at the north of the great desert and thus came down into Philistia from the north. They are frequently referred to elsewhere in the Scripture as coming from the north.

This points the way to the true interpretation of the passage. Verse 28 is not the introduction to this passage but the conclusion of the previous one. Philistia is here told not to rejoice, not because of the death of king Ahaz, but because of the destruction of the army of Sennacherib as described in verses 24-27.

When Sennacherib came against Hezekiah, he marched southward through the Philistine plain, overwhelming many cities, and preparing to meet the army of Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia and Egypt (cf. 2 Kings 19:9). Large portions both of Philistia and of Judah were devastated by the Assyrian forces and Jerusalem was seriously threatened. When the Lord smote the army of Sennacherib in the night and the king had to return to Assyria, both Philistia and Judah were freed for the time from the Assyrian menace. Jerusalem actually outlived the Assyrian Empire, and was not destroyed until Babylon had succeeded Assyria as the world power. But the relief of Philistia was only temporary. During the remaining century of Assyrian history, successive Assyrian armies marched through Philistia, pillaging and destroying.

In Isaiah 14:29-32, Isaiah tells the Philistines that the victory over Sennacherib was not wrought on their behalf. God did it in order to preserve Jerusalem. "As birds hovering so will Jehovah of hosts protect Jerusalem" (Isa. 31:5 American Standard Version). The temporary liberation of the wicked Philistines from the Assyrian threat was a by-product and would not continue more than a few years. Thus the prophet warns the Philistines not to draw false comfort from the defeat of Sennacherib. The miracle was not wrought for their sakes but for the sake of His own people.

Isaiah said, "Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken." He did not say that Sennacherib had died, but that Sennacherib's rod had been broken. He continued with the prediction that "out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent." Sennacherib was succeeded by his

son Esarhaddon, whose armies overran Philistia and Egypt, and Esarhaddon was succeeded by his son Ashurbanipal, who again led destructive raids through Philistia into Egypt.

Verse 30 shows a contrast between the future state of the wicked Philistines and that of God's own people. God's people would enjoy peace and prosperity for a long period after the deliverance, but Philistia's respite would be only temporary. Its root would be killed by famine and its remnant slain. After the famine conditions of the years when Sennacherib's army threatened Jerusalem (cf. Isa. 37:30), the nourishment promised in verse 30a (and in Isa. 37:30-31) must have been very welcome to God's people, but Philistia would face renewed suffering and destruction (v. 30b-31).

Verse 32 assures the messengers who ask the meaning of what has happened, that God worked marvelously in order to save His own people. Zion is His foundation and only through Zion can salvation be found.

God handles all the affairs of the world in accordance with His purposes. He works mightily in order to bring His will to pass in the life and experience of those who trust in Him. Often others, who do not believe in Him, receive temporary blessings as a by-product.

All the wonderful prosperity which our nation has enjoyed is a result of the fact that it was founded by men who were seeking to serve God in accordance with the teachings of His Word. Roger Babson brings out clearly in one of his books the puzzlement of a certain South American president over the contrast between the condition of his own country and that of the United States. The South American president pointed out to Mr. Babson that his own country had been settled by Europeans while North America was still a wilderness. It had printing presses and higher education while the United States was still peopled by savages. Its resources in minerals and in fertile acres compared favorably with those of the United States. There was no visible reason why the United States should have developed a prosperity many times as great as that of his nation. "Why," he asked, "has the United States gone so far ahead of my nation in prosperity and material advancement?" Babson answered somewhat as follows: "South America was colonized by

Spaniards who came in search of gold and North America by Pilgrims who came in search of God."

As a result of the loyalty to God of the many persecuted groups which came to North America seeking freedom to worship the Lord in accordance with His Word, our nation has been remarkably blessed. Millions of people who do not share in the faith of our fathers are profiting by the blessings God has given. To them the message of this passage would be very appropriate. They have no true reason to rejoice in the great things which God has done for our country, because their own enjoyment of them is only temporary. It is a by product of God's blessing upon His own. If America continues its present course of wandering away from God, it will inevitably find itself losing its prosperity and suffering the natural result of its sin. Oh, that our nation would be given afresh the message of verse 32! It is only as we trust in the foundation which God has laid in Zion through the death of Jesus Christ at Calvary that we have any reason to expect continuance of His blessing.

Thus we see that Isaiah 14:29-32 is not really a distinct burden, but an integral part of the burden of Babylon. These verses deal particularly with the attitude of outsiders to the marvelous works of God. They point out the folly of thinking that one can enjoy the by-products of righteousness without partaking in that righteousness himself. Though the two chapters deal primarily with God's attitude toward the mighty forces of wickedness, lesser powers of evil need not think that God will overlook them. There are only two sides in the world conflict. Do you stand with Babylon, or do you stand with God?

Isaiah 15-16: The Burden of Moab

These two chapters are entitled, "The Burden of Moab." At sight of this title many readers pass rapidly on to some thing else. Moab means little to them.

Yet Moab was a nation with a great deal of individuality. Its history is at many points very interesting and important. It is true that it is not a great empire like Babylon or Assyria. The chapters do not, like chapters 13 and 14, present a picture of the final destruction of the great forces

which oppose God in the world. They do not reveal facts about the one who was the instrument through which sin entered the world -- that great evil figure which stands in defiance of God - - and whose destruction God has promised. They deal with a small nation, one which is far less known.

Yet there are many places in the Bible where Moab comes into considerable prominence. The nation begins with the incestuous relation of Lot with his daughters (Gen. 19:30-37). The Israelites seem always to have felt that there was a relationship between Moab and themselves (cf. Deut. 2:9). Consequently it was quite a shock to them when the king of Moab refused them passage through his land when Moses was led them up from Egypt (Judges 11:16-18), and still more of a shock when the king of Moab hired Balaam to curse Israel. Numbers 22-24 tells us how God frustrated the efforts of this wicked king and turned the purchased curse into a blessing.

To understand why the Israelites desired to cross the territory of the Moabites, we should notice its position on the map. Originally, Moab seems to have occupied a large area east and northeast of the Dead Sea. Shortly before the Israelite exodus from Egypt, Sihon, king of the Amorites, conquered the northern part of the area (Num. 21:26), and the Moabites were for a time confined to the region south of the river Arnon, the most important river which runs into the Dead Sea from the east. Moab seems never to have thought of itself as restricted to the area south of the Arnon River. Our present chapters mention Moabite cities which were north of that dividing line.

Every Bible student is familiar with the story of Ruth, the Moabitess. When Naomi and her family went to the land of Moab to escape from the famine in Israel, they were received with friendship, and Ruth herself returned to Israel with Naomi. God blessed her and made her the great grandmother of King David and even an ancestor of Jesus Christ. David conquered the land of Moab, and it was part of Solomon's empire. After the disruption of the kingdom it remained under the control of the northern kingdom until its revolt after the death of Ahab (2 Kings 1:1). 2 Kings 3 tells of an unsuccessful attempt to reconquer Moab, in which the king of Judah joined forces with the king of Israel. Moab

celebrated the regaining of its independence by putting up a monument which was discovered by a German missionary in 1868. This monument, known as the Moabite Stone, was for a time our earliest known writing in ancient Hebrew letters. We see from it that the language of Moab was very similar to that of ancient Israel. It celebrates the victory of Mesha, king of Moab, as he gained his independence from Israel, and mentions a number of cities whose names occur in our present chapters. Today the Moabite Stone is in the Louvre in Paris.

All these matters which we have mentioned -- the proximity of Moab to Israel, its relationship to Lot, its connection with Ruth, its providing one of our earliest and most interesting Palestinian archaeological discoveries -- all these combine to add importance to the effort to interpret Isaiah 15 and 16.

Although these two chapters contain only 23 verses, as against 54 in chapters 13 and 14, they include a far greater number of place names. This is quite natural in view of the fact that Moab was just across the Jordan from Judah and these places were quite familiar to the people of Judah.

An interesting contrast between this section and the burden of Babylon is the fact that this section contains only one verse of criticism of the nation with which it deals. Much is said about the terrible fate that is coming to them, their suffering, their destruction and their misery, but only one verse (16:6) contains statements derogatory to their character. Most of this verse deals with the pride and haughtiness of the Moabites. It will be recalled that in the burden of Babylon the wickedness of pride was greatly emphasized. The Moabites had far less to boast of than the King of Babylon, but in both cases Isaiah singles out the sin of pride for particular criticism.

It is unfortunate that among Christians in general the terrible nature of the sin of pride is not sufficiently realized. We are apt to think of grosser sins as being worse, but in God's sight there is nothing comparable to the sin of pride. In God's sight the arrogance of the human heart -- exaltation of the human being as over against God -- is far worse than any of the sins of the flesh. Alas, how easy it is for us to become like the Pharisees, to gather our skirts around us and praise God that we are better than our neighbors. God will

never bless such an attitude. The one thing He loves above all else is a humble and a contrite spirit. He wants us to realize that apart from the grace of God none of us deserve anything good at His hand.

Common Motifs

As we begin the study of these two chapters we immediately note certain aspects which are quite common in prophetic denunciation of foreign nations. Although little space is devoted to the sins of Moab, we find other common notes in these verses. Much stress is laid on destruction, sorrow, lamentation, ruin, and famine.

The first note stressed is that of destruction. This theme is presented in verse 1, stressed again in verse 9, and suggested in verses 7-8 of the following chapter.

The next four verses (15:2-5) give a vivid picture of the sorrow and lamentation of the Moabites. This note recurs in verse 8 and occupies verses 7 and 10 of chapter 16.

Here the stress is laid upon suffering rather than upon sin. The people who are suffering are kinsfolk of the Israelites. As Ruth, the Moabitess, is one of the finest of Old Testament characters and the great grandmother of David, the king, it is not at all strange that in 15:5 and 16:9 and 11 we find the prophet himself breaking out into lamentation over the suffering of Moab. He sympathizes with the people and feels deeply sorry for them. This seems strange to some interpreters who think that a prophet should always show love and sympathy for Israel and hatred and detestation for other nations. Some even go so far as to say that the prophet does not express sympathy with Moab but merely quotes the statements of the Moabites themselves as they express sorrow for each other! But such an interpretation does not spring from a true understanding of the attitude of the Old Testament prophets, for their books often reveal the universality of God's love. Isaiah 40-66 contains a number of declarations that the Coming One will be a light to the Gentiles. Here it is quite evident that the prophet is sympathizing with the people of Moab.

There is no harshness or cruelty in the heart of the true follower of God, or in the heart of God Himself. God must

deal in justice and punish sin, but He has a heart that is overflowing with sympathy for the erring human. Jesus Christ wept over Jerusalem and longed to gather the people of Jerusalem as a hen gathers her chickens under her wing. This aspect of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ well illustrates the picture of God contained both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. It is brought out vividly here in the sympathy of the prophet and of the prophet's God for the people of Moab.

The destruction which comes to Moab naturally leads to desolation and famine. This is touched upon in verses 1 and 6 of chapter 15 and particularly stressed in verses 7, 8, 9 and 10 of chapter 16. As usual, the suffering which comes from war is followed by famine and desolation.

Another note that is much stressed in these chapters is the plight of the refugees. This is brought out in verse 5 of chapter 15 where we see the Moabites fleeing as they try to escape from the destruction. It is possibly involved in verses 7 and 9 of chapter 15, and it is quite definite in verses 2 and 8 of chapter 16 (perhaps also in verses 3 and 4).

The Problems of the Section

We have thus noticed the common features of these two chapters and yet are far from interpreting the whole passage. There is much more to the burden of Moab. From the motifs already noticed we can get a general picture of the content of the section, and yet we find that certain of its verses remain obscure. These involve some rather difficult problems and commentators have advanced a number of theories in the attempt to explain them, particularly in chapter 16. Some of these interpretations have much to be said in their favor. Others have hardly anything to commend them. The lack of proper historical sense has led many commentators astray. If we interpret the passage in the light of the situation of the time of Isaiah we find that most of its difficulties disappear.

There is little to give difficulty to the reader until he comes to the last verse of chapter 15. There the question immediately arises about the word "lions." Does this refer to actual lions or is it used figuratively? Both interpretations

can be abundantly illustrated by examples in other parts of the Scripture. Either makes perfect sense in the context.

Perhaps the situation is similar to that described in 2 Kings 17:25. After the people of the northern kingdom were taken into exile, the land of Israel was so depopulated that lions increased and began to come right into the suburbs of the big towns and harm the people. Does this verse describe a similar situation as due to occur in the land of Moab? This is a possible interpretation of the verse.

It is equally possible here to consider the lions as figurative for the armies of the king of Assyria. The lion often was used as a symbol of the Assyrian. Assyrian kings loved to picture themselves as fighting against lions. It would be quite natural to take this as a picture of the coming of the Assyrian forces against the land of Moab, destroying the land itself and pursuing its fugitives. Whichever of the two interpretations we take will not greatly affect the interpretation of the passage as a whole.

Sending the Lamb

When we go on to the next verse, 16:1, we find much greater difficulties of interpretation. Many suggestions have been made by commentators in the attempt to explain this verse. The first difficulty comes in the reference to the lamb. The next is the question: "Who is meant by the ruler of the land?" The third is: "What is Sela?" The second of these problems should not be particularly difficult. The ruler of the land here must either mean the king who reigns in Judah or must mean God Himself. The parallel at the end of the verse, where it speaks of "the mount of the daughter of Zion," fits in with either of these interpretations.

The first problem relates to the word "lamb." The Christian reader immediately thinks of "the Lamb of God" and wonders whether this verse may be Messianic. It has sometimes been interpreted this way. St. Jerome, one of the greatest of the early Christian interpreters, took this verse to mean "the lamb, the ruler of the land, sent forth from the rock of the wilderness," and understood it as a prediction of Christ's descent from Ruth the Moabitess. It is to be feared

that in this case Jerome let his zeal run away with his judgment!

In addition to its lack of connection with the context, this interpretation encounters difficulty when the Hebrew word translated "lamb" is examined.

There are a number of words in the Bible which are translated "lamb." One of the less common is the word used in this passage. It means "a strong he-lamb." It is never used in the description of the sacrificial ritual in Leviticus, nor does it occur in the prediction of the sacrifice of Christ in Isaiah 53. It presents the idea of the lamb, not as something pure or tender, but as something tough and strong. In fact, the word is sometimes translated "battering ram." It would be very strange if this particular word were used in a Messianic passage describing the coming of Christ as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." We find a better suggestion in 2 Kings 3:4-5 and also in the Moabite Stone. When Moab was subject to Israel the king of Moab paid tribute of a certain number of sheep each year. Since Moab was a great land for the raising of sheep, this was the natural tribute for Moab to pay. At this time the southern kingdom is the only remaining kingdom of Israel, since the northern kingdom has already gone into captivity. The prophet is doubtless calling on the king of Moab to send the tribute to the king of Judah as Moab had formerly sent tribute to the king of Israel. He advises them to seek the protection and friendship of the king of Judah, who is God's representative. Some form of this interpretation has been adopted by most commentators.

The third problem has arisen in connection with the word "Sela." The common Latin version translated this word as "Petra." Petra is a famous town in Edom, far south of Moab. It is a great fortress city protected by cliffs. The word "Petra" means rock, just as the Hebrew word "Sela" does.

In view of the suggestion that Sela here means the town of Petra, some commentators have suggested that this verse represents a situation where the people of Moab have fled far south into Edom and that they are advised to send tribute to Jerusalem from the mountain fastness in Edom where they have sought protection. The difficulty with this interpretation is that the very next verse speaks of the fugitives of Moab as

being beside the River Arnon, which is in the northern part of the land of Moab. Thus the interpretation that considers Sela to mean Petra involves interpreting the verse without reference to its context.

There is no reason to think that Sela here stands for the Edomite town of Petra. There were many rocky places in the land which Moab occupied, and Sela could just as well represent the generally rocky nature of Moab itself.

A Plea for Help

The second verse offers no difficulty. It shows the daughters of Moab in flight and suffering beside the fords of the River Arnon. Various opinions are held regarding the third verse. Someone is calling upon someone else to give help to refugees. The statement, "make thy shadow as the night in the midst of the noonday" is a vivid portrayal of a refuge, under the figure of a rock -- a figure which is rather common in the Old Testament. It finds expression in one of our great hymns, in the words: "The shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land." Isaiah describes the shadow as being so strong that it is like night in the midst of noonday.

After asking help for the outcasts, the verse continues: "for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land." As it stands in the English translation it seems to ask for help on the ground that the power of the enemies has already been destroyed. In this case it would surely seem that help would no longer be needed. Actually the Hebrew phrases do not contain a time element. They express a situation, and whether it is past, present, or future must be inferred from the context. Literally it does not say "the extortioner is at an end" but "the end of the extortioner." This could mean the extortioner "was at an end," or "is at an end" or "will be at an end." If we interpret the phrases as applying to the future, as is recommended by many commentators, a reasonable sense is secured from the verse. It then means: "Give help to my outcasts for the present. The help will not be needed long. The oppressors will soon come to an end." The reasonableness of this interpretation is apparent when we note that

the next verse is definitely future and describes the establishment of a king in power and security. The whole passage is easily understood if we consider the historic situation described in Isaiah 37-38. The armies of Sennacherib come into the land and threaten destruction to Israel and its neighbors. In this situation the prophet calls (in 16:1) upon the Moabites to send tribute and help to Hezekiah, the ruler in the mount of the daughter of Zion. He points out (v. 2) that Moab also is eventually to have her time of difficulty. Now she should help Judah which is facing danger from Sennacherib. Sennacherib overruns the greater part of the land of Judah and captures most of its fortified cities. The prophet calls upon the Moabites (vv. 3-4) to receive the outcasts and to give them help and protection. He assures them that the time of need will not last very long. Just as he assured Hezekiah in 37:30-35 that after a brief interval God would deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrian menace, so now he assures the Moabites that the oppressor will soon be consumed out of the land of Israel and the throne of Hezekiah established. When Hezekiah sits on his throne in truth in the tabernacle of David seeking judgment and hastening righteousness, he will be in a position to help Moab if Moab has done its part in Israel's time of need. Thus recognition of the historic situation enables us to understand the true meaning of these five verses and to see how every detail fits perfectly as each part takes its place in the complete picture.

Verse 5 gives a picture of what actually occurred after the driving away of Sennacherib, when Hezekiah reigned as one of the best of all the kings of Judah. There never was a king who was truer to God or one who exerted himself more to stand for the things of the Lord.

The passage has also a meaning for us today. It calls upon all who try to be neutral in the strife between goodness and wickedness to give their help to the good in the days of oppression and trouble. It seeks to assure them that extortion and oppression will eventually come to an end and that God's own Son will reign in the tabernacle of David and will judge in righteousness. How we will regret it then if we have opposed the progress of His plans, and have refused to help His people in their time of adversity. There is no neutrality

in relation to God. We are either with Him or we are against Him.

After this interesting passage, verse 6 proceeds to condemn the pride of Moab. This would seem to imply that the plea for help went unheeded.

Although it is nowhere stated that Moab turns a deaf ear to the plea for help, it is apparent that she has done so. The fate described in chapter 15 is to come to her, and the following verses contain further elaboration of this theme.

Verse 6 is the only verse in the two chapters that contains an actual condemnation of the character of the Moabites. The condemnation here is on the ground of pride -- one of the very worst types of sin. Pride is the basis of much failure in our Christian lives. No sin is more severely condemned in God's Word. In the New Testament it is the Pharisee -- proud of his piety and of his self-righteousness -- who receives the greatest condemnation from the Lord. A humble spirit before God is the finest fruit of righteousness. Every sin can proceed from the root sin of pride.

Verses 7-11, like 15:1-9, present a vivid picture of the troubles ahead for Moab. Prosperity is to be brought to an end. People are to flee in terror. The prophet himself sympathizes deeply with the suffering of the Moabites.

Verse 12 is an unusual and interesting statement. Moab "shall come to his sanctuary to pray; but he shall not prevail." The verse does not make clear whether Moab prays to his god Chemosh or whether Moab actually comes to the Lord in prayer. Whichever is in mind here the result is the same. Moab does not prevail. It really doesn't make a great deal of difference to the sense of the passage whether Moab is here praying to a false god, which of course cannot bring help, or whether Moab is praying to the Lord but is simply praying in order to get help and not because of any repentance or real desire to serve Him. We often hear that prayer changes things and that is true and yet the statement in that brief form is not a correct one. It is not just any prayer that changes things but it is the true prayer of a heart that is devoted to God's service that changes things. Prayer is never a magical way of getting results. Prayer is bringing the heart in tune with God and getting oneself into such a relationship

with God that one can be a channel through which God's grace can flow and whose petitions can properly be answered.

In times of personal or national distress all sorts of people rush to pray. There may seem to be results from the prayers of the ungodly, but they are not lasting, nor can it be proved that these results really come from their prayers. Prayer that is not in the spirit is of no avail. The prayer that is merely seeking help for oneself, or is merely seeking to avoid the results of one's own misdeeds, accomplishes nothing.

We cannot expect to wait until the day of adversity and then be able to approach God. When things are going right we should prepare for difficulties ahead. We should learn to know God so intimately that we will have no difficulty in coming into His presence in the day of emergency. Sometimes, of course, God sends distress and trouble as a means of bringing people to Himself; yet this is the exception rather than the rule. In general, people are not brought to the knowledge of God through adversity. Adversity makes them seek Him, but if they do so only for their own selfish purposes it usually avails them nothing.

Now we come to two extremely interesting verses. Verses 13-14 are quite different from what has preceded. They were evidently written much later than the previous 21 verses, for verse 13 says that the previous passage was written at an earlier time. Since it is evident that verses 1-5 come from the time of Sennacherib's invasion, verses 13 and 14 must have been written considerably later. Three years after the giving of these new verses God will bring desolation upon Moab.

It might be possible to interpret this statement as meaning that all the predictions of the previous passage would be fulfilled within three years after the giving of these last two verses. The prediction has previously been given; now a time element has been added. This is done, of course, so that it will be abundantly clear that it is God who is working. One may try to deny the divine activity by saying that trouble comes eventually to every nation. God prevents this evasion by definitely pointing to the time of fulfillment, thus making it harder for people to say that the events are simply due to natural causes. Here is one further evidence that God has

actually predicted the events -- that He is on the throne -- that everything is being worked out according to His will.

There is another possible interpretation of verse 14 -- that it does not describe the entire fulfillment of chapters 15 and 16, but only one great reverse which will come to Moab. The glory of Moab is to be brought into contempt; its multitude is to be cut down; the remnant is to be small and feeble. This is a terrible statement; yet it does not say how long the trouble will last, nor does it go nearly as far as the predictions in the earlier part of the chapter. It is reasonable to think that this was not the complete fulfillment, since, over a century later, Jeremiah gave a further denunciation of Moab (Jer. 48) in which some of the language of this passage in Isaiah is repeated. This would suggest that Jeremiah is pointing to much of what Isaiah describes as having been still future at this later time. Most likely, then, verse 14 does not describe the actual fulfillment of all that precedes but a partial fulfillment. It is a token indication that the whole prediction will eventually be fulfilled.

This is a phenomenon which we find occasionally in the prophets: a prophecy is given which relates to the distant future, and then a lesser one which relates to a nearer time, so that when the nearer prediction is fulfilled we have added reason for confidence that the later one will also come to pass. We find an interesting example of this in 1 Kings 13. There a terrible prediction is made against the altar which Jeroboam had set up before the golden calf. It is said that a king will come from the house of David, Josiah by name, who will pollute this altar by burning men's bones upon it. After this prediction is given, we are then told that the Lord will give a sign: "the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out." This sign was fulfilled very soon. The altar was rent and the ashes poured out. This was an evidence of the fulfillment of the greater prediction, which actually came to pass three hundred years later. Thus an immediate prediction is sometimes given to strengthen people's faith in the eventual fulfillment of the greater things that God has declared. It is very likely that this is the nature of these last two verses in chapter 16.

Our knowledge of the history of Moab is quite limited, and we do not have any way of checking the exact details of this

preliminary fulfillment, nor do we know exactly when it occurred.

Isaiah 17: The Burden of Damascus

This chapter is a distinct section, separate from what precedes and what follows. Its title is quite abbreviated. Actually it deals not merely with Damascus, the capital of Syria, but also with Ephraim, the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The greater part of the chapter deals with Israel rather than with Damascus.

This chapter was doubtless written at a much earlier time than the greater part of chapters 15-16. The beginning of chapter 16 deals with the time of the Assyrian invasion under Sennacherib, but the beginning of chapter 17 relates to the earlier crisis at the time of the Syro-Ephraimite invasion, which was very prominent in the beginning of Isaiah 7 and 8 and is also the background of Isaiah 28. It is the first great occasion on which Isaiah dealt prominently with the affairs of his nation. He declared that God would protect Judah from the wicked alliance of Syria and Israel which was attempting to destroy it. Ahaz had his own idea of how to secure protection. He sent to Tiglath-Pileser, the great Assyrian king, far across the desert, and offered to pay tribute if he would come and protect Judah from Syria and Israel. Isaiah declared that this alliance with Assyria was wicked and contrary to God's will. Isaiah declared that God would protect the land from Syria and Israel, but he said that the means that Ahaz was using for this end were wrong and would result in very grave danger.

Chapter 17 may be divided into four sections. The first of these, which includes verses 1-5, predicts destruction for Damascus and Ephraim. Verse 1 declares that the beautiful city of Damascus will become a heap of ruins. Verse 2 pictures the region across the Jordan, represented by two cities called Aroer. This region had belonged to the Northern Kingdom ever since the division of the kingdoms, but had frequently been under attack by Syria. Now it is predicted that it will become so desolate that nothing will hinder the sheep from wandering through the center of its towns.

Verse 1 and verse 3 are the only verses in the chapter which actually speak of Damascus. Verse 3 begins with a statement that Ephraim will lose its fortification, then makes two references to the destruction of Damascus and Syria, and finally returns to the similar fate of the glory of the children of Israel. These two nations which have bound themselves together in an alliance to overthrow Judah are themselves to be overwhelmed.

Verses 4 and 5 continue to predict the dire fate of the Northern Kingdom. The figure of a harvester reaping grain is used to picture the devastation which is to come to Israel. We know that this happened when the Assyrian army attacked the Northern Kingdom and carried away most of its people into exile.

The second section, verses 6-8, describes the remnant of grace. The Northern Kingdom is not to be entirely destroyed. There is to remain a gleaning of righteous people. Verse 6 vividly pictures in agricultural figures the few remaining "boughs" which the Lord will preserve. Although the ten tribes went off into captivity, this was not the end of them. They were a part of the nation of Israel which God had set aside for His own purposes. When the Jews returned from exile, members of the northern tribes were with them. The New Testament refers to individuals living in Jerusalem as members of some of these tribes (Luke 2:36; Acts 26:7). The idea of "ten lost tribes" is only a myth. After the exile they were blended with the people of the southern Kingdom.

Our present chapter deals almost entirely with the northern Kingdom. Verses 7 and 8 clearly predict that many of its people will turn to God. They will cease to look to the altars they have made, but will look to the Holy One of Israel.

The denunciation in verse 8 is not merely against the worship of false gods, forbidden in the first commandment. It is also a denunciation of false worship, forbidden in the second commandment. The golden calves were in some way supposed to represent the actual God of Israel; they were not meant to be a representation of false gods. But they were the work of men's hands and could not properly represent the invisible Creator of the universe. There is great danger when

man builds his own religion and works out for himself the way in which he thinks he can glorify God. What God desires most of all is a humble and contrite heart and a desire to do His will as it is revealed in His Word.

The third section, verses 9-11, continues the prediction of the disaster to the Northern Kingdom, but dwells upon the reason for the disaster.

If one does not have the historic situation in mind these three verses can be readily misunderstood. It is to be feared that this was the case when the King James Version was made. The translators of that version may have considered the verses as isolated verses instead of thinking of them as part of the whole picture. It is true of course that we should not let our idea of the meaning of an entire passage lead us to misinterpret a particular verse. Yet a word or a phrase is often susceptible of more than one interpretation, and it is sometimes necessary that a translator select one of several possible interpretations. In these verses the King James Version has selected interpretations which do not fit with the historic background, and the resulting translation seems not to give much sense. Except for one word, the American Standard Version gives a better presentation of the meaning of these verses. Consequently, we shall direct our attention in verses 9-11 to the American Standard Version.

Verse 9 compares the coming desolation of the Northern Kingdom to the desolation of the old Canaanite cities which were destroyed at the time of the Israelite conquest. The remains of some of these Canaanite fortresses were still to be seen in the mountains or in the wooded sections. Just as these were forsaken in the face of the attack of the children of Israel, so their own cities are to be a desolation as a result of the coming destruction. The phrase in the King James Version "as a forsaken bough and an uppermost branch" is equally possible with the translation of the American Standard Version "as the forsaken places in the wood and on the mountain top." The following phrase, which the King James Version translates "which they left because of the children of Israel" and which the American Standard Version renders "which were forsaken from before the children of Israel"

shows that the American Standard Version rendering of the preceding phrase is preferable.

The first half of verse 10 is identical in the two versions. It points out the cause of the disaster. The people have forgotten God, from whom they received the strength to overcome the Canaanites and to get possession of the land in the first place.

The verbs in the last part of verse 10 and the first part of verse 11 are rendered as future in the King James Version. The American Standard Version takes them as frequentatives, showing what the people of the Northern Kingdom are doing rather than what they will do in the future. This is an equally possible rendering of these verbs, and it makes far better sense in the context. The result of turning away from God is described as follows: "Therefore thou plantest pleasant plants, and settest it with strange slips. In the day of thy planting thou hedgest it in, and in the morning thou makest thy seed to blossom." These words describe the attitude of the people in building up their own clever schemes instead of looking to the God of their salvation for help. The result of their activities is described by the American Standard Version in these words: "But the harvest fleeth away in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow." The King James Version translates it: "But the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and desperate sorrow." Here the King James Version is preferable. Only a heap of ruins will remain, to show the result of their efforts.

"Thou settest it with strange slips" is an interesting phrase. The word rendered "slip" occurs five times in the Old Testament. In the other four it is translated "branch." Here "slip" seems better, since it describes something just planted. In the preceding phrase, "pleasant plants," the word rendered "pleasant" is one which is sometimes applied to the god Adonis, who is also called Tammuz. In Ezekiel 8:14 the prophet sees women in Jerusalem "weeping for Tammuz," and thus learns of the practice in Jerusalem of heathen rites common in Mesopotamia and Syria. It is impossible to say with certainty whether our passage is alluding to the worship of this false god. While this is possible, it would seem rather likely that it is not what is meant here, since the prophet is denouncing the wicked alliance with the Syrians, rather than

worship of their god. Such worship may have been involved also, and so might be in the background of the prophet's thought. Instead of building up the plants that God desires and following His program, the Ephraimites are planting plants that seem to their own sinful judgment to be pleasant, and are setting up strange slips. Israel, which has been told repeatedly that it was God's will that it should be separate from the heathen nations around it, here for almost the first time in its history unites with Syria in an alliance against its own brethren in the Southern Kingdom. God cannot but punish such an unnatural action. Thus these verses give the reason for the destruction.

The last half of verse 11 describes the destruction again. The people have planted their lovely plants and set up their strange slips, put a fence around, and tried to make their seed flourish, but the harvest is entirely different from what they expect. The word which is translated "flee away" in the American Standard Version can just as well be rendered "heap" as in the King James Version, and is so translated in a number of other places in the Old Testament. In this particular instance, I consider the rendering of the King James Version to be preferable. The harvest of the wonderful plants of the godless leaders of the Northern Kingdom will prove to be simply a heap of ruins in a day of grief and desperate sorrow.

The fourth section of chapter 17 runs from verse 12 to 14. There is a sharp jump between section 3 and section 4. The logical relationship between the two is not stated. It might seem at first sight that verses 12 and 13 describe the oncoming hosts of the foreign nations that will overthrow Damascus and Ephraim. In this case there is no meaning to the end of verse 13 and to verse 14, where destruction of these hosts is described. God did not put an end to the attack of many nations against Israel, but caused the Northern Kingdom to go into exile at this time.

A second interpretation would be that this is a picture of the attack of Syria and Israel against Judah, and of the way that God will deliver Judah from it. There are two objections to this. It is hardly appropriate to describe Syria and Israel as "the multitude of many people which make a noise like the noise of the seas." It is true that they were much stronger

than Judah, but this does not mean that they were large and strong enough to be properly described in such terms as these. The words sound far more like a description of the oncoming of an Assyrian army with its contingents from many subject nations.

A second reason why this hardly seems to be a description of the Syro-Ephraimitic invasion is the suddenness of the deliverance. God did not give the Southern Kingdom such a sudden and marvelous deliverance from that attack as is described here. Actually the deliverance came through an attack in the rear by the forces of Tiglath-Pileser, resulting from Ahaz's wicked alliance with Assyria. In chapters 7 and 28 and elsewhere Isaiah rebukes Ahaz and the Judean nobles for this wicked alliance and declares that its results will in the end be harmful rather than beneficial.

A third interpretation considers verses 12-14 as a vivid picture of God's intervention to end the ultimate results of two "strange slips," i.e., of two wicked alliances with the ungodly. The wicked alliance of Israel with Syria had been met by king Ahaz by means of a wicked alliance with the Assyrian forces. The results of this, as Isaiah so vividly points out elsewhere, is that the Assyrian forces do not stop with their conquest of Israel but eventually roll on into Judah also, so that ultimately Sennacherib's invasion threatens the very existence of Jerusalem. The oncoming of the Assyrian forces is vividly and accurately described in verse 12 and the first third of verse 13. The rest of verse 13 and verse 14 vividly portray the way in which God ultimately delivered Jerusalem from the attack of the mighty Assyrian armies. At eventide there is trouble but "before the morning he is not." It parallels the picture in Isaiah 29-31 of many nations attacking Jerusalem but disappearing like a dream as a result of God's intervention. How this actually happened is described in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles and in Isaiah 37, where we read of the marvelous interposition of the angel of the Lord, who destroyed Sennacherib's army and thus compelled him to give up his attempt to conquer Jerusalem and made him return to his own land. "This is the portion of them that spoil us."

Thus "the burden of Damascus" is really the burden of Syria and Ephraim (the Northern Kingdom of Israel). It is

a summary in beautiful poetic form of a section of Isaiah's teaching which is elaborated in various other parts of the book. It forms a distinct unit by itself, separate from what precedes and what follows. It has an appropriate place here in the midst of these "burdens of the nations."

Isaiah 18-20

These three chapters form a unit. The first speaks of Ethiopia, the second of Egypt, and the third of Egypt and Ethiopia together. The two nations are treated in this way because in Isaiah's time Ethiopia was dominant over a large portion of Egypt. For a time an Ethiopian reigned as Pharaoh and the policies of the two nations were united. This situation is reflected in Isaiah 37:9, where Sennacherib's plan to conquer Jerusalem is affected by the report that Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia, is coming to make war with him. Such an event would be utterly impossible if Tirhakah were not ruler of Egypt, since Egypt would then be an impassable barrier between Ethiopia and Palestine.

In ancient times Ethiopia was the land south of Egypt, including what we now call Sudan and also what we now call Ethiopia, to the east of Sudan. In ancient times the emphasis was on the western half, since this was in close proximity to Egypt, and was greatly affected by Egyptian culture. Eventually the Ethiopian leaders even established themselves for a time as supreme in Egypt.

Some commentators have been misled in their interpretation of chapter 18 by the word "beyond" in verse 1 -- "Woe to the land shadowing with wings which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia." This translation has caused them to think that the chapter is not about Ethiopia at all, but about a nation beyond it. Immediately they run into serious difficulty, since there is no country on the other side of Ethiopia which plays a vital part in the history of the time of Isaiah. An examination of the Hebrew quickly shows that such a difficulty is unnecessary. The word which is here translated "beyond," actually means "at the side of." It is frequently used in connection with the Jordan river, since people in Canaan usually referred to the land across the Jordan as "the side of Jordan." Thus the term came often to be almost a synonym

for "the other side;" yet actually it can be used for either side. This is done in Numbers 32:19 where our English Bible renders it "yonder side" in the first half of the verse, and "this side" in the last half of the verse. The same phenomenon may be observed in Judges 12. In the first verse of that chapter this word is translated "the other side;" in verse 7 the identical word is translated "this side." In these particular cases the writer makes clear which side he means by adding "to the east," "to the west," or "forward" (when the people were in Transjordan and thinking of going forward into Palestine proper). Thus we see that the word does not actually mean "beyond" or "on the opposite side." It would be better if our verse were translated "the land which is at the side of the rivers of Ethiopia." Surely this is a picturesque phrase to describe the Sudan, where life is dependent on the Nile river and its tributaries.

In order to understand these chapters it is necessary that we keep the historical background in mind. This is related to that of the previous chapter.

In chapter 17 we dealt with a situation which is vital to the understanding of a great portion of the book of Isaiah. We noticed the wicked alliance of Syria and Israel against Judah. In the background was the wicked plan of Ahaz to secure protection from these enemies by making an unholy alliance with distant Assyria. In the latter part of the chapter we saw the natural result of Ahaz's plan in the eventual sweeping on of the Assyrian forces into Judah, and its unexpected end through God's miraculous intervention to protect His people from this mighty power. A similar historical situation lies behind chapter 29ff., and there it is followed by the same considerations as here in chapters 18-20. In Isaiah 30:1-7 and in 31:1-3 we find that the people are seeking an escape from the Assyrian menace. They think they will find safety by sending to Egypt for help since Egypt is the great enemy of Assyria. In choosing one of the two great powers and standing with it against the other, they think that they can maintain a balance of power and thus secure their own peace and freedom.

In chapters 30 and 31, God points out the folly of such an attitude. One cannot fight fire with fire. One wicked force will not protect God's people from another wicked force,

unless God himself chooses to maneuver these forces in accordance with His own plan. Human safety is only found in trust and submission to God. In both of those chapters God declared that He Himself would give protection to Israel, but that He would show the folly of trusting in Egypt.

Thus it is quite appropriate that chapters 18 to 20 should come immediately after 17. There is a progress of thought here.

At the end of the three chapters, we find the following two verses: "And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory. And the inhabitant of this isle (better "coastland") 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?" These two verses present the keynote of the whole three chapters. Everything previous illustrates this truth. At the same time, of course, as in all prophecy, additional and related truths are constantly set forth. The word that the King James Version generally renders as "isles" can be equally well rendered "coast." Here it means the coastland that includes Palestine.

Chapter 18

This chapter, which deals exclusively with Ethiopia, has puzzled many readers. If the historical situation is left out of account, many of its verses are obscure and bewildering. Once the historical situation is brought into focus, the chapter becomes entirely clear and gives rich insight into God's ways of dealing with humanity. The chapter may be divided into three sections:

1. Verses 1 to 2a -- description of the people addressed.
2. Verses 2b through 6 -- God's reply to the Ethiopian ambassadors.
3. Verse 7 -- the concluding prediction.

In verse 1 to 2a, a description is given of the people who are discussed in the chapter. We have already seen that these are the people of Ethiopia, the region south of Egypt. This land is here characterized as a land "shadowing with wings." Some prefer the translation "whirring with wings." Perhaps it is a reference to the bright sunlight shimmering

on the ground, or perhaps to the great number of winged insects.

It might be noticed that the word translated "woe" in verse 1 is not necessarily a declaration of misery ahead. It is an interjection which is quite often used to introduce a statement of God's judgment, but by no means always. Thus we find it translated "Ah" in Isaiah 1:4 and Jeremiah 22:18. It is translated "O" in Isaiah 10:5 and Jeremiah 47:6. It is translated "Ho" in Isaiah 55:1. In this last reference it calls upon every one who thirsts to come and receive God's help through the wonderful free provision that He has made. The message of our present chapter is more similar to the glorious promise of mercy in Isaiah 55 than it is to the declarations of doom that are sometimes introduced by this Hebrew word.

Verse 2a tells of the situation of these people at this time. They are sending messengers in vessels of bulrushes. The word is better translated papyrus, as in the American Standard Version. It describes the paper-like substance of which light boats were constructed for use on the Nile River. The nation is hurriedly sending ambassadors here and there in order to try to get help in the emergency produced by the onrush of the Assyrian armies across Asia.

In chapter 37:9 we are told that Sennacherib's conquest of Palestine was interrupted by the news that King Tirhakah had come out to oppose him. Like the Israelites, who were so disturbed by the constant aggression of Assyria, the Ethiopians and Egyptians knew that they were next in line. They were concerned for their sphere of influence, which reached quite a distance into Asia. Isaiah 30 and 31 picture the Israelites sending large amounts of tribute down to Egypt in order to get Egyptian help against Assyria. Here in chapter 18 we see Ethiopia sending its ambassadors to get as many nations as possible to stand solidly with them against the Assyrian aggressors.

Verses 2b to 6 give God's reply to the Ethiopian ambassadors. It is easy to be confused by the fact that the King James Version and the American Standard Version insert the word "saying." This word is not in the original. Its insertion makes it look as though this was the Ethiopian command to their ambassadors, rather than the reply God desired His people to give to them. The prophet tells the swift messengers

to go back to the nation that sent them and give it God's answer to the situation that confronts it. God says that it is not necessary for them to scurry about, trying to get help in order to resist the onrush of the Assyrians, for He plans to deliver His own people from the Assyrian attack by a marvelous supernatural intervention. For the time being Assyria will not be a menace to the people of Ethiopia. This is perfectly clear if we omit the word "saying," which is not in the original.

The principal difficulty in correctly understanding the chapter comes from the latter part of verse 2 which contains a number of rather obscure phrases. This makes it easy to misinterpret the entire verse. The question, of course, is whether the verse describes the Israelites or the Ethiopians.

It is remarkable how differently the King James Version and the American Standard Version render the latter portion of the verse. The King James Version reads, "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!" The American Standard Version translates it as follows: "Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people terrible from their beginning onward, a nation that meteth out and treadeth down, whose land the rivers divide!"

At first sight one wonders how the Hebrew words can be translated in such different ways. This will be made a little clearer if we see the fairly literal translation which is given by Delitzsch in his commentary on Isaiah, (4th edition) Vol. 1, page 352: "Go, fleet messengers to the nation long stretched and beautifully polished, to the terrible people far away on the other side, to the nation of command on command and treading down, whose land rivers cut through."

The first phrase, which Delitzsch translates "long-stretched and beautifully polished," could be rendered "scattered and peeled" with the King James Version or "tall and smooth" with the American Standard Version. It can describe either a race that has been oppressed or a handsome race somewhat different in appearance from that of the writer. Thus it can be either applied to the Jews or the Ethiopians.

The King James Version and the American Standard Version agree in general in the phrase, "terrible from their

beginning hitherto," or "terrible from their beginning onward." Delitzsch reads "to the terrible people far away on the other side." The phrase can refer either to place or to time. While time is a bit more common, it is sometimes used in the Scripture of place, just as our English word *further* may mean further away in time or further away in space. This however, does not particularly affect the sense. You may say the people have been terrible from their beginning onward and the time phrase could apply to either of the two countries. Of course if you take it in the sense of space, "far away on the other side" could only refer to the Ethiopians, not to the Jews. But there is nothing in the phrase to make certain whether time or space is meant.

At first sight, one might wonder how the King James Version could say "a nation meted out and trodden down" and the Revised could translate the same Hebrew words as "a nation that meteth out and treadeth down." Delitzsch's rendering is somewhat more literal: "the nation of command on command and treading down." This gives an understanding of how the King James Version and the American Standard Version can differ so radically. The word "treading down," in the phrase, "a land of treading down," can be taken actively or passively. Either this land does the treading down, or it is the one that receives the treading down. Consequently both the King James Version and the American Standard Version are possible here. The first part of the phrase, "meted out" or "that meteth out" is a very free rendering in either case. Delitzsch renders it "of command on command." While this is more literal, it is still somewhat free. A much more literal rendering would be "line on line." The same phrase is translated "line upon line" in Isaiah 28:10 and 28:13. It indicates a measuring line. A line may be an evidence of command and Delitzsch's suggestion "command upon command" is not at all impossible. Is it however, a command that is given by the nation -- in which case it is measuring things out to others, or is it a command given to it -- in which case it is itself measures out? This cannot be decided from the words used.

The last phrase of the verse also differs strikingly. The King James Version reads, "whose land the rivers have spoiled;" the American Standard Version reads, "whose land

the rivers divide." The verb used here is one which occurs nowhere else in the Bible. The rabbis have generally explained it as "spoil," on the analogy of a somewhat similar Hebrew word. Another rather similar Hebrew word means "despise." Neither of these fits the context particularly well unless "rivers" is taken in a figurative sense, and the phrase describes Israel despoiled by Assyria. If "rivers" is taken in a literal sense, neither "spoil" nor "despise" fits at all well. Most interpreters prefer to take it as related to a similar Aramaic word, which means "to divide" or "cut through." In this case it would literally describe Ethiopia, which is intersected by the River Nile and its tributaries. Thus the obscurity of this rare verb leaves us in doubt of the meaning of the phrase. If we take "rivers" as a figurative description of Mesopotamia, and follow the King James Version in translating the word as "spoil," we may perhaps have a picture of Israel. If we take "rivers" literally and follow the American Standard Version and most commentators in translating the word as "divide," we have here a perfect picture of the Sudan, which is so dependent for its life on the Nile and its tributaries.

A Decisive Point

In our examination of the words used in this verse we have thus far skipped over the word "terrible," which is translated exactly the same in both the King James Version and American Standard Version, and also by Delitzsch. The Hebrew word means "something that is feared, or that ought to be feared." There is no question about its meaning. It is used to describe the people to whom the ambassadors are directed to go. It gives us definite proof as to the meaning of the verse. At this time Judah is in grave danger from Syria and Israel. The relief she gets through the help of Assyria results in putting her in a most difficult position, with no buffer state between her and the mighty Assyrian empire.

Under these circumstances she is tempted to seek the help of the other great empire, that of Egypt. In such a context, it would surely be absurd to speak of Judah as "a people terrible from their beginning hitherto." On the other hand, the phrase exactly fits the great war-like nation to which the

Jews are now looking for help. It is indeed a nation that is terrible from its beginning. It is a nation that is greatly feared even though it is far away on the other side of Egypt. Thus this one word, whose meaning is absolutely certain, proves that the nation here spoken of is Ethiopia rather than Judah, and that the latter part of verse 2 is the answer which the prophet gives the ambassadors to take back to the people who have sent them.

How can this point be evaded? The only possible way to do so is to interpret the word as meaning that the nation here described will suffer such a terrible fate that its history will cause all who hear about it to be filled with fear. This interpretation is, in fact, advanced by some commentators. But the word modifies "people," and is never used in the sense that such an interpretation would require. Further more the context speaks of a marvelous interposition of God to rescue Jerusalem. There is nothing in this context about a terrible fate ahead for the Jews.

A great part of verse 7 is almost identical in wording with verse 2 and the nation described in this verse will also relate to it.

In reply to the ambassadors who come with a message asking that Judah join with Ethiopia against the Assyrian attack, Isaiah directs them to carry back a message to the mighty nation that has sent them. That nation may be mighty, but God is mightier, and He is sending word as to what He is going to do in this situation.

Verse 3 calls upon all the Ethiopians, and in fact all the dwellers of the world, to watch for the lifting up of the ensign and the blowing of a trumpet in the mountains. It should be noted that the pronoun "he" does not occur in the Hebrew in this verse. The American Standard Version is quite a bit more literal when it says, "when an ensign is lifted up on the mountains, and the trumpet is blown." The verse does not state who is to make these signals. It proves to be the act of the Assyrian army, as it comes in mighty power, marching across the mountains of Judah, threatening complete overthrow to Jerusalem, and even, perhaps, eventual conquest of Egypt and Ethiopia.

Verses 4 and 5 give a very interesting picture. They depict something growing up quite naturally, and seemingly headed

inevitably toward complete fruition. The Lord is pictured as doing nothing about it until it is just about to come to its completion; then He steps in and brings it to an end. The Lord says that He will take His rest and consider in His dwelling place, allowing the clear heat and the cloud of dew to work in slow and regular fashion; as nature takes its course the thing proceeds forward and apparently seems certain of completion. This is a description of the working out of the plans of Sennacherib. The Assyrian conqueror marches over the land; his troops take city after city; they conquer area after area; their power is constantly increasing. It seems as if Jerusalem will soon fall, and all of Judah will be in their hands. Then they will march on with mighty force against Egypt and Ethiopia. While the Ethiopians are rushing around frantically trying to get help from others, desperately equipping themselves for a great stand against the mighty Assyrian empire, the Lord is sitting calmly, watching what is progressing, waiting until the exact moment when He chooses to intervene.

In verse 5 we find the hour of harvest almost here -- "The bud is perfect and the sour grape is ripening in the flower" -- but the process of fruition has not yet reached its end. Suddenly the Lord intervenes and cuts off the sprigs with pruning hooks and cuts down the branches. The great plan of the Assyrian is suddenly brought to an end!

What a perfect picture of that great event described in Isaiah 37, where God intervened with mighty power to destroy the armies of Sennacherib! It is vividly pictured in 29:1-8. One day the Assyrian was strong and great, and seemed absolutely certain of conquering all that he desired. The next day everything was gone. His power vanished as a dream in the night. His army melted away, as the angel of the Lord smote it, and it was necessary for Sennacherib to return to his own land and give up his plans of conquest in the west. Before the harvest was ripe the Lord intervened with His pruning hooks, to cut off the sprigs and take away the branches.

Verse 6 describes the result. It is a figurative picture of the great host of Sennacherib's army lying prostrate and desolate upon the hills of Palestine -- a prey to the birds and wild animals.

This is God's answer to the Ethiopians. He is going to bring the present Assyrian attack to an end. There is no need for them to try to get the Israelites to join with them in an alliance. As Isaiah has told us so often elsewhere in the book, it is not necessary for the Israelites to pour out every bit of strength they can muster, helping the Ethiopians and the Egyptians in their plans to resist Assyrian aggression. This particular attack God Himself is going to stop.

In the last verse of the chapter the Lord looks on to the distant future. He tells us that a time is coming when the Lord of hosts will receive homage and sacrifice from the very people to whom the message was sent in verse 2. Ethiopia itself is to be a present to God; the people from this great heathen land of mighty warriors are themselves eventually to be God's own. There is a foretaste of the fulfillment of this promise in the visit of the Ethiopian eunuch to the temple in Jerusalem. On the way back from the temple he was met by Philip, the evangelist, and was given the knowledge of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ from this very book of Isaiah. Here there is a promise of much greater supremacy of Christ in Ethiopia than that land has yet seen.

Isaiah 19

After speaking of the great Egyptian empire, the prophet goes on in chapter 19 to deal with the future of Egypt itself. The chapter divides naturally into two main sections; verses 1 to 16 (or 17) describe God's judgment against Egypt; verses 17 (or 18) to 25 portray His future blessing upon that land.

The first of these is in turn divisible into smaller sections, as follows:

1. Verses 1-4, Political disruption in Egypt.
2. Verses 5-10, Natural disaster and economic depression.
3. Verses 11-14, Confusion among the Egyptian leaders.
4. Verses 15-16 (or 17), Frustration and fear.

It will be noticed that we have left the position of verse 17 indefinite. The question whether it ends the first part of the chapter, or begins its second part, will be discussed later on. What a remarkable difference there is between the tone of this chapter and that of the Burden of Babylon. In chapters 13 and 14 the prophet considered Babylon and all that it

represents as the great enemy of God. He depicted great armies preparing to attack it, and foretold the complete destruction of the realm of wickedness and evil. In striking contrast chapter 19 contains no specific mention of foreign attack upon Egypt, nor does it predict its destruction as a result of foreign conquest. It predicts that the Lord will stir up dissension and strife within the land, and that He will withdraw the bounty of nature, causing economic and industrial chaos, bringing the counsel of the leaders to nought, and sending fear into the hearts of the people. All this leads up to portrayal of a change in the attitude of the people so that they are no longer enemies of God, but actually become His own people (v. 25).

It is not necessary to assume any chronological progression in this first part of the chapter. There is a general picture of calamities which will occur during the subsequent history of Egypt, arranged in logical rather than chronological fashion. It is as if we were to say to a nation: "That country will have confusion and upheaval; civil war will break out; its factories will close; its crops will fail; its industries will shut down." A long perspective of future trouble is gathered into one brief picture. Looking back over the history of Egypt it is easy for us to see at one point or another the exact fulfillment of every one of the details which are heaped together in the first sixteen verses.

Until the time of Isaiah, Egypt usually ranked as one of the greatest powers in the world. Within the next century and a half it sank to lesser rank, and has never since enjoyed its former greatness.

The Lord Himself to Go to Egypt

Verse 1 is interesting. In contrast to the general situation, where the people of Judah are sending tribute down to Egypt in order to get Egyptian help and protection against Assyria (see 30:1-7, especially v. 6; also 31:2-3), God pictures Himself as going down into Egypt upon a cloud. Of course His purpose is not to seek protection, but to show His superiority to the idols of Egypt; at His presence the heart of Egypt shall melt.

Verses 2 and 3 describe the dissension and disagreement which will come into the land. Internal strife has always been one of the most destructive forces in the world. Many a nation which has resisted external attack has fallen as a result of internal dissension.

Verse 4 predicts the rise of a fierce dictator in Egypt. It is not stated whether this comes about as a result of foreign conquest or of internal strife. Whether this man is to be an Egyptian or a foreigner, internal strife may well play a vital part in opening the way for his seizure of control. Almost every dictator who has arisen anywhere has secured power as a result of such a condition. Frequently, too, it has been a deciding factor in making possible a nation's fall before a foreign aggressor.

Verses 5 through 10 describe calamities in nature, leading to economic depression. The word "sea" in verse 5 refers to the Nile River. This large stream was often referred to in ancient times as "the sea," and even now the Arabs designate it by the same term. The verse predicts a great decrease in the Nile flow, so that the overflow which fertilizes the land should be cut down or entirely eliminated for a period of years. Such periods have occurred from time to time in the history of Egypt. The result has been famine and depression. All of the events described in the next three verses are such as would naturally come from a decrease in the Nile waters. Such catastrophes would inevitably produce severe economic depression.

Verse 9 shows depression in the great Egyptian textile industry. When trouble comes in one industry of a nation, it is apt to have repercussions in other industries. Industrial and economic trouble in Egypt is the theme of these verses.

Verses 11 to 13 predict confusion in the counsel of the nations's leaders. Judah is looking to Egypt to learn how she can become safe from Assyria. God says that the counsel of Egypt itself is going to be confused. These people are not gods but only men. They do not know what the Lord of Hosts has purposed regarding Egypt. Only God's prophet can reveal the answer to the questions that really are vital for Judah. Verse 14 shows the effect upon the whole nation of the confusion among the leaders. The land staggers like a drunken man.

Verse 15 may be interpreted in either of two ways. Perhaps it describes widespread unemployment. Strong or weak, leaders or followers, none can find work to do. Surely economic depression and unemployment are the natural results of the condition already described. All sections of the population are facing trouble. Another interpretation of the verse might be suggested -- that there is nothing that anyone can do to remedy the sad condition. On either view, the verse portrays frustration and weakness.

In verse 16 we find the land filled with fear. One can hardly read this verse without recalling the words of President Roosevelt when he said, "We have nothing to fear but fear, nameless, unreasoning fear." Whether the statement was altogether true at that time might be questioned, but there is no doubt that unreasoning fear greatly increased the difficulties of the year 1933.

It would be only natural that the conditions described in verses 1 to 15 should produce a situation where people would become like women, shaking with fear. "Because of the shaking of the hand of the Lord of hosts which he shaketh over it." In times like those described here the feeling of something terrible impending is sometimes even worse than the miserable reality.

The Problem of Verse 17

It is rather difficult to be sure whether verse 17 belongs with the first part of the chapter, and concludes the declaration of woe against Egypt, or whether it is really the beginning of the second part, which shows the turning of the nation to God.

It is sometimes hard to know exactly where the transition occurs from one division of a subject to another. This is particularly true in the book of Isaiah for he is rather fond of gradual transitions. A striking instance of this may be found at the end of chapter 8, where the King James Version puts the transition at one place and the American Standard Version at another. Here most commentators have taken verse 17 as the end of the first section.

Difficulty arises from the statement that "the land of Judah shall be a terror unto Egypt." Does this depict a time

when Egypt will fear the great military prowess of Judah? It would be difficult to think of a time in past history when this has been the case. Many commentators interpret it as meaning that so terrible a fate will befall the land of Judah that knowledge of it will strike terror into the heart of Egypt so that everyone in Egypt who mentions what has happened to Judah will be overcome with fear, saying, "If He has treated His own people so frightfully, think what terrible things He may do to us, who are His enemies!" Yet this certainly is not the natural interpretation of the verse. It would be very easy for the prophet to express that thought if that was what he had in mind. As it reads in the King James Version and the American Standard Version -- "the land of Judah shall be (American Standard Version become) a terror to Egypt" -- it would hardly give anyone such an idea as that. Moreover, history records no evidence that the people of Egypt have ever been affected in this way by news of Jewish suffering.

Examination of the Hebrew words shows that the translation deserves reconsideration. Superficial translation could easily produce our common rendering, which occurs as early as the Septuagint. It might seem natural to a patriotic Jew, reading of Egypt's disasters and expecting a promise of Jewish supremacy. Several of the words are far from requiring the translation usually given, and in the case of one of them it is extremely dubious.

The verse does not contain the common word for "land," but rather the word for "ground" or "earth." It speaks of the soil of Judah, rather than of its people.

The word which is here translated "terror" occurs nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. Considerable twisting is necessary to find a way to secure the meaning "terror" from it. It seems to be related to a Hebrew root that means "make a pilgrimage, keep a pilgrim feast." This root is often used in connection with the great festivals in which Israelites worshipped God in accordance with the commands He had given them. Some think that this word refers to the general exhilaration of a person in a festive dance, from which they get the idea of one who is reeling to and fro, and from that the idea of terror. Surely this is a very long jump. From the preceding context it is easy to see how "terror" could be

suggested as a guess for an unknown word, but it is rather hard to see how one can have any certainty in deriving such a meaning from the Hebrew word used here. In view of what follows it is not at all impossible that it predicts pilgrimages from Egypt to the soil of Judah, when the idolatry of Egypt should be replaced by worship of the one true God.

Further support for this interpretation is suggested by the fact that the word translated "to be afraid" is one which is often used in the phrase "to fear the Lord." The noun related to it is often used in the phrase "the fear of the Lord." In Genesis 31:42, 53 it occurs in the phrases "the fear of Isaac" and "the fear of his father" and designates God Himself.

The phrase at the end, "which He has determined against it." might lead one to think that verse 17 is a declaration of doom against Egypt, rather than a statement of God's purpose of salvation, but the phrase can be just as easily translated, "which He has purposed concerning it."

In this connection let no one think that the Hebrew is so ambiguous that one can make anything mean anything. This is far indeed from being the case. In all languages a word expresses an area of meaning rather than a point and every sentence has various possibilities of interpretation. In studying any language it is necessary to interpret sentences in relation both to the immediate context and to similar passages elsewhere. It is sometimes said that you can make the Bible mean anything you want. This is true if you take a verse out of context and arbitrarily adopt one of various possible meanings of the particular verse. It is equally true of every book that ever was written. Every sentence has various possibilities of meaning. It is always necessary to consider the immediate context and also the area of possible meanings of each word in order to determine the exact thought which the writer intended to convey.

The Hebrew preposition used near the end of verse 17 may have the meaning "against," "concerning," "upon," or "near." This does not mean that Hebrew prepositions are more ambiguous than English prepositions. Every English preposition has a large range of possible meanings. It is possible to say that in the two world wars the United States fought with Germany, but it is equally possible to say that in those wars the United States fought with England and

France against Germany. Thus "with" can seem to have opposite meanings. Since the range of prepositions differs widely in various languages, they constitute one of the most difficult features in making any translation.

Thus we may reasonably question the usual translation of verse 17, and suggest that it is really the beginning of the second part of the chapter rather than the end of its first part.

Blessings for Egypt

The latter part of the chapter describes a turning of the Egyptian nation to God. God will smite Egypt but He will not destroy it. "He shall smite it and heal it and they shall return even to the Lord and he shall be entreated of them and shall heal them" (v. 22).

This part of the chapter may be subdivided into two sections. The first, consisting of verses 18 to 22, deals particularly with Egypt; the last three verses promise blessing to Assyria as well.

In verses 18 to 22 there is a wonderful picture of the spread of the knowledge of God in the land of Egypt. While some of its details may not be very clear, the central meaning of the passage is unmistakable. God will become known in the land of Egypt, and its people will worship and serve Him.

The five cities in verse 18 have caused interpreters much difficulty. What does it mean that "one shall be called, The city of destruction?" All sorts of suggestions have been made. Some take it as showing the fate of one of these cities; others consider it to be a proper name. This latter is the interpretation followed by Delitzsch. A very ingenious suggestion has been made by Calvin. He considers the city mentioned at the end of the verse to be in addition to the other five, rather than one of them, and regards the whole as comparative rather than specific. He would make it mean that out of every six cities in Egypt, five will turn to God and one will be destroyed.

Full interpretation of the details of verse 18 is difficult but this much is clear -- that it describes the spread of the knowledge of God to cities in Egypt. All through these five verses we have a wonderful prediction. God is not going to

destroy Egypt but to change it into a place where He will be worshipped and loved -- a place where His mercy will show itself abundantly.

No indication is given of the time when this will be fulfilled. As we have seen, the phrase "in that day," really means, "in the day of which I am about to speak." It might be paraphrased as "a time will come when --."

The last three verses of the chapter show that God's mercy, which has now been shown to apply to Egypt as well as to Israel, will not be confined even to this larger area. In these three verses the two great empires of that day are brought into one focus. God will not simply destroy Egypt and Assyria -- He will convert them to Himself. Even the wicked aggressor, the land of Assyria, can find a place in His mercy. There will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria; peaceful intercourse will be established between the two nations; together they will serve the Lord.

Israel, formerly but a small and insignificant nation when compared to these mighty empires, will assume a vital place beside the great world powers. It will be "a blessing in the midst of the land." It is the place where God's Word is being written and where He will bring His Son into the world. Israel is to be the third with Egypt and Assyria, and there will be blessing for all of them. God will pour out His love on the great empires and on Israel. He calls Egypt His people, Assyria the work of His hands, and Israel His inheritance.

Of course the conclusion is clear, that God will pour out His blessing upon all the nations of the earth. His kingdom will cover the entire world, and all through the world people will praise and glorify Him for His wonderful goodness. What a wonderful promise God has given! May we not look forward with joy and hope to the fulfillment of this wonderful promise.

Thus the latter part of the chapter deals with the turning of Egypt to God. We have already seen that the conversion of Ethiopia is described in the last verse of the previous chapter. Similarly this chapter ends, not like the burden of Babylon with a message of destruction for the great hostile world powers, but rather with a description of their conversion into members of the family of God.

The purpose of chapter 19 was not to pronounce judgment upon a great enemy. Its purpose was to demonstrate the futility of trusting a great heathen power. Isaiah showed the ultimate weakness of such a course and sketched its future hardships. Egypt is not a safe support on which to lean; it is much wiser to trust in the Lord, especially since Egypt itself shall eventually turn to the Lord and be subject to Him. Since this is the case with Egypt, how much more should those who already know the Lord look to Him and trust Him instead of turning to this great pagan empire for help.

Isaiah 20

Ethiopia and Egypt were discussed in chapters 18 and 19. In chapter 20 both nations are considered together, with emphasis on their fate in the fairly near future. So far from being able to deliver the Israelites from Assyria, the Egyptians and the Ethiopians are themselves to be led away as prisoners by Assyria. Judah was spared from being conquered by Assyria and did not go into exile until Assyria itself had been destroyed, but Ethiopia and Egypt were conquered by Assyria.

Chapter 20 begins with an interesting heading. The giving of this portion of the Word of God is connected up with a great event in the international world. Sargon, the king of Assyria, sent his Tartan (or Turtanu, Assyrian for "commander-in-chief") against the great Philistine city of Ashdod and conquered it. Ashdod was between Judah and Egypt. In the year that this startling event occurred, God gave Isaiah the message contained in this chapter.

A little over a century ago, the very name of Sargon was unknown, except for this one mention in the Bible. Many interpreters naturally thought it must be a mistake. Surely, they said, if there had been a great king of Assyria named Sargon, there would be some reference to him in ancient records and in other parts of the Bible. Then French excavators unearthed a great palace of Sargon at Khorsabad, a few miles from Ninevah. The treasures found there, the wonderful pictures, and the long accounts of the reign of Sargon, put the whole matter in a different light. It became apparent that he was actually one of the great conquerors

who ruled the mighty Assyrian Empire. When Sargon was marching forth with his armies, conquering nations hundreds of miles away from his headquarters, the God of Israel seemed to him a very small factor indeed. He probably never even heard the name of Isaiah. Yet all the greatness of Sargon disappeared from human knowledge, except for this one mention in the book of Isaiah. Isaiah makes an interesting comment on this and other similar occurrences in 40:7-8: "Surely the people is grass. The grass withers, and the flower fades; but the word of our God shall stand forever." It is even more pointedly expressed in 1 Peter 1:24-25: "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls away; but the word of the Lord endures forever." God gave His word through Isaiah. The mighty Assyrian conqueror disappeared and was completely forgotten except for his use as a peg to date a portion of the Word of God.

Yet we must realize that the reference to the conquering of Ashdod by Sargon is not given in this first verse simply to tell the date at which the message came, but rather to connect it up with the general subject under consideration. Here is the Assyrian army conquering great cities, even on the opposite side of Judah from the Assyrian homeland. The Israelites must have been filled with terror and have immediately begun to wonder where they could find help. Their desire to seek help from Egypt and Ethiopia would naturally have been greatly intensified by this news.

In such a situation it would have seemed unpatriotic to speak against Egypt or Ethiopia, just as it was thought unpatriotic in America during the Second World War to make any criticism of Russia, which was regarded as America's great ally against Germany.

In order to get his message across, Isaiah used a device which is found a number of times in Scripture. God ordered him to make use of an object lesson. He said, "Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot." Isaiah was a man of considerable prestige. Some even think that he was connected by blood with the kings of Judah. For him thus to go without his outer garment would almost seem as if he were naked. When the people would see Isaiah in this condition, they would ask, "What is the matter?"

Why does this gentleman who always has been known for his conservatism go about in this unusual fashion?" Isaiah would answer, "This is the command of God for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia. So shall the king of Assyria lead the Egyptians away prisoners, and the Ethiopians captive, young and old, naked and barefoot ... to the shame of Egypt." Isaiah continued this object lesson for about three years.

We do not know just when this prediction was fulfilled. The Assyrian power lasted another century after Sargon's officer took Ashdod. During this period the Egyptians suffered a number of defeats at the hands of the Assyrians. Two Assyrian kings led armies into Egypt and took great numbers of prisoners away with them. Our passage may not be a specific prediction of one of these conquests, but a declaration of the fact that there will be occasions when the conquering Assyrians will completely overcome the armies of Egypt and Ethiopia.

The last two verses are the conclusion not only of this chapter, but also of the entire section of three chapters. The people of Judah will be ashamed of these two nations to which they have looked for help.

In verse 6 the word "isle" is an unfortunate translation. The Hebrew word simply means coast or region. Isaiah is pointing to the region of Judah as contrasted with that of Egypt. The inhabitant of this area will say, "That is the land to which we looked for help; we thought that Egypt and Ethiopia would be able to help us against Assyria, yet they themselves have been conquered by the Assyrians! How then can we escape?" There is only one way they can escape: it must be through the help of the Lord!

The Lord did prevent the Assyrian from ever conquering all of Judah. It was only after Assyria had been destroyed that the conquerors of Assyria destroyed Judah and took Jerusalem into exile. Until God's time came, no one could injure His people.

Isaiah 21-22: A Series of Four Visions

The passage from 21:1 to 22:14 contains four visions with very striking titles. The first is called "The Burden of the

Desert of the Sea." The second, "The Burden of Dumah," might perhaps better be translated "The Burden of Silence," since the Hebrew word Dumah means "silence" or "still waiting." The third, "The Burden of Arabia," may also be translated, "The Burden in the Evening." The fourth is "The Burden of the Valley of Vision."

This group of four visions is not an isolated section. It continues the part of Isaiah which began with chapter 17. To quite an extent this section parallels the Book of Immanuel (chs. 7-12) and also the section from chapters 28 to 32. It deals with the situation resulting from the wicked alliance of Ahaz with Assyria. Chapter 17 indicated that the result would be to bring Assyria right next to Judah without a buffer state between. Then God declared that He Himself would protect Judah from the inevitable Assyrian attack. In chapters 18-20 He showed the folly of looking to Egypt and Ethiopia for help. Now discussion of the same theme is carried a bit further. All earthly help in this crisis is futile. Trust should be placed in God alone.

The title of the first of these burdens is very strange – The Burden of the Desert of the Sea. Verse 9 shows that the prophet is dealing with Babylon. Two whole chapters, 13 and 14, have already been designated as "The Burden of Babylon." Another section is now given to Babylon, dealing with a different theme.

In chapters 13 and 14 Babylon was taken as representative of the great world powers which oppose God. God predicted His final vengeance against these great powers, and outlined the destruction that would certainly come to them. In this chapter Babylon is not thought of as the great evil empire, but simply as one other source to which the people of Judah have looked for help against Assyria.

Chapter 39 tells of the embassy that Merodach-baladan, king of Babylon, sent to Hezekiah. Isaiah rebuked Hezekiah for having made common cause with Merodach-baladan and told him that eventually Jerusalem would be taken captive to Babylon. This must have seemed fantastic to the Jews in Isaiah's day, because Babylon, like Judah, was being oppressed by Assyria and was looking for relief from that great aggressor.

There can be no question that Merodach-baladan's real purpose in sending an embassy to Jerusalem was to get Hezekiah to join with him in making plans for common action against Assyria. For a period of nearly a century Babylon was a thorn in the flesh to the Assyrians. The Assyrian kings were constantly having trouble with the Babylonians, who, though frequently conquered, often revolted. During a considerable portion of this time, Merodach-baladan was the leader of the opposition to Assyria. The Elamites, who were themselves afraid of the tremendous power of the Assyrians, joined with him and for a number of years they succeeded in holding back the forces of King Sargon. Eventually Merodach-baladan was driven out of Babylon, but he was able to take refuge in the marshy land near the shores of the Persian Gulf and thus to escape capture by the Assyrians. Eventually he returned and again established himself as king of Babylon. Again the city was attacked and he was compelled to flee for refuge to the wild country at the edge of the Persian Gulf.

This fact provides a clue to the title of the vision -- the Burden of the Desert of the Sea. It is a play on the fact that Merodach-baladan had to flee for refuge to a region which could well be described as the wilderness of the sea.

Babylon is Fallen

A number of statements in this passage show the prophet to be tremendously upset by the fate of Babylon. It is an attitude altogether different from any which he displays in chapters 13 and 14. It is by no means the typical attitude of the prophet of God when dealing with the great forces which oppose God's will in the world. The reason is that the prophet is not here considering Babylon as an enemy. He thinks of it rather as a great power to which the people are tempted to look for help. "A grievous vision" -- "the treacherous dealer deals treacherously" -- "my loins are filled with pain" -- "pangs have taken hold upon me" -- "I was dismayed at the seeing of it" -- phrase after phrase piles up to show the intense emotion of the prophet. It is representative of the feeling of the Israelites, as they look for help from Egypt,

Ethiopia, Babylon, and other sources and see one after another coming to naught before the attack of the Assyrians.

The conquest of Babylon by the Assyrians made a great impression upon the mind of that day. Babylon was an ancient city which had been mistress of a large portion of the world when Assyria was still comparatively unimportant. The downfall of Babylon seemed like a terrible disaster.

Some commentators take this passage as we have suggested, as describing a conquest of Babylon by one of the Assyrian kings. Others take it as referring to the eventual conquest of Babylon by Persia a century and a half later. Those who take this latter view allege in favor of it the statement in verse 2: "Go up, O Elam: besiege, O Media," and point out that Elam was an ally of Babylon in the time of Sargon, but this is not a valid objection.

Elam and Media are not designated here as foes of Babylon. The prophet echoes the cries of the Israelites as they urge on the various enemies of Nineveh to push forward in opposition to it. A century later Media and Babylon together struck the death-blow against Nineveh, but the present alliance was short-lived. The prophet sympathizes with the hope of his compatriots for relief from the Assyrian danger.

Before the striking force of Assyria, Media and Elam drew back to their highland fortresses and left Babylon to suffer Assyrian retribution. The verse says: "A grievous vision is declared unto me; ... all the sighing thereof I made to cease." The groaning and sighing of the Assyrians, faced by all these opponents, comes to an end. God will use Assyria for another century as His instrument to punish wickedness. Babylon proves no more helpful than Egypt. Only in God can help be found. As the prophet points out the failure of Babylon as a help against Assyria, he enters into the strong disappointment of the Jews. All human help is failing, yet God has promised to deliver and He will fulfill His Word.

The succeeding verses give a vivid picture of the prophet in his watch-tower. In a vision he sees chariots and horse men, camels and all sorts of supplies going by. He cries like a lion as he watches what will happen. Then he sees a portion of the force returning and it gives the news in verse

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

In verse 10 this is applied to the people of Judah; they are God's threshing, they are the corn of God's floor. They are the area in which God is particularly interested. They are the people whom He has set apart in order that He may show forth His righteousness through them -- that He may give the oracles of God through them -- that He may through them bring His Son into the world. "My threshing" indicates that God has important work which He is doing with Judah. He is not simply desirous to please them as His pets; they are set apart as His people, in whom and through whom a great work is to be performed. In 28:23-29 the same idea is presented by reference to the farmer who threshes out different crops in different ways. At the beginning of chapter 29, Jerusalem is called "the hearth of God:" it is the place where God is working out His great purposes. "Oh my threshing and the corn of my floor" -- it is important that you see what God has revealed. You should not trust in Babylon, for Babylon is doomed to fall before Assyria.

Isaiah 21:1-10 deals with the futility of looking to Babylon for help against Assyria, since Babylon itself will fall before that mighty aggressor. Sennacherib, the Assyrian king whose attack threatened utter destruction to Jerusalem, tells of his treatment of Babylonia in the following words: "In an open battle, like a hurricane I cast down Merodach-Baladan, king of Babylonia, the Chaldeans and Arameans, together with the armies of Elam, his ally. He fled alone to the sealand ... and in that place he died."

Of Babylon itself, Sennacherib says: "The city and its houses, from its foundation to its top, I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire. The wall and the outer wall, temples and gods, temple towers of brick and earth, as many as there were, I razed and dumped them into the Arahtu Canal. Through the midst of that city I dug canals. I flooded its ground with water, and the very foundations thereof destroyed. I made its destruction more complete than that by a flood, that in days to come the site of that city, and its temples and gods, might not be remembered. I completely

blotted it out with floods of water and made it like a meadow."[†]

No one could have guessed that Babylon, after such a destruction, would ever regain enough of its ancient power to take part, a century later, in the ultimate destruction of the Assyrian empire, and actually to fulfill Isaiah's astonishing prediction (Isa. 39:6-7) that Babylon, rather than mighty Assyria, would be the force which would ultimately destroy Jerusalem and carry its people off into exile?

Our present section of Isaiah, as we have seen, is not directly concerned with Judah's eventual exile, but with the series of events which followed the alliance of King Ahaz with the wicked Assyrian aggressor, and the consequent removal of all barriers between Assyria and Judah. There is no help in Babylon; only in God can lasting support be found. Jerusalem will continue for another century, not through clever schemes or because of help from purely human sources, but simply because God has chosen to protect it by His supernatural power.

The Burden of Dumah

The next portion of this prophecy is a brief section (v. 11-12), with a rather cryptic title. Yet it has a haunting melody that renders it unforgettable:

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 inquire, inquire; return, come.

As we have noticed, the word Durnah means silence. It is a word-play on the name Edom, as is shown by the reference to Mt. Seir, the outstanding geographic feature of the land of Edom. The Hebrew word which is regularly translated Edom

[†]Quoted in Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* II: 152-3.

is four times rendered Idumea in the King James Version. Dumah omits the first letter of the name. It is an appropriate title because of the great desert silences in the region of Edom. In the present situation it suggests the failure of the Edomites, descendants of Jacob's brother Esau, to make common cause with the Israelites.

Edom is pictured as standing on the sidelines, waiting to see which way the tide will turn. Is it advantageous to side with the Judaeans, or against them? From Seir a voice is heard, asking about the present outlook. Is the night almost over? Will the cruel danger soon be at an end? Will Judah be delivered from the Assyrian menace, or will she succumb?

The watchman replies that morning is ahead, but not for all. God will deliver Jerusalem -- morning is coming. But for Edom, which has refused to stand alongside Judah, only night stretches ahead.

The burden ends with an invitation to make more than a casual investigation of God's decrees. It is not enough merely to ask whether the long night is nearly over. God is not simply a last resort, to whom we can go for help in need. He wants us to come to Him in every need. If we are going to inquire at all, we should do it constantly. Come to God and seek help and advice from Him. Return to Him with your whole heart, and He will pour blessing upon you!

The Burden of Arabia

Another brief burden finishes the chapter. Arabia is not a great power which might serve as a strong protection against Assyria, but it seems to offer a place of escape if flight becomes necessary. Verses 14 and 15 state that fugitives have found help in Arabia. Tema is an oasis in the Arabian desert.

Isaiah is pointing out that there is no place to which Judah can turn for help against Assyria, except to God Himself. Even flight into the Arabian desert is shown to be useless. Verse 13 depicts the travelers in Arabia as being in such danger that they have to hide in the forest during the night. Verses 16 and 17 state that even Arabia will fall before the Assyrian conquerors. Kedar is an important section of Arabia. All the glory of Kedar will fail.

The Assyrian kings did conquer Arabia, as Isaiah predicted, although we do not know which conquest is referred to here. Assurbanipal describes a conquest of Arabia which resulted in the capture of so many camels that he apportioned them "like sheep, dividing them up among the people of Assyria. Throughout my land camels were sold for one and one-half shekels of silver in the markets."

Thus the prophet has shown that there is no country to which Judah can turn for help against Assyria, or even for protection in case of flight.

The next chapter deals with Judah itself.

Isaiah 22

Isaiah 22 has been quite generally misunderstood. There are two causes for this. The first is that many interpreters have jumped to a conclusion as to its subject, instead of first reading its verses carefully and seeing exactly what is involved. The second cause for misunderstanding has been failure to examine the chapter in the light of its context, or to realize that it is actually the end of a continuous discussion which began with chapter 17.

As we begin to examine this passage, we note that it naturally divides into two parts. Verses 1-14 deal with a city; verses 15-25 deal with individuals; the two sections together make up one complete chapter. In approaching such a section as this we should begin by trying to see how the less clear verses fit themselves around the clearer ones. If at first sight a certain idea seems to stand out in a passage, one can take that idea as a starting-point. If however, as one goes on, he finds words or passages which clearly do not fit with this interpretation, he should then immediately seek a different starting-point, and not be satisfied until he finds one which fits the entire passage.

The introductory title -- "the Burden of the Valley of Vision" -- leaves us rather uncertain as to the subject, for it could have any one of a number of possible meanings. So we look ahead to verses 8-10, where Judah, Jerusalem, and the city of David are mentioned in such a way as to indicate clearly that Jerusalem is the subject of the chapter. In the light of this fact it is very easy to see the correct interpretation

of the title in verse 1. "The valley of vision" can easily refer to Jerusalem. Perhaps it describes the area where Isaiah and many other prophets received most of their divine visions. Or perhaps it depicts Jerusalem as the area which has been the subject of so many prophetic visions. Whichever way one takes it, it is easy to see that it is quite an appropriate title for a chapter dealing with Jerusalem.

At first sight, one immediately guesses that this chapter is a description of a siege. Various phrases in these fourteen verses seem to bear out this conclusion. Many commentators have not gone beyond this first glance. They have tried to fit the passage to one of the numerous sieges of Jerusalem, and have found a satisfactory interpretation difficult to attain.

Some have suggested that it might be a siege by Sennacherib. Others have chosen one by Nebuchadnezzar. Still others have tried to make it prophetic of the siege by Titus. It is noteworthy that Alexander, in his generally excellent commentary on the Book of Isaiah, recognizes that certain verses here do not fit with the idea of a siege, and yet he goes on to discuss the passage as if it were describing a siege, or possibly, as he suggests, all the sieges of Jerusalem viewed in one picture.

As we look carefully at the passage we see that it is not a description of a siege at all. Verse 2 describes the city as a joyous city. One would never think of a city in the midst of a siege as "a joyous city." Verse 13 says: "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." Is it possible that these words describe the attitude of people in the midst of a siege? People could hardly be said to have joy and gladness at such a time! This attitude of bravado and careless indifference might characterize people who refused to believe a prophet's threatenings, but hardly those who were already suffering the experiences of a siege.

Thus we see that we must find a different starting-point for our interpretation. In the light of the book of Isaiah as a whole, and of our previous five chapters in particular, it is easy to see that Isaiah is continuing his discussion of the ungodly attitude of the people who trust to the wicked Assyrian alliance for protection against Ephraim and Syria

but fail to recognize that in the end this alliance will bring terrible disaster to their nation. In chapters 18 to 21, Isaiah took up one after another of the possible sources of help and showed that nothing but God's own power would suffice to bring deliverance. Our present chapter faces the people directly and describes the results which their ungodly bravado is certain to bring.

In our English translation, the first verse includes a phrase after the title which seems at first sight to contradict this idea. The words, "What aileth thee now?" might suggest that Isaiah is speaking to a city that is right in the midst of its misfortunes, but, on examination, we find that this translation is actually a rather free rendering of the Hebrew. The Hebrew simply says, "What is to thee?" which means, "What is the matter with you?" "What concerns you?" "What are you excited about?" It does not necessarily mean that they are in misery. We, ourselves, sometimes use similar expressions in colloquial speech. We may say, "What ails you?" or "What is the matter with you?" without necessarily implying that the one to whom we speak is actually suffering. This is probably what the translators meant by the phrase, "What aileth thee?"

The passage continues. The people have gone up to the housetops. They are full of excitement, tumult, and joy. This is not a picture of those who are sad or in gloom. He is saying, "What is the matter with you that you are taking the wrong attitude in the present situation?"

The last part of verse 2 reads, "My slain men are not slain with the sword, nor dead in battle." This is generally taken as showing that the city is in the midst of a siege. Yet it is hard to see much purpose in it if that is what it means. Commentators suggest that it describes such results of a siege as pestilence or famine, but in that case it is hard to see how people could be joyous. It is more reasonable to take it as pointing out the callousness of the people in a situation where sin is rampant. Although people are not now dying in war, he says, many are dying as a result of the sin and carelessness of the Israelites themselves.

An interesting parallel may be drawn from safety placards occasionally seen in the United States, pointing out that just as many people die in auto accidents as would die from

enemy fire in war. While we are very anxious to prevent war, we are often inexcusably careless about prevention of accidents. The people of Judah are rebuked by the prophet for the fact that there is just as much suffering and misery in their city as war would bring, not due to war but to the failure of the people to obey the law and maintain good order. People refuse to look their sin in the face. There is an inexcusable attitude of superficial frivolity.

This interpretation of verse 2 is proved to be correct when we look at the end of the passage. In verses 12 and 13 the prophet says that the Lord had called the people to "weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth." He had given them warnings of the trouble that is ahead. He had urged them to repent. But instead of repenting they have indulged in frivolity, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine. It reminds us of the situation at times in America. Sometimes many of us feel that there should be a day of national sorrow and penitence. We request a day of confession of sin before the Lord, but the attitude of the nation as a whole seems to be one of trusting to its own right arm, and of feeling confident that the miseries afflicting the rest of the world will never come to its own shores.

Since verse 3 is susceptible to two possible interpretations, let us look next at verse 4. The prophet gives his own reaction to the situation. He sees misery ahead. He knows that God will send calamity and trouble, and he weeps because of the fate that is bound to come to his own people, as a result of their sin.

Verse 5 describes the trouble and perplexity which the prophet knows to be ahead for the valley of vision. In his imagination he can already see the breaking down of the walls and hear the resounding cries of the people as their shrieks go out to the mountains round about.

It would seem likely that verse 3 is a part of the same picture as verses 4 and 5. In this case the prophet portrays the present situation in verses 1-2, and then begins to describe the future picture which he sees in his vision. All the rulers have fled together. They are found by the archers. This calamity occurs in the prophet's vision of the future fate of the city.

There is also the possibility that verse 3 is not to be interpreted in this way, but as a rather figurative expression describing the failure of the rulers at the present time to face the facts. They are fleeing away from their duty; they are bound in their wickedness and pride.

It is impossible to be certain which of the two interpretations of verse 3 is the correct one. Here, as so often in the prophetic books, we have certain verses whose meaning is absolutely clear, while others verses may fit with either the previous context or with the following one, and it is some times difficult to be sure which is meant.

In verses 6 and 7 the prophet continues his vision of the future. He sees Elam and Kir taking part in the attack against the city. These are regions far from Jerusalem. Kir is mentioned in 2 Kings 16:9 where it is said that people from Damascus were taken into captivity there. Since Ahaz and the people of Judah have called in the distant Assyrians to protect them from their neighbors, Elam and Kir, regions even more distant than Assyria, will eventually be included among the attackers of Jerusalem. In verse 7 the future calamity is vividly described, as the choicest valleys round about Jerusalem are filled with enemy soldiers.

Verses 8-11 describe the activity of the people of Judah in response to the difficulties ahead. They prepare the armory of the house of the forest. They examine the coverings of Judah. In fear of a siege they make such preparations to bring the water inside the city as are described in 2 Chronicles 32:3-4, where Hezekiah's preparation for the coming of the king of Assyria in later years is described. Verse 10 tells of the tearing down of some of the houses in order to strengthen the walls of the city. Verse 11 describes the frenzied activity of the people as they seek to make the city safe against invasion.

The last part of verse 11 gives a strong rebuke. The people are not criticized for their preparations to resist invasion. They are criticized because they do not add to their looking to the defenses a look toward the One who is the greatest and most important defense of all. They have ignored God in their preparations and have failed to call to Him for help. Therefore the next verse goes on: "And in that

day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth."

The Lord called the people to weeping, but they used the occasion for a big celebration and much festivity and joy. "If we're going to die anyway, why worry? It won't happen until tomorrow. Let's be happy today." The terrible denunciation is given in verse 14, "Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you, till ye die, saith the Lord God of hosts."

In this examination of verses 1-14 we first noticed those verses which clearly tell us what is being portrayed. It is not a siege, but it is a situation in which there is danger of a future siege. The prophet warns the people and rebukes them for their failure to look to God as they should. As we read the passage, we cannot but be impressed with the similarity to the whole situation described in Isaiah 7. Doubtless this is a picture which the prophet received at the very time at which he received the material from chapter 7 on. It is a picture of God's word to the people about the Syro-Ephraimitic invasion. Chapter 17 described the attack on Damascus and Israel, and told of God's declaration that He will protect Judah. The people should look to Him; only through Him can they will find the protection they need. Instead of looking to God for help they have turned to Assyria. Ahaz has made his wicked alliance with Assyria, which is rebuked in chapter 7, and also in chapters 28 and 29. Ahaz does this to gain a temporary respite. God points out that it will not give them protection against Assyria, but will remove the buffer states. In chapters 18-21 he has shown the impossibility of looking to help from any other source. Here in chapter 22 he is rebuking the people of Jerusalem for their attitude and telling them of the misery that is ahead.

It is noteworthy that there is no statement in this chapter that Jerusalem will be taken. There is no declaration of any thing beyond a siege and possible captivity of some of the leaders. There are other sections in the book in which Isaiah declares that the city of Jerusalem will eventually fall into the hands of the enemy because of its disobedience to God, but that is not the message of this particular section. Here, as in the sections from chapter 7 to chapter 12 and from chapter 28 to chapter 33, God is dealing with the situation

under Ahaz. It is God's will to protect the city for the time being. He will not allow the Assyrians to conquer it. That will come a century later under the Babylonians. At present He is rebuking the attitude of the people, telling them how they should repent and look to Him, assuring them that they can find help nowhere else against the Assyrians, and pointing out the troubles that are coming at the hands of the Assyrians, even though actual conquest of Jerusalem is not included among them. For the present God will treat Jerusalem as His own city and will protect it "as birds hovering" (Isa. 31:5), as a way of giving evidence of His sovereign power and control.

Thus the message of Isaiah 17-22 (like that of Isaiah 28-33), combines several ideas. It contains the joyful message of God's promise of deliverance and also the sad message of rebuke for man's failure to trust God.

The last portion of chapter 22 is almost unique in the Book of Isaiah. He does not often deal with specific individuals of his own time. In chapter 7 he gives scathing rebuke to Ahaz, but it occupies only a few verses (esp. vv. 13-17) of that great chapter. In chapter 39 Hezekiah will be given a milder rebuke for his alliance with the king of Babylon. Aside from these instances, our present section is just about the only case where Isaiah specifically rebukes a living individual by name.

As we have little evidence elsewhere about the individuals to whom he refers, the section is not easy to interpret. It is mostly a rebuke against one man, and we have no other information about this man except that he was included in Hezekiah's embassy to meet the representatives of Sennacherib, listed in Isaiah 36:3, 11, 22 and in the parallel in 2 Kings 18:18, 26, 37 and 19:2. Isaiah 22 must have been written a long time before the events described in Isaiah 36-37 and in 2 Kings 18-19. In chapter 22 Shebna is the treasurer over the house. He is rebuked and told that his position is going to be taken away from him and that it will be given to Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah. In chapter 36-37 we find this Eliakim already over the house, while Shebna is in a lower position.

Perhaps someone may question whether these terrible predictions against Shebna were fulfilled. In answer it may

be noted that the first of them, that he will be removed from his treasurership, has surely been fulfilled by the time of Isaiah 36, for there Eliakim already possesses the higher office, and Shebna has a lower position. We have no evidence about the other and more serious part of the prediction -- that he will be driven away into a distant country and die there, but we can safely assume that the prediction was fulfilled.

What is the cause of the rebuke? Does verse 16 accuse Shebna of vainglory, or does it merely state that he has built a great sepulchre for himself and is trying to make himself a lasting name, as is true of most men in similar positions? The succeeding verses tell him that these efforts are not to succeed. He will be pulled down from his position (v. 19) and will die in another land (v. 18).

In any event, we are safe in concluding that there is more in back of it than is mentioned here. Humility is always more pleasing to the Lord than pride. Yet the mere fact of hewing out a great sepulchre and making a memorial for oneself does not ordinarily bring down God's wrath. We can safely assume that there are other characteristics of Shebna, not described here, which make it necessary that Isaiah should devote a number of verses of his great book to stating God's wrath against this one individual.

Many conclude from verse 16 that Shebna is a foreigner who has been promoted to high position in the land of Judah. They do not think that he is actually a citizen, since he is rebuked for making his habitation here, and acting as if he had a permanent position. I think they are reading more into it than the words will bear. I do not see how we can tell from the passage whether he is a foreigner or a Judean.

Verses 20 to 24 give a wonderful promise about Eliakim. God will commit Shebna's important governmental position to Eliakim, so that he will be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The key of the house of David will be laid upon his shoulder. He will be fastened as a nail in a sure place, and will be "a glorious throne to his father's house." Some have gathered from the references to "father's house" in this verse and in verse 24 that Eliakim proceeded to do a great many things for his own relatives, to which perhaps they were not entitled, and have concluded that these verses involve a rebuke to Eliakim. I think that this again is

reading into the Scripture. I see no such teaching in the verses. They are simply stressing the great importance of the position Eliakim is to occupy. While his family would naturally assume prominence, the reference to "a glorious throne to his father's house" and the statement that "all the glory of his father's house" will be hung upon him suggest that perhaps the words "father's house" are used in a more general sense, and refer to the whole house of David here (or of Judah?), rather than merely to the immediate family of Eliakim.

Verse 25 is one which at first causes uncertainty. After just being told that Eliakim is going to be fastened as a nail in a sure place, and that many things will be hung upon him, it is something of a shock to read in verse 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." It seems as if God is taking back the promise that He has just made, and showing that Eliakim, too, will fall. However, most commentators agree that it is unnecessary to interpret it this way. To do so would be to introduce additional ideas for which we have no warrant. It is far better to consider that verse 25 is simply repeating the prediction in the earlier verses and bringing us back to our starting point. Shebna is at present the nail that is fastened in a sure place. A day is coming when Shebna will be removed and all the burdens that rest upon him will be cut off, and this is sure because the Lord has spoken it.

But how about the phrase with which the verse begins: "in that day?" To our English ears, this verse seems to say, "in the day of which we have just spoken -- the day when Eliakim becomes great." If we take it this way, it must mean that in the day that Eliakim becomes great, Shebna, who was previously the nail in a sure place, will be removed. However, it is not necessary to interpret the words "in that day" in this way. The Hebrew phrase, "in that day" does not necessarily mean "the day of which we have been speaking." It may just as well mean "the day of which we are about to speak." This is quite important for interpretation of many passages in the Book of Isaiah. Note in this connection our earlier discussion of the uses of this phrase in chapters 4 and

10. The phrase is often best rendered in common English simply as meaning: "a day is coming when the following events will happen." Verse 25 merely stresses the certainty that the rebuke against Shebna will be fulfilled.

Thus this passage has dealt with the affairs of two individuals who were very prominent in Isaiah's day, but who to us are merely names. Its importance doubtless was very great at that time. To us today its significance lies simply in showing God's great interest in all the affairs of life, His oversight in everything that happens, and the insecurity of all earthly positions apart from Him.

With chapter 22 we finished the long series of related chapters which began with chapter 17.

Chapter 23: The Burden of Tyre

Tyre was one of the principal cities of ancient Phoenicia -- the region along the coast of the Mediterranean sea, just north of Israeli. This region is quite different from most other sections of the ancient world. Its claim to prominence rests, not on military prowess, but on trade and commerce. This development was one which might be expected in view of the geographical situation of Phoenicia, so different from that of Palestine. In Palestine the coastline is generally straight and rough. There are no good natural harbors, and few that deserve even to be called secondary ones. An attractive country stretches eastward from the Mediterranean, but there is little to attract men to venture the dangers of the western sea. As a result the Mediterranean has little part in the events of the Old Testament.

Phoenicia is quite the opposite. To the east it is shut in by towering mountains and the fertile land is narrow in extent and often poor in quality, but the coast is cut up into little bays and harbors, making navigation less difficult and luring the people out to sea. The Phoenicians soon became great navigators and traders. Their land possessed articles with great commercial value, and commerce was necessary for survival. Once fairly begun, it provided a means of outstanding progress and achievement.

Tyrian purple early achieved preeminence as a dye; Canaanite wool became known throughout the Near East; and

the mountains back of Phoenicia provided the famous cedars of Lebanon. Not only were these vital to the construction of David's palace and of Solomon's temple; nearly two thousand years before the time of David they were already well-known and widely used in Egypt.

One of the cities of Phoenicia has given its name to our greatest book. Gebal, which the Greeks called Byblos, began to sell timber to Egypt at a very early period. In payment it received vast quantities of papyrus. These it sold to the people of other lands. When the Greeks began to make extensive use of papyrus, they named it after the city from which it came to them. Thus they applied the name of Byblos to their books, and in time this Greek word became the accepted designation of the Book of Books, the Bible.

Forty-two miles south of Byblos was Sidon, and twenty-two miles south of Sidon was Tyre. Probably Sidon was older than Tyre. Sometimes the two were combined. Omri, king of the northern Israelite kingdom, married his son Ahab to Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians (1 Kings 16:31). Every Sunday School child is familiar with the danger which threatened the religion of Israel when Jezebel tried to introduce her highly sophisticated, but morally degenerate religion into the kingdom ruled by her husband. Elijah and Elisha worked and fought for many years before this menace was at an end.

Ezekiel 27 contains a lengthy description of the great wealth and extensive commerce of ancient Tyre. In the course of our present chapter Isaiah alludes to these facts in a few striking statements. In verse 11 he calls Tyre "the merchant city." Verse 17 refers to its commerce "with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth." Verse 7 calls Tyre a "joyous city, whose antiquity is of ancient days." Verse 8 calls it "the crowning city, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth." Verse 3 says that through the great waters the seed of Egypt and the products of the Nile valley are her source of revenue" (the terms used in verse 3 will be explained later) "and she is a mart of nations." In verse 4, Tyre is called "the strength of the sea." Thus we see that Tyre was a very great city, and that her greatness came from navigation and commerce. Perhaps some of the landlocked and rather provincial

Israelites of the time of Isaiah thought that any city possessing these advantages deserved to be destroyed.

The chapter divides naturally into four sections:

1. Tyre's catastrophe, verses 1-7.
2. The source of Tyre's catastrophe, verses 8-14.
3. Her restoration, verses 15-17.
4. Her eventual usefulness, verse 18.

We should observe the perspective of the first seven verses. The manner of presentation is most interesting. First, however, we must note the meaning of a few terms.

Verse 1 speaks of "ships of Tarshish." This term originally described the great Phoenician ships which sailed to Tartessus in Spain. When Jonah tried to flee from the presence of the Lord, he took passage in one of them (Jonah 1:3).

Another name in verse 1 is Chittim. This name designates the people who inhabited Cyprus and other islands or coastlands of the eastern Mediterranean.

Zidon (an archaic English spelling of Sidon) is mentioned in Verses 2, 4, and 12. Verse 12 suggests that Tyre is a daughter of Sidon.

Sihor, in verse 3, is a name for the river of Egypt. The word translated "river" in this verse is not the common word for river, but one which usually refers to the Nile.

Now let us note the perspective of this section. Verse 1 is addressed to the ships of Tarshish; "from the land of Chittim it is revealed to them."

The situation is plain. Great ships are returning to their homeland from distant Spain. They are imagined to have come as far as Cyprus. Here a terrible piece of news awaits them: "Howl, ye ships of Tarshish; for it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in." A frightful calamity has befallen their homeland.

Some commentators think of verse 2 and verse 6 as addressed to Tyre itself, since at least part of it was on an island. A preferable explanation is to consider that they are addressed to the island where the returning ships hear the bad news. This fits better with the statement that the one addressed has been replenished by the merchants of Sidon, who pass over the sea. Sidon is probably thought of here as

the associate of Tyre, and may be considered as involved in the disaster of Tyre.

Verse 3 is a description of the previous greatness of Tyre. It should be observed that the first occurrence of the word "is" is in italics, indicating that it is not in the Hebrew. The second "is" is hardly an accurate translation. It is better rendered "was" or "has been." The American Standard Version has "was" in both places.

Verse 4 is addressed to Sidon itself. Sidon is told that Tyre is reduced to impotence. Tyre, described as "the strength (or stronghold) of the sea," is pictured as declaring her inability any longer to carry out plans or accomplish results. Sidon is therefore told to "be ashamed." The word here, as in many other passages, has the idea of being confounded or disturbed, rather than our usual idea of feeling shame. Cf. Jeremiah 2:36, Psalm 6:10, and Judges 3:25.

Verse 5 compares the news about Tyre to a previous catastrophe which concerned Egypt. This occurred before the predicted Tyrian disaster, but after the time when Isaiah wrote. The allusion here has the additional purpose of reinforcing the prophet's declarations in chapters 19 and 20 that it is foolish for Judah to look to Egypt for protection, since Egypt herself is to be conquered.

Verse 6 suggests that the ships might as well turn back again to Tarshish; the people who are left in Chittim can do nothing but lament over the fate of the great merchant city. Some of them may also seek to follow the injunction of the first half of the verse, and to flee to Tarshish so as to get as far as possible from the scene of danger. Verse 7 is a taunt addressed to the followers of Tyre. The people of that great city will have to flee to distant lands, if they are to survive.

The Source of Tyre's Catastrophe

Verse 8 asks a question: Who has caused this terrible calamity to befall the mighty city? Verse 9 gives the answer: The Lord of Hosts has purposed it.

What a tremendous declaration! The God of Isaiah is no mere tribal god, doing his best to help his own small nation. He is the creator of the universe. He even controls the great

empires of Egypt and Assyria. The great merchant city, whose fleets cover the sea, is subject to His will. If she perishes, it is because He orders it.

Verse 10 addresses the people of Tarshish, and, by implication, of the other colonies subject to Tyre. They are now free to pass through their lands as easily as the Nile flows through Egypt. The last phrase of the verse reads in the King James Version: "there is no more strength." The American Standard Version reads: "there is no restraint any more," and has a footnote under "restraint" which says, "Heb. girdle." The word is used in Psalm 109:19 to picture a curse enfolding the wicked, and is there translated "girdle" in the King James Version. It means that the power of Tyre, which held its colonies in subjection, is removed and they are free to do what they wish without restraint.

Verse 11 again declares the supremacy of God. It is He who has shaken the kingdoms!

In verse 12 God declares that the Tyrian can find no safety in flight. Even though he crosses the sea to Chittim, there also shall he find no rest. God is supreme there too.

Verse 13 calls our attention to a land far to the east of Tyre: "Behold the land of the Chaldeans." In the context it can have no significance other than to state that the destruction of Tyre will be at the hands of the distant Chaldeans. In Isaiah's time they did not seem to be a great power. Assyria was then the powerful aggressor which brought terror to the nations. We are reminded of Isaiah's words in chapter 39, where he told Hezekiah that the eventual destruction of Jerusalem would not be by the mighty Assyrians, but by the people of Babylon, who were themselves at that time struggling to maintain their existence against Assyrian oppression.

The verse goes on to mention that the Chaldeans hardly seemed even to exist as a people until long after the Assyrians had become a great nation. Babylon itself was a famous ancient city, but the Chaldeans were nomadic tribes who did not enter Mesopotamia until the tenth century B. C. They could properly be described as "them that dwell in the wilderness." The verse would seem to suggest that their entrance into Mesopotamia and establishment there was facilitated by the Assyrian power. At the time of Isaiah it was common for the Assyrians to transport subjugated

peoples from one part of their realm to another, as, for instance, in the case of the conquered northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 17:6, 24).

The latter part of the verse probably describes the Chaldean conquest of Tyre. They set up their siege-towers. They raised up her palaces. In this last phrase, Alexander suggests "roused up" instead of "raised up." The American Standard Version translates it "overthrew." They made it a ruin (King James Version -- "he brought it to ruin").

Verse 14 ends this section with the same command as in verse 1: "Howl, ye ships of Tarshish." The concluding phrase says: "for your strength is laid waste." The word rendered "strength" here is the one used in verse 4 where Tyre is called "the strength of the sea." In verse 10, which tells the subject peoples that they can now move freely since there is now no restraining force, a different word was translated "strength." In verses 4 and 14 the American Standard Version gives a better rendering as "stronghold."

Tyre's Restoration

The prophet has vividly portrayed the destruction of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar, a century after Isaiah's time. Now he goes on to describe events still more distant. Tyre is to be rebuilt. Again she is to "sing as a harlot."

It would not be impossible to consider almost everything in the first fourteen verses of this chapter as simply expressing the antagonism, and consequent prophecy of woe, uttered by the inhabitant of an inland agricultural town against a great mercantile port. The only exception is the positive (and astounding!) statement that the destruction will come from an extremely improbable agency -- the Chaldeans. Aside from this one statement the rest is very general. The catastrophe is described in vague terms. That it is to be terrible is clear, but none of its details are mentioned. One might think that the chapter would end here, and that the prophet, aside from one lucky guess, had merely displayed his provincial hatred against commercialism and trade. However, the most striking portion of the chapter is still ahead. The remaining verses show the attitude of Isaiah to be utterly different from the misconception which might conceivably be derived from the

first part of the chapter, if taken alone. This latter part of the chapter is most distinctive of Isaiah, and most important in its spiritual insight.

The destruction of Tyre is not, like that of Nineveh, to be final. Verse 15 tells us "that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king," and then shall be restored.

What is the meaning of the phrase "according to the days of one king"? Perhaps if we had a full knowledge of the events of Isaiah's time and of the centuries following, we would know of some outstanding fact that would make the allusion perfectly clear. As it is, we know that Tyre was restored, but no evidence has been preserved which indicates the exact time and circumstances when it occurred. Probably the best that can be done with the phrase at present is to consider the possibility of the interpretation that Eichhorn and Ewald have suggested, that it indicates a general period, like the days of a king, in contrast to the precise measurement indicated in Isaiah 16:14 and 21:16 by the phrase "the years of a hireling."

Verse 15 ends with the statement that Tyre shall "sing as an harlot." One might think that the word "harlot" here betrays the antagonism of the prophet from the settled agricultural community against the traders and merchants, the "middlemen" of the ancient world, but the context shows that this is probably not involved in the word. It may simply indicate the lack of fixed relationship, the readiness to trade with all corners, the lightness of attitude.

The phrase, then "shall Tyre sing as a harlot," is better translated, then "shall Tyre sing the harlot's song." Many commentators think that verse 16 presents the actual wording of the song: "Take an harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten; make sweet melody, sing songs, that thou mayest be remembered." It pictures Tyre reestablishing its mercantile power, and beginning again to make a name for itself in the Mediterranean.

In verse 17 the Lord states that the reestablishment is from Himself. He has been the cause of the downfall of Tyre; He is going to cause that it be again restored.

At the end of seventy years the Lord will "visit" Tyre. This Hebrew word, which is sometimes translated "visit," has

nothing in common with our English word "visit." It does not mean to make a call or spend an hour gossiping. No English word exactly represents this Hebrew word. It has the idea of a superior power coming in and making a forceful change in the situation. It may be a change either for the better or for the worse (Cf. Numbers 14:18; Ruth 1:6; 1 Samuel 2:21; Amos 3:14). The idea is not contained in the modern English word "visit," but we have derived from it the word "visitation," which retains one portion of its meaning. We speak of a visitation of God, as indicating a terrible calamity, but this Hebrew word may point to a great change in either direction -- to something better or to something worse. Verse 17 says that the reestablishment of Tyre will come because the Lord will "visit" Tyre. It is God who will change the condition of the city from one that is forgotten to one whose greatness is again established.

Tyre "shall return to her hire, and shall commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth. This is probably not so much a figure for wicked acts as for a promiscuity of relationships; she will enter into all kind of relations with all kinds of nations without regard to their character or viewpoint. She will have commercial relations with all the nations on the face of the earth. Tyre is again to be as great and powerful as before.

Her Eventual Usefulness

Verse 18 is one of those verses in which Isaiah's individuality stands out most strongly. We see here that he has not simply been denouncing Tyre because it was a foreign city which was often hostile to the Jews. He was not simply denouncing it because it was a merchant city, nor was he attacking mercantile life in itself. He was depicting the fate of a city which had been living in its own pride and for purposes contrary to the will of God. In verse 18 he states that eventually the merchandise and the hire of Tyre is going to be "holiness to the Lord." Eventually a time is coming when all this greatness is not to be destroyed, but to be made useful. It will not be treasured or laid up; it will be for those who dwell before the Lord, "to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing."

In this verse we find the recognition of the great principle that no particular thing is right or wrong in itself; it all depends upon its use. It is easy for us to become angry at something and desire simply to destroy it from the face of the earth. God's attitude is different. Everything which He has established is for a definite purpose, and it is His will that it shall find that purpose.

When was verse 18 fulfilled? The city of Tyre was reestablished and continued to be a great city. Eventually it again suffered a great attack, this time from Alexander the Great. He destroyed what remained of the city of Tyre on the mainland. He captured the portion of the city which was on an island in the midst of the sea by building a great mole out to it, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Ezekiel 26. Later the island city was reestablished, and in the time of the New Testament it was a great heathen city. Later it was converted to Christianity. We can hardly say that the city of Tyre has yet fulfilled the great purpose described in verse 18.

We have now completed our examination of Isaiah 13-23. This section is often called, "the Burdens against Foreign Nations." Yet we noticed that Judah itself is often right in the forefront of consideration. Particularly in chapters 17-22, we found that everything was directly related to the Syro-Ephraimitic invasion and to the wicked scheme of King Ahaz, who thought he could protect Judah by looking to the Assyrian Empire for help. In chapter 22 we saw that the indifference of the people and their sin against God could end only in disaster to Judah.

Isaiah 24-27: The Isaiah Apocalypse

All commentators recognize that these chapters form a unit. Most interpreters think them to be the conclusion to the section from chapter 13 to chapter 23, though there is at least one who considers them, instead, as an introduction to the following section (chs. 28-36).

This section is often called "the Isaiah Apocalypse." An apocalypse is a writing in which the veil is removed from God's government of the world, and we are enabled to see the true realities which will end in the victory of right over wrong. It gives a glimpse of the eventual triumph of

righteousness at the end of the age. The two great apocalypses in the Bible are the books of Daniel and Revelation. Our present section has much in common with these remarkable books, but has not received as much attention and careful interpretation as has been given them.

Isaiah 24

This chapter is cut off from what follows by the fact that chapter 25 seems to refer to a different situation, and that it changes to the second person.

Even a hasty reading of the chapter shows that it divides naturally into five sections. It begins with a long description of sorrow and misery, which runs from verse 1 to the end of verse 12 (and possibly includes the first few words of verse 13). This is followed by a brief passage, depicting joy and praise to God, which extends to the middle of verse 16. Then comes a further description of terror and calamity, in general terms, which runs to the end of verse 20. Verses 21 and 22 tell in specific terms how God will deal with the great leaders who oppose Him. Verse 23 concludes the chapter with a wonderful description of future glory, when God shall reign supreme in Jerusalem.

Thus the chapter moves forward with definite progress through five sections, the first of which occupies nearly half of the chapter.

The Starting Point

Verses 1-13 give a picture of devastation and desolation. The question that immediately occurs is this: what is here described as devastated? Is it a picture of confusion and upheaval in one country, such as might portray the results of an Assyrian or Babylonian invasion of Palestine, or is it a picture of cosmic upheaval at the end of the age?

If we look at verse 3, we can easily imagine that the passage is describing the upheaval in Judah caused by the invasions: "The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the LORD hath spoken this word." We get the same impression from verses 11 to 13a: "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. When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people"

The mention of "city" in the singular in verse 10 suggests that one country, rather than the whole world, is in view. The use of the word "land" in verses 1, 11, and 13 strongly supports this impression. We would not expect this term, in the singular, to be used in a picture of devastation affecting the whole world, or of earthquakes and calamities involving the entire planet.

Quite a different impression, however, is gained when we begin reading the chapter with the first verse, as translated in the King James Version: "Behold, the LORD maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof." The third phrase, "turneth it upside down," suggests that the chapter is describing earthquakes and cosmic upheavals, rather than the devastation of a single country. Yet, after all, this phrase comes third, rather than first. It seems to describe a result, rather than a cause, and would fit very naturally into a description of the devastation of a single country, if the word "land" were used (as in the margin of the American Standard Version) instead of "earth."

A similar impression is made by verses 4, 5, and 6, where "earth" is used again. Yet these verses, even more than verse 1, are made up principally of statements which would apply more naturally to the devastation of a single nation than to a description of great cosmic disturbances, if it were not for their use of the word "earth" instead of "land."

In our present passage -- verses 1-13a -- the King James Version uses "earth" six times, and "land" three times, thus giving contradictory impressions. The preponderance of the term "earth" suggests that cosmic disturbances are being described, but this conclusion is rudely checked when we observe the fact that the same Hebrew word is used in all nine instances. Thus the translators of the King James Version have been inconsistent. Three times they have rendered the word one way, and six times the other way. They evidently were not sure of their own mind on the matter, but leaned toward the idea that cosmic disturbances were in view, rather than a local upheaval.

At this point I believe that we must decide that the translators of the King James Version were wrong. Careful examination of the passage indicates that it would have been better to translate the word as "land" in all nine instances.

Someone may object that the Hebrew language must be very strange if the same word may mean "earth" and describe the entire planet, or "land" and simply refer to one country, but instances where there is similar variety in the use of words are found in all languages. Since the possible combinations of meanings differ from one language to another, no translation can ever be a complete substitute for careful study of an original.

Thus our English word "earth" may indicate the entire planet, or merely a small amount of soil, as in 2 Kings 5:17, where Naaman asked for "two mules' burden of earth" (though, in the Hebrew, this latter idea requires a different word). Similarly our English word "land" may refer to a particular country, and is often so used in the King James Version, or it may refer to the dry land in contrast to the ocean, thus having two distinct meanings, but never meaning the entire globe. Again, the word "country" may be used for a particular national area, or it may be used for a rural district as opposed to the city. English words have at least as many possible interpretations as Hebrew words, but the combinations are different.

This Hebrew word may mean "earth" and indicate the entire planet, or it may mean "land," and designate only a section of the world, such as one country, or one specific area. The Hebrew Bible contains abundant evidence of both possibilities. On the one hand, it is used in the statement in Genesis 1:1 that "God created the heaven and the earth," and in many similar passages, as in Isaiah 37:20, 45:18, and 66:1. On the other hand, it is regularly used in such phrases as "the land of Egypt," "the land of Israel, or "the land of Assyria." Even without a qualifying word, it often refers simply to one country. Striking evidence of this is contained in Isaiah 36:17-18, "Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards. Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, The LORD will deliver us. Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of

Assyria?" Here the word "land" is used five times, and it is exactly the same Hebrew word which the KJV renders as "earth" so frequently in our present chapter (Cf. also Genesis 42:30; Deuteronomy 1:8, etc.) Whether the word means a section of the world, such as a country, or whether it means the whole earth, must always be determined in the light of context, and cannot be decided by the usage of the one word.

Delitzsch interprets the passage as describing great convulsions which affect the entire world at the end of the age. In contrast with his usual sound methods of procedure, he seems to base this almost entirely on the claim that the word designates the entire globe. Alexander, on the other hand, thinks that we have here a description of the desolation of the land of Judah, whether at the hands of the Assyrians, of the Babylonians, or of the later conquerors.

There are a number of reasons why it seems best to interpret Isaiah 24:1-13a as referring only to the land of Israel. The special mention of one city, in verses 10 and 12, hardly fits a world-wide description. The various statements in the passage seem more naturally to describe a country made desolate by war than a world shaken by final convulsions. Many of the phrases used in the section are actually applied to Israel elsewhere, e. g. 2 Kings 21:13 (turneth it upside down), Hosea 4:9; Isaiah 33:9; etc. The passage does not seem to lay its stress on the actual upheaval, but rather on the ensuing stagnation and decline. This is natural enough in a portrayal of the results of foreign invasions of Israel, but hardly appropriate to a picture of world-wide catastrophes at the very end of this age.

A further reason for thinking that Israel is primarily in view is derived from the references to different classes of people in verse 2 and to "laws," "ordinance," and "the everlasting covenant" in verse 5, which are more appropriate to a discussion of God's dealings with His own people than to a description of His treatment of the world in general. While it is true that all have sinned, and that all deserve punishment for their sins, sections of the Bible which declare God's wrath against foreign nations usually speak of their cruelty and of their attacks against God's people as special grounds for punishment. There is no hint of such accusations in this passage.

Equally important is the comparison with the usual attitude of prophecy elsewhere. Normally a prophet begins with things around him, and then goes on to discuss more distant horizons. The prophet first looks at the immediate situation. He begins with a reference to the sin of his people, and looks ahead to its inevitable punishment. Then he may look into the more distant future and see the blessing that God will ultimately bestow. In instance after instance we can notice this procedure on the part of Isaiah himself. It is natural to expect a similar arrangement here, unless we find strong evidence to the contrary.

There is really only one obstacle to this interpretation of our section. That is the use of "world" in verse 4: "the world languisheth and fadeth away." The word here rendered as "world" is one that occurs less often. It is used only thirty-six times in the Old Testament, and in thirty-five of them the King James Version translates it "world." In one instance (Prov. 8:31), it is rendered "habitable part." It seems to have the same difference from the other word that our word "world" has from our word "earth." Its stress is on the organized life of man, rather than on the universal area of the globe. When we speak of something as "worldly" we are apt to think of sophistication, rather than of universality. So it is not at all unreasonable to take the statement, "the world languisheth and fadeth away" as showing the decline of the highly sophisticated life of Judah, rather than as necessarily indicating a world-wide cataclysm.

A Survey of Verses 1-13a

Having thus established the general import of the passage, let us survey it in order. Isaiah has repeatedly affirmed that God will ultimately punish Judah for its sin. He now views the disaster as already present. Verse 1 pictures the land as emptied of the bulk of its inhabitants. Many have died in war. Still larger numbers are "scattered abroad," some by being carried off into exile (cf. Jer. 39:9), others by flight into Egypt and elsewhere (cf. Jer. 43:5ff.).

Verse 2 shows the leveling of the people as a result of the disaster. Social, ecclesiastical or financial distinction is no protection against this calamity. Where the King James

Version speaks of takers and givers of "usury," the American Standard Version more correctly translates "interest." The question whether the rate of interest was or was not excessive is not involved in the verse.

Verses 3 and 4 describe the devastation and resulting decline of the land, and say that this is in accordance with divine predictions. Verse 5 gives the cause of the disaster: Israel's departure from God's commands.

Verses 7 to 9 dwell on the results of the depopulation. Joy and mirth have disappeared from the land.

In verses 10 to 12 the attention is concentrated on Jerusalem. It is called "the city of confusion." The American Standard Version reads "the waste city," but this does not express the sense of the original nearly as well as the rendering of the King James Version. In Genesis 1:2 the word is translated "without form" in the King James Version, and "waste" in the American Standard Version. It is used only twenty times in the Old Testament and the context of many of its occurrences shows that its primary idea is not that something is the result of devastation, but that its condition may be described as empty, useless, vain, or confused. It would be tautologous to say, with the American Standard Version, "the waste city is broken down;" the rendering of the King James Version is preferable as containing a reason for the disaster. Jerusalem should have been the city of order. She had God's law. He had established her government, and poured out His blessings upon her. Yet she neglected His ordinances and forgot His commands. She became a "city of confusion." The breaking down is the inevitable result.

The beginning of verse 11 differs in the two English versions. King James Version reads: "There is a crying for wine in the streets;" American Standard Version says: "There is a crying in the streets because of the wine." The latter is the more literal. Yet it does not make clear whether the crying is because of a lack of wine, or because of its results. Most commentators think that it is a sign of hunger, like a cry for bread (cf. Lam. 2:12). Yet the American Standard Version reading suggests that it means a cry of suffering, uttered as a result of having drunk of the wine of the wrath of God.

Verse 12 once more stresses the desolations of the city.

Thus verses 1-12 describe the devastation of Judah, which the prophet sees as already present, in view of the nation's disobedience to God. In verse 13 he goes on to tell what comes later. As the chapter progresses, his vision is widened to include the ultimate fate of the entire world. Through Isaiah's words God reveals interesting glimpses of remarkable features of His wonderful plan of the ages.

Isaiah 24 is a most remarkable chapter, for it contains a bird's eye view of the plan of God for this age, from the time of Isaiah to the very end of the world.

We noticed that the first half of the chapter is a description of the land of Palestine as it lies in devastation and neglect after the Babylonian conquest. In this chapter, as generally in the prophetic books, the prophet begins with the situations of his own day before going on to speak of future ages. Looking forward to the inevitable result of the sin of the nation, he sees that Israel will be devastated and largely deserted. In verses 1-12 he has given us a pathetic description of this condition.

If verse 13 were the last verse of the chapter, we might readily think it to be merely a reiteration under a different figure of the same thoughts as were expressed in the previous 12 verses. The land is no longer to be like a prosperous olive tree, with much fruit on its branches. Delitzsch aptly says, "The state of matters produced by the catastrophe is like the olive-beating, which recovers the fruit left hanging when the trees were stripped, and like the grape-gleaning after the grape harvest has been fully gathered in." After the exile has begun men are to be scarce; the number of God's people is terribly reduced.

Yet we cannot avoid the impression that the verse contains a suggestion of hope. The land is not to be like an olive tree that has been utterly destroyed, or like a vineyard from which every single grape has been taken. There is a suggestion that something is to remain even after the destruction.

The mention of the olive tree inevitably calls to mind the picture Paul gives in Romans 11:16-27, where he compares God's people to an olive tree. Paul speaks of certain Jewish branches as being broken off from the olive tree, and of wild branches as being grafted in; later, he says, the natural branches will be grafted in again. Paul considers God's

people as one olive tree, through the ages, whether its branches at any particular time be mainly Jewish or not. Under this striking figure, Paul stresses his great teaching of the unity of God's covenant, and the real unity of God's true people in all times.

If verse 13 were the last verse of the chapter we might readily think it a mere reiteration of the gloom of the previous picture, despite its gentle suggestion that there is hope, even beyond the catastrophe. Verse 14, however, shows that this hope is to be realized. It begins a brief but magnificent passage of rejoicing, "They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the LORD, they shall cry aloud from the sea." What a marked contrast to the previous verses of the chapter! Here we have rejoicing and praise to God, and that not only in Palestine but from the sea as well.

The joyful attitude continues in verses 15-16a: "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."

This passage shows God's praise no longer confined to Palestine. The perspective is broadening out. In verse 14 we heard the praise of God coming from the sea. Verse 15 looks still further, to the islands and coastlines beyond. We imagine Isaiah, standing a hilltop in Judea, looking on westward across the Philistine plain to the Mediterranean Sea, looking across the sea to the distant horizon, imagining regions still farther away, and thinking that the exile, terrible as it is, is not to be the end of God's testimony. Later on there will be a time when God's word will cross the sea and distant lands will resound to songs of praise. Greece, Italy, Spain, Britain, even distant America, will be areas in which God's word will be proclaimed and souls born anew into His kingdom. Is it any wonder that the prophet cries out in verse 16: "From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous."

The word translated earth in verse 16 is the same word which we translated "land" earlier in the chapter. The vision is broadening out. After the wide vistas of verses 14 and 15, we are probably justified in translating it "earth" from here on.

Verse 15 contains a strange phrase: "Glorify ye the LORD in the fires." Many commentators seek to interpret this as the converse of the latter part of the verse, which speaks of "the isles of the sea." The sea is to the west; therefore they take the fires as indicating the east. This they do by considering fires as a synonym for light, and light as standing for sunrise, which would naturally indicate the east. The verse then would mean that God would be praised both in the east and in the west.

This is a very interesting idea, but it can hardly be derived from this verse. Hebrew has other ways to express "sunrise," or "east." "Fires" is an entirely different idea. It is true that the Hebrew word, by a change of vowel, could be made into the common word for "light." Even then, it would hardly naturally mean "sunrise." As it stands it does not mean "light," anyway. It is similar -- perhaps identical -- with the word Urim which stands for something connected with the high priest's breastplate (Ex. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; et al). Other wise it occurs only six times in the Old Testament. All but this one are in the singular. In one instance it is translated "light" (Is. 50:11), but in the context it means the light of a fire. In the other four instances it is translated "fire." Isaiah 31:9 speaks of "the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem." In Isaiah 44:16 and 47:14 it refers to a fire where one may warm himself. In Ezekiel 5:2 it occurs in God's command to the prophet to "burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city." Clearly the word indicates fire as distinct from mere light, and it is hard to see any connection between it and a means of designating the east.

What then does our verse mean: "Wherefore glorify ye the LORD in the fires?" Does it not indicate the fires of tribulation and suffering? Does it not indicate that the time to follow the exile will be one when God's people will go through persecution and misery, and yet will praise God in the midst of the fires?

As we think of the history of God's people since the time of Isaiah we find that it has been, on the whole a time of insecurity and frequent persecution. We think of the difficulties faced by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, as they glorified God in the fiery furnace. We think of Daniel in the lion's den. We think of the early Christians, dying as flaming

torches in Nero's gardens, or thrown to the lions, glorifying God in the midst of adversity. We think of the heroes of the Reformation, of the victims of the Inquisition, of the Scotch Covenanters. We see a little band of Pilgrims leaving their beloved homeland and crossing the seas to found a country in the wilderness, where they might worship God in accordance with the demands of His Word. We see Christians behind the iron curtain today, bravely giving their lives for their loyalty to God's Truth. Surely the long history since the exile has been a time when God's people praised Him in the fires.

Our present group of verses is characterized by joyful praise of God. Verse 16 tells us that the very ends of the earth resound with songs, "even glory to the righteous." The adjective "righteous" here is in the singular, and must refer to God.

In verse 16 we have another transition -- in this case a very sudden one. After its first phrase we are plunged into deep misery, and the note of unhappiness persists for several verses. This is an added evidence that in verse 15 the word "fires" refers to persecution and suffering. After the wonderful declaration of praise to God with which the verse begins, it continues: "But I said, My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously."

The exact meaning of the uncommon word rendered "leanness" is not certain. Other words from the same root are translated "lean." The rendering of the King James Version rests on fairly early tradition. If it is correct, and if the word does not merely signify calamity in general, it carries the idea of disappointment at failing to produce the expected amount of fruit. This idea is quite in line with developments during the present phase of God's economy.

Christ commanded us to bear fruit wherever we go. As the gospel has gone out, many have thought that soon the whole world would be converted to Christ. A few decades ago the watchword was, "the evangelization of the world in this generation." Yet today we find that there are more people in the world who do not know Christ than there were when the great missionary movement started. The great increase of population is partly responsible for the growth of heathenism

in our day. Yet this is not the cause of all of it. Modernism has swept our country in recent years. In many a city where God was praised on every corner a few decades ago, you would now have to hunt a long time to find a place where the true Word of God is proclaimed. We can well imagine a man who looked forward with such hope to the conquest of the world for Christ in this generation, looking about him today and saying: "My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously."

This has been the experience of many generations in this age. Everything moves forward as if all the world would soon be won to Christ; then something goes wrong. People settle down to worldliness and indifference; subtle unbelief sweeps over an area; some new cult leads thousands astray; personality problems disrupt the work of God. Whatever the cause, the result is frustration and disappointment.

We must never forget that this is Satan's world. We know that God controls all things and Satan can go only as far as God permits; yet God permits Satan, during the present age, to be the prince of this world. He is constantly deceiving the nations and disrupting the work of God. It has been true from the very beginning of Christian history, and it is true today. It fits exactly with the suggestion that we found in the use of the word "fires" in verse 15.

Verses 17 and 18 continue the picture of the unpleasant side of the history of this age. "Fear, and the pit, and the snare, are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth." Verse 18 shows fear and terror on every hand. The one who escapes from one adversary falls a prey to another.

Only a few years ago, it was generally thought that the world would enjoy peace and happiness if only the aggressive force of Hitler were destroyed. It was frequently said: "If the Allies win this war, there will be such an opportunity for Christian missionary work in the Orient as the world has never seen." When the war ended it looked as if this would be the case; then a foe came from another direction, and godless Communism spread over large portions of Europe and the greater part of Asia, and tried to stop all preaching of the Word of God in those regions.

Those who flee from the noise of the fear in this age are apt to fall into the pit; he that comes up out of the midst of the pit is sometimes taken in the snare.

In verses 19 and 20 we have a picture of great convulsions of the earth at the end of the age. The condition of individual terror and fear described in verses 16b-18 passes over into great convulsions and turmoil in verses 19 and 20, until the earth reels to and fro like a drunkard, "and it shall fall, and not rise again."

In verse 21 we see divine interposition to bring an end to the forces of wickedness that are controlling the world in this age. Two types of adversaries are mentioned: "the kings of the earth upon the earth" and "the host of the high ones that are on high." These latter are the real enemies, "for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world" (Eph. 6:12). Satan, "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2), is the supreme enemy of God's people in these days. He will not always continue to have his present power. God is going to intervene.

Verse 22 tells what God will do after He seizes the evil leaders. "They shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison." The verse ends strangely: "After many days shall they be visited." The word translated "visited" is very different from our modern English idea of visiting or making a call. The only trace of it surviving in modern English is found in one sense of the word "visitation." It means "to interpose with power in such a way as to make a great change in one's condition." It may be a change for the better or for the worse. Thus, God visits His wrath upon the ungodly. He visits His people, when He rescues them from their distress (cf., for instance, Ruth 1:6). The word is frequently used in the Old Testament.

Our present verse states that the spiritual forces of darkness are to be shut up in the prison, and then that after many days they are to be visited. It is a strange prediction. Why does Isaiah not simply say that Satan is going to be punished, and stop there? Why is it important to mention that there is to be a time of "many days" when he will be shut up in the prison before his visitation? If it is merely a matter of Satan's being closed in the prison for a time before

he receives his eventual destruction or punishment, we may well wonder why such a detail deserves mention. However, it is equally possible to take "visit" as referring to a visitation which results in a betterment of conditions. In such a case, there would be real purpose in its presentation here. Perhaps, after Satan has been shut up in the pit "many days," he is to receive a brief new lease of power.

As Delitzsch points out, there is a striking similarity between this verse and Revelation 20:1-3. After the great battle described in Revelation 19, an angel descends from heaven with a great chain. He seizes Satan and casts him into the bottomless pit, and binds him there for a thousand years so "that he shall deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled." During this period of a thousand years the saints reign with Christ on earth. Surely this is the same period which Isaiah describes as "many days." At the end of that period Satan is released for a little season, before his final visitation with eternal destruction when he is cast into the lake of fire.

Thus Isaiah has given us here a picture of the course of events up to the end of the age and the beginning of the Millennium. He has pointed out that Satan is to be bound during the thousand years of the Millennium and that after that he is to be loosed for a little season.

The chapter ends with the wonderful glory of verse 23. "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." The word here translated "ancients" is elsewhere rendered "elders." It indicates those who are selected for leadership by reason of age or experience. In Isaiah's time many of the leaders of Israel were infected with worldliness and unbelief. In chapters 28-29, and in many other places, he declares God's wrath against the untrue leaders of God's people. How wonderful it is to know that a time is coming when all of Christ's elders are to be so completely yielded to Him that they shall be counted worthy to share in His reign (cf. Rev. 20:4, 6).

It is possible that verse 23 is a picture of an eternal state of joy after the end of the Millennium. It would seem more likely, however, that it is a picture of the wonderful glory of

the reign of Christ during the Millennium when He "shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously."

What a wonderful picture of the course of God's testimony during the present age is contained in this chapter! It is not given merely to satisfy curiosity, but so that we may lift up our hearts and rejoice. It is given in order that we may never despair, but may glorify God in the midst of the fires. It may be our lot to face the pit and the snare. When we flee from one, we may run into the other. Yet we are to remember that God is on the throne, and that in His own time He will send back His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to set up His wonderful kingdom of righteousness and peace upon the earth.

During this age we are "displaced persons," representing our Lord in the midst of a land that is in the hands of the enemy. We should not be disheartened if our fruit does not entirely fill the whole earth. From the uttermost parts of the earth we shall hear songs of glory to the righteous God; wonderful indeed are the stories that we hear of the outreach of the gospel. Yet it is never a complete victory. Time after time, we feel impelled to cry out: "My leanness, my leanness, the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously." It is good for us to realize that God has not promised victory in this age, but that He has promised that His Spirit will be with us to give us strength to pass through the fiery trials that await us, in order that we may give a true witness to Him and "glorify Him in the fires."

How wonderful it is to see that Isaiah and John in no way disagree with one another. The picture of the wonderful millennial reign of Christ after the end of this age, which John sees in more detail, is contained in brief and yet clear outline in this wonderful chapter of Isaiah.

Isaiah 25

Chapter 25 starts with a verse that, if it stood alone, could readily be considered as simply a conclusion to the vision given in chapter 24. Yet it is better to consider this verse as beginning a new chapter, since it is part of a series of six

verses that are addressed to God, using the second person singular in praising Him, and describing His mighty deeds.

There is a remarkable parallel between the first and last parts of the chapter. Although verses 2-5 are directly addressed to God while verses 10-12 speak of Him in the third person, both sections deal with God's great power in overcoming the forces of evil. Verses 2-5 describe how He has done this in the past and verses 10-12 declare that He would continue to do so in the time that was still future when the prophet wrote. Except for the first part of verse 4, which shows that in the midst of all this turmoil there is still refuge and shelter for those who trust in God, all these verses are descriptions of God's destruction of wickedness.

The similarity of the first and last portions of the chapter emphasizes and stresses the importance of the four verses that stand between them. Although parts of these verses are highly figurative and somewhat vague, their meaning becomes clear when carefully examined in the light of the rest of the Bible. Actually Isaiah 25:6-9 is one of the great prophetic passages of the Scripture. The events that it describes are so important as to form the basis for the worldwide extension of God's Word as described in 24:14-16.

Both verses 6 and 7 begin with the words "on this mountain," a phrase that occurs also in verse 10, but nowhere else in the Old Testament in exactly this form, except in Deuteronomy 1:6. The phrase "on this mountain" stresses the fact that at a particular place on this earth the Lord will do something of tremendous importance for His people. What He will do is described figuratively. He will prepare a feast of rich food "for all peoples."

In verses 6-7 the phrase "all peoples" occurs twice and "all nations" once. A universal blessing is here described, not merely for the nation of Israel but for "all nations." Nowhere else in the Bible is this precise figure used, that God will prepare a great feast for all nations. Two things come readily to mind -- the Passover supper in the Old Testament and the communion service in the New Testament. Both of these are feasts at which God is the host and at which His great work of salvation is emphasized. Both center on the lamb that God would slay so that we might "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Truly this is a symbolic picture of the blessing

that God prepares for all nations -- the blessing of salvation made available through the death of Christ, through shedding of His blood -- a salvation well represented by a banquet of the finest of wines. This sacrifice would occur on the very mountain where Abraham had been ready to sacrifice Isaac, but God Himself had provided the sacrifice. The sacrifice represented by this banquet is the source of every blessing described in these four chapters.

Verse 7 says that in this mountain God will destroy "the veil that is spread over all nations." This verse is misunderstood by a considerable number of commentators, who think of it as primarily connected with the following verse rather than the preceding one. They point to some instances in the Scripture where men have covered their heads to express sorrow in the face of death, and say that this verse promises the removal of such a covering.[†] In the light of the entire context it is much more reasonable to consider it as predicting the removal of the veil that so blinds all the nations as to prevent them from truly seeing the glory of God and the wonders of His plan. Thus the verse suggests Paul's assertion in Acts 17:30 that "in the past God overlooked such ignorance" and his statement in 1 Corinthians 2:14 that the things of God are foolishness to the natural man. In 2 Corinthians 3:14-16, Paul said that the minds of many are blinded by the veil of ignorance that covers the hearts of those who do not receive the promises, but that this veil is taken away in Christ.

Thus the great feast provided by Christ's sacrifice leads directly to removal of the veil that keeps all nations from seeing God's truth, a veil that can be removed only through Christ.

These two verses are appropriately followed by the promise that God will swallow up death forever and will wipe away all tears. It should be noted that the last part of the verse emphasizes removal of His people's reproach or disgrace. The

[†]This false interpretation of the verse is probably the reason why the NIV here translated the words and as "shroud" and "sheet," though there is no evidence that either of these words for "covering" or "woven material" included a specific reference to sorrow or death.

emphasis is on the disgrace that is the result of sin rather than on the sorrow caused by death. This gives further evidence that the veil represents blindness rather than sorrow. Although the removal of death is an important part of God's promise, it is only a part. Removal of the many aspects of the misery caused by sin, including the sorrow resulting from death, is of far greater importance, and all of these are removed through Christ's sacrifice at Calvary.

Verse 9 is a fitting conclusion to the passage. It contains the words "we trusted in him"† twice and in each case these words are followed by mention of the salvation that God provides. This puts the capstone on the promise of deliverance from sin through Calvary by pointing out that man's part is only to trust and that only God can save. Thus salvation by faith is strongly stressed in the verse that concludes this passage.

As already noted, the last three of the chapter verses repeat the theme of its first part by vividly describing God's complete destruction of all the forces of evil.

Isaiah 26

This chapter divides naturally into two parts. Verses 1-11 deal particularly with the land of Judah, telling how God will protect the nation as long as it truly deserves to be called a righteous nation. Verse 1 says that salvation must be its walls and bulwarks. Verses 3 and 4 are wonderful verses, applicable to any true servant of God: "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." Verses 5-11 continue the thought of God's supreme power and of His blessing upon those who trust in Him, together with a strong condemnation of those who are obdurantly wicked. Verse 11 mentions the blindness of those who do not see God's zeal for His people and the certainty that those who oppose the Lord will be destroyed.

KJV "we have waited for him."

The latter half of the chapter is so different from the first part that it probably should have been designated as a separate chapter. Considered in relation to earlier portions of this Apocalypse these ten verses can readily be understood as unveiling a vital part of the divine plan.

We recall that chapter 24 began with a description of the situation in the land of Judah when God found it necessary to send the people into exile because of their sin; then it looked at the remnant of grace that would carry God's Word to the very ends of the earth in spite of persecution and suffering; finally, it described the upheavals that would precede the ultimate establishment of righteousness. In 25:6-9, the central theme of God's blessing to all nations was figuratively presented. It described the great banquet God would prepare at Calvary and its result in bringing salvation, opening the eyes of multitudes, and ultimately doing away with death. Since chapter 26 is still a part of the Isaiah Apocalypse it is quite reasonable to ask whether it may also have a long section dealing with the fate of God's true people. Careful students should not begin by simply assuming that such a vision would necessarily start with the exile as was done in chapter 24, but should also consider the possibility of a vista that would start at a point further along in the dealings of God with His people, whether physically descended from Abraham or not. An answer to this question should be determined by what the text contains. Rather definite indications for this determination are found in verses 13-14.

The passage begins with verse 12, which declares that it is God Himself who produces whatever peace His people have and whatever works they may accomplish. Although the Holy Spirit is not specifically named, the verse could quite naturally be interpreted as describing His work in the heart of the believer.

Although verses 13-14 are applicable to all believers, they would seem to have particular application to those from non Abrahamic backgrounds. These people may look back on their pagan ancestry and recognize that such gods as those of Greece and Rome, of Scandinavia or of Germany, had ruled over them, but that these false gods have now been laid aside and only the true God is their Lord. Verse 14 shows that

these false gods have been permanently discarded. They are dead. They can never rise again. God has brought them to ruin. Even the memory of them has been largely eradicated. As far as the great mass of people in so-called Christian nations is concerned, the memory of the Roman and Teutonic gods has practically disappeared, except for the generally unnoticed traces remaining in names of certain months or of certain days of the week.

After the joyful recognition in verse 15 of the extent to which God has enlarged His people the next few verses come as a surprise, for this great advance is followed by disappointment. Great expectations seem to be unrealized: "We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind." The key to understanding these verses would seem to lie in the last half of verse 18: "We have not wrought any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen."

Early in the present century, there were those who declared their confidence in "the evangelization of the world in this generation." Great efforts were expended as missionaries went out to many distant lands and for a time it was thought that the entire world would soon be won to Christ. Yet today there are more heathen in the world than there were when the great modern missionary movement began. In sections of Europe and America where the message of salvation was once proclaimed from thousands of pulpits, many of these same churches are today controlled by men who deny the basic teachings of Scripture. Great denominations that fifty years ago supported hundreds of missionaries who were presenting the Word of Christ in distant lands have today in their missionary force only a small fraction of the previous number and many even of these are devoting them selves to social service or to attempts to create a human "kingdom of God" instead of presenting the word of salvation and teaching converts to study the Bible as God's inerrant guide for their lives. One can easily imagine a personification of the multitude of true believers, seeing the change that has occurred within the present century and uttering the words of verse 18: "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."

In verse 19 God gives His reply to this complaint. As always, the answer is found not in human effort or human strength but in God's power. The verse describes in clear language the resurrection of the just. "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." This verse is addressed to believers; it is the answer to their disappointment in failing to win the entire world to belief in their Lord. It tells them to shout for joy. To those who have died in sin, resurrection does not promise joy but punishment and misery. The verse clearly points to the resurrection of the just and to that alone.

Complete victory will not be brought about by human effort, not even by the preaching of the Gospel, though God does indeed mightily use human efforts for His purposes of bringing many to salvation. The ultimate solution comes only from Him. Verse 19 represents the great climax to the struggles of true believers through the ages -- God's divine miracle, the bodily resurrection of the just.

God's answer to the increasing frustration of His faithful servants will bring an end to their sorrow. Freed from the weakness of the mortal body, reunited with those who had died in the Lord, they will be forever with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:17).

After the great climax of joy for believers that is described in verse 19 the next three verses seem at first to be very strange. Is the arrangement accidental? Or do these three verses show what is to come next? If verse 20 is to be taken as following the great event pictured in verse 19, it shows the resurrected saints removed for a time from the area in which God's wrath is now to be displayed.

The next two verses (26:21-27:1) picture a great climactic outpouring of God's wrath upon the ungodly world. By itself this passage could hardly be taken as proof that such an event is to follow the resurrection of true believers. Yet anyone who has reached this conclusion from other passages will surely find additional evidence of it in these verses. God's people, the risen saints, who are in the presence of the

Lord, are told to hide themselves for a little. While they remain safe in His presence, apart from all the turmoil here described, He will come forth to punish the people of the earth for their sins. What He will do is vividly portrayed in Isaiah 26:21-27:1.

Isaiah 27

The first verse of chapter 27 belongs with chapter 26 and simply completes the thought expressed in its last verse. Under the figure of Leviathan, the great monster of the sea, the supreme wickedness of the ages is represented. Chapter 27 should begin with what is now called verse 2, where an entirely different thought is introduced.

Thus far in the Isaiah Apocalypse there have been sections dealing with national Israel, such as the first half of chapter 24. Other sections have clearly had in mind, not a physical nation, but the entire body of true believers in the Lord. In each section one of these two viewpoints has been pursued for a considerable space before returning to the other.

God called the nation of Israel to Himself for a very special purpose, to use it as His instrument to keep alive the knowledge of God in a world that tried to forget Him, and to prepare the way for the coming of His Son. It is quite fitting that the Isaiah Apocalypse should end with a section that again deals primarily with the nation of Israel.

Verse 2 introduced the figure of the vineyard, a figure sometimes used in other Scripture passages for Israel. In Isaiah 5, God expressed His disappointment with the people of Judah under the figure of a vineyard (note esp. vv. 1 and 7). In Matthew 21:33-43, Mark 12:1-2, and Luke 20:9-16, Jesus Christ used the figure of the vineyard to show how the nation of Israel had failed. He declared that the vineyard would be taken away from those who had proved unworthy of it and be given to other keepers, thus testifying in advance to the change that was about to take place. (In Rom. 11:17-24, Paul uses the figure of an olive Tree to represent the people of God. Though it would still include many who were Abraham's descendants according to the flesh, it was reaching out to include many non-Israelites). Here in Isaiah 27, God tells how faithfully He protected His vineyard, briefly

touches on its unfaithfulness, and surveys the future history of the nation that was falling so far short of His desire.

Verse 3 tells how God has protected Israel and preserved it from harm. In verse 4 He speaks of His readiness to defend it forcibly by destroying external adversaries, pictured as briars and thorns, that would seek to destroy it. In verse 5 he pleads with His people to come to Him for their refuge that He would gladly give them if they would be true to Him. In verse 6 He promises that in days to come Israel will yet bud and bloom and fill all the world with fruit.

Succeeding verses describe the efforts that will be made to destroy Israel by warfare and exile, but declare that such efforts will not succeed. Even Hitler's terrible persecution failed to destroy Israel; today it is stronger than when this powerful destroyer began his attacks. Although at present the olive tree is to a large extent made up of branches that were grafted in, God is still interested in His ancient people and has promised eventually to graft them in again (Rom. 11:24-26).

Verse 9 predicts the end of Israelite idolatry. Idolatry was conspicuous among the sins that led to the exile. Such pre-exilic prophets as Hosea, Isaiah, and Ezekiel (who prophesied in Babylonia during the years just before the conquest of the southern kingdom) devoted much time to assailing idolatry. Yet since the return from Babylon, Israel has been almost entirely free from this particular sin.

Verse 10 describes the long period of desolation that would come to the land of Israel for the sin of its people. Verse 11 shows the cause of this desolation and its result in centuries of misery. Yet verses 12 and 13 promise an eventual regathering of the scattered nation, a regathering which, it is promised, will eventually lead to their worshipping the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

Thus the Isaiah Apocalypse has surveyed many aspects of God's plan for the ages. It has constantly stressed that the power is all of God and that it can be received only through faith and trust in Him alone. God declared that He would never abandon the people to whom He made such great promises, but clearly indicated the outgoing of His grace to all peoples and all nations and showed that in the end His

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righteousness would be universally triumphant (Isa. 24:21-23; 26:19-27:1, and 27:12-23).

Isaiah 28-35

Chapter 28

Commentaries sometimes refer to Isaiah 28-35 as a section of miscellaneous promises and threats. Examination of the section, however, discloses that it is a closely knit unit with many striking parallels to the Book of Immanuel (chs. 7-12). It was given at the same general time as the Book of Immanuel, but is primarily addressed to a different portion of God's people. We found that the Book of Immanuel tells of God's promise that to provide His own perfect king to replace Ahaz and his successors on the throne of David. In this section Isaiah addresses himself to the leaders and rulers, and makes similar declarations about them.

The historical background of the Book of Immanuel was clearly stated at the beginning of chapter 7. There is no such statement at the beginning of chapter 28, but as we look through these chapters it becomes clear from allusions contained in them that the historical events in the background of the prophet's mind are exactly the same as in chapters 7 to 12. As a result of the danger from the attack by Syria and Ephraim the people of Judah are frightened. Ahaz and his leaders have formed a secret plan of making an alliance with the distant king of Assyria, in order that this great aggressor may attack Syria and Israel and thus free Judah from its present danger. In chapter 7 Isaiah assured Ahaz that God was perfectly able to protect His own country when and as He chose, but that the appeal to Assyria, instead of bringing protection, would merely remove the buffer states and thus lead to greater danger to Judah itself.

There is also a striking similarity in the general message of the two sections. We noticed that the primary message of chapters 7-12 was that the people should not look to these wicked alliances for protection, but should trust God who was abundantly able to give them safety if they would be true to him. There was also the much stressed note of God's rebuke upon Ahaz for his wickedness and lack of faith, and of God's determination that, in His own time, He would put his own Immanuel, "God with us," on the throne in place of Ahaz. In chapters 28-35 the message is not addressed to the king but to his nobles, and the rebuke and declaration of judgment are

similarly addressed, not to the king but to the leaders of the people. To them is given much the same message as was given to Ahaz, although from a slightly different angle.

It is stated at the beginning of chapter 7 that Isaiah went outside the city of Jerusalem in order that he might speak to the king when the latter was on a defense inspection trip, at a place where he could not very well refuse to listen to the prophet. We are not told where chapter 28 was spoken but examination of its contents makes it clear that it was spoken at a banquet of the nobles as they were celebrating the decision which had been made to secure help from Assyria against Syria and Ephraim. We can be sure that the mass of the people did not know what the nobles were celebrating. The nobles, however, were in high glee over the clever decision which had been made, and there was no limit to the extent of their celebration. Under these circumstances, the people had a certain amount of access to the banquet hall, and were doubtless given presents as a mark of the general happiness of the nobles. In this situation Isaiah could come into the banquet hall and begin to speak, and the nobles could not throw him out without risking the displeasure of the people.

This statement of the situation in which Isaiah 28 is spoken may seem a bit imaginary to some, but if they will read the following discussion of the message of the prophet and check it carefully with the words contained in the chapter there can be little doubt that they will be convinced that this is the true interpretation of the situation under which the chapter was spoken.

The Prophet's Tact

In reading the messages of the prophets we find that they often they show a great deal of tact in their manner of approach. Sometimes God leads them first to present something that will secure the approbation of those to whom they are speaking, and then to present a rebuke after respectful attention has been secured. This was the case when the prophet Nathan came to rebuke David. Instead of immediately rebuking him for his heinous sin in taking Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, and in causing Uriah to be

placed in the forefront of the battle, Nathan told David a story which aroused the king's indignation and led him to take a strong stand on the side of righteousness. Then the prophet pointed out that the king's situation was precisely identical to that against which he had declared his wrath, and David was ready to receive the message.

Similarly Amos, when he spoke at Bethel, did not begin with denunciation of the sins of the people of Israel, but first pointed out the sins and coming punishment of the people of the surrounding nations. After this had won the approbation and respectful attention of the people of Israel, he proceeded to show that they also were guilty in God's sight.

Again, we find in Isaiah 7 that when God sent the prophet to give to Ahaz God's condemnation of the wicked alliance with the ungodly Assyrians, Isaiah did not begin by denouncing Ahaz. Instead he began his message with words of encouragement, denouncing the enemy and promising God's protection to those who would be faithful. Here the situation is rather similar. He begins with denunciation of the Israelite enemy. Although Isaiah is speaking to the leaders of Judah, he begins with words of woe against the drunkards of Ephraim. He declares that their beautiful capital, Samaria, will be trodden under foot and become like a fading flower. The Judean nobles, who are anxious to arouse the patriotic zeal of the people in order that they will fight tenaciously to hold off the Ephraimite attack until Assyrian help will come, rejoice in this declaration of Isaiah since they feel that it will help them in their plans. As long as he is attacking others and saying nothing against them, and particularly when these others are the present enemies of their nation, they rejoice that his message should be heard.

We are not sure that they rejoiced quite as much in the message of verses 5 and 6, when Isaiah declared that a time was coming when the people would no longer find their crown of glory in the splendid situation of their city at the head of the fat valleys, or in their earthly plans, but in the Lord of Hosts, who Himself would give victory and judgment to those who are His own. However, it is likely that the apostate Judean nobles felt that, after all, this was a mere harmless bit of pious talk, and the prophet would soon return to his patriotic denunciation of the enemy nations.

Assyrian Invasion Predicted

Their hopes were disappointed. Verses 7 and 8 proceed to an entirely different message. The King James Version has an unfortunate translation at the beginning of verse 7, "But they also have erred." The American Standard Version is much closer to the original, "And even these reel with wine, and stagger with strong drink." The Hebrew contains the word "these," which is a strong demonstrative pronoun and doubtless indicates that Isaiah pointed directly to the banqueting nobles in front of him. He refers to the drunkenness and filth of these carousing leaders of the people, and indicates that they also are erring in their vision and stumbling in their judgment. We can readily imagine that this arouses the ire of the nobles. Some of them are probably inclined to throw the prophet out of the room.

Verses 9 and 10 are either the statements of the nobles as they criticize him or the prophet's own quotation of the criticism which these nobles are thinking: "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."

The meaning is clear. The nobles are glad to have the prophet come to denounce their enemies, but they do not want him to treat them as if they were little children, giving them his ethical precepts, "line upon line, here a little, and there a little," as to the sort of life they ought to lead. They are not interested in this sort of message from God, and they are grumbling about it.

Verse 11 also is better rendered in the American Standard Version than in the King James Version. The American Standard Version reads, "Nay, but by men of strange lips and with another tongue will he speak to this people." God has been speaking to them "precept upon precept" and "line upon line" by the clear simple teaching of the prophet. They refuse to listen to him; therefore, God will give them what sounds like stammering lips and another tongue. He will speak to them through the mighty attack of the Assyrian army, whose speech will sound like gibberish to the Judeans.

Verses 12 and 13 continue the rebuke to the people. God has given them the opportunity of securing rest and refreshment in following Him, but they would not hear. He has given them "precept upon precept" and "line upon line," but they were unwilling to pay attention to His desires. Therefore, they must hear Him speak in another way through the harsh and brutal commands of the wicked Assyrian invaders. These men that the leaders of Judah are calling in to help them against their neighboring enemies will prove ultimately to be the scourge of God against Judah itself.

A Covenant with Death

All this might not be altogether clear if we had only verses 11-13. Verses 14-22, however, make it absolutely clear. Verse 15 describes the idea of the nobles. They think that they have made a covenant with death and are at agreement with hell; they think that the fact that they have made an alliance with the wicked and ungodly Assyrians will give them protection, and that when the overthrowing scourge comes through it will not pass near them, "for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves." God, however, declares in verse 16 that the only real protection is in the foundation stone which God Himself has laid -- God's plan which heads up in His own Immanuel, the One in whom alone faith can be placed. The people have refused to receive their help and protection through God's provision, and therefore will have to meet the judgment of verse 17 -- righteousness laid to the plummet and judgment to the line. God's hail shall sweep away their refuge of lies and the waters shall overflow their hiding place. At this point we recall that Isaiah, in chapter 8:7-8, compared the coming of the Assyrians to a great river overflowing its banks and filling all the land and passing onward into Judah. Here he declares that the waters will overflow the hiding place of the Judean nobles, and in verse 18 it is shown that their covenant with the Assyrians will prove to be useless. It will be disannulled; the agreement with hell will not stand; the Assyrian scourge will actually come right over them. Verse 20 uses a homely illustration to show the impossibility of securing safety in this world through human means that

leave God out of consideration: "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." God Himself will rise up in supernatural power. As in the days of old when He performed His great works on Mt. Perazim and in the Valley of Gibeon, so will He again bring to pass His strange acts. In verse 22 we have a word of appeal to the people. Let them turn to God and cease from mocking and criticizing Him for talking to them like little children who must receive "precept upon precept" and "line upon line." Let them turn away from this scornful attitude and turn back to God. Unless they do so, God has decreed a great destruction.

The last seven verses of the chapter form a section by themselves. At first sight they do not seem to fit into the rest of the chapter, but on closer examination their meaning becomes abundantly clear. God is not a workman who does things in a haphazard way. His plans are perfect, and He works them out in consideration of the material with which He is dealing. The prophet reminds the people that the plowman does not plow forever. After he has plowed the ground he scatters his seed. When God has finished His present stage of dealing with the people He will begin the next stage. He will not plow forever; He will also plant. He will not plant forever; He will harvest in His own season. God has protected Judah all these years, but they must not think that He will do it forever if they continue in unbelief and refuse to obey His laws.

There is also another thought in these agricultural verses. The prophet points out in verses 27 and 28 that the farmer deals differently with different types of products. Some products are handled with sharp and strong instruments, while others are handled lightly and with care. God also will handle those who are outside His covenant with strong and overwhelming destruction, but His own people will be given chastisement rather than destruction. They can expect difficulty and trouble, but they can know that it is all part of God's plan to prepare them for their place in His kingdom. He does not thresh the bread corn nor break it with the wheel of His cart; He handles it carefully. The same is true of the remnant of His people -- that great number in the land of Judah who are true to Him. He will handle them with

gentleness but with firmness, and will bring His glorious purposes to pass.

Isaiah 29

It is doubtful whether there should be a chapter division between chapter 28 and chapter 29. The same message continues. Isaiah applies it to the city of Jerusalem, which he here calls by the mystic name of Ariel. He declares that Ariel is due to suffer trouble and difficulty, but not everlasting destruction. Verses 1-4 describe the city laid under siege, crushed almost to the ground, whispering out of the dust. Though the people kill sacrifices and go through all the forms of religion, honoring the Lord with their lips though their hearts are far from Him, it will not bring them any help; instead, they are to be crushed almost to the ground.

After this prediction of misery, we find a sharp change in verses 5-8. Although the Judeans are helpless to deliver themselves from the great number of the Assyrian invaders who are to come, God Himself is going to protect them. He is going to cause that the multitude of the terrible ones shall be like the chaff that passes away suddenly at an instant. The multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel shall be like a dream of a night vision. It will seem to the Assyrian king just as it seems to a hungry man who has been sleeping and dreaming of a great feast and wakes up to find that he has nothing.

This prediction, as we know, was literally fulfilled. The fulfillment is described in Isaiah 37. There we find that the king, Sennacherib, who led his tremendous hosts against the land of Judah and expected to conquer Jerusalem without much difficulty, found it impossible because of the intervention of God. In one night the angel of the Lord killed great multitudes of his soldiers; when he awoke in the morning they were all dead men, and he had to return to Assyria empty-handed.

It has been made clear that this deliverance is not to be given because of any good deserts on the part of the Judean nobles, but because it is God's own purpose to protect Ariel. Verse 9 continues with his denunciation of the wickedness of the nobles. They are drunk with wine, but he points out that

in addition "they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink," because they have turned away from God and are erring in their decisions from other causes as well as from intoxication. They are unwilling to listen to the Word of God. They have the book before them and could easily read it, but they refuse to do so. The man who is learned says, "I cannot read it for it is sealed," and the man who is not learned says, "I cannot read." The one who is learned does not bother to break the seals; the one who is not learned does not bother to take it to someone who can read it to him. How similar this is to the attitude of many people today, who have the Word of God and fail to read it, finding it more interesting to spend their time hearing the ideas of human beings than meditating on the Word of God. The punishment which God declares here against the Judean nobles is one which we today would do well to take to heart.

The prophet now proceeds, in verses 13-14, to give us a bird's eye view of God's future dealing with His people. He declares that He is going to do a marvelous work among them. He is going to cause the wisdom of the wise man to perish, and the understanding of the prudent man to be hid. This reminds us of the words of Isaiah 53: "Who has believed our report and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" The Apostle Paul declares in 1 Corinthians that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty" shall come to the knowledge of the truth. It is only those of humble heart, whether wise or ignorant, who can receive the Word of God.

Verse 15 refers again to the secret plans of the Judean nobles to deliver their land by alliance with a wicked power, while leaving God out of account. Their works are in the dark, and they say, "Who sees us?" and "Who knows us?" This is an utter turning upside down of God's method of doing things. They think that they are going to make plans which utilize wicked forces in order to accomplish what will be good. God shows that this cannot be done, that it is only as righteousness is triumphant that anything good will be accomplished. He Himself has created them. They are but the clay and He is the potter. He says that He can turn things upside down if He chooses, but that they are unable to do so. Then in verse 17 He declares that He actually will

turn things upside down. The exact meaning of this verse is not clear at first sight, but on close examination it becomes absolutely clear.

In the early part of chapter 29 Israel is particularly in view. The prophet has described the great disaster which will threaten Jerusalem, and the manner in which God will deliver His city without any human aid. Now he turns to the leaders of Israel and reproaches them for their forgetfulness of God. They have had every opportunity to know Him and to follow His commands, but have shown an attitude of indifference toward His desires. Because their honoring of God has been lip service rather than heart service, the Lord declares that He will cause their wisdom and understanding to perish.

The Judean nobles consider themselves very wise and think that they are using God for their own purposes; they are attempting to carry out plans for their own selfish purposes and using God's gifts as means to that end. In attempting thus to use Him they are acting as if He were the clay and they the potter. Verses 16 and 17 declare God's determination to prove that He is Himself the potter and that they are the clay, by performing a great overturning and utterly reversing the present conditions.

Israel has been God's fruitful field. Upon it He has lavished His love and His care. He has digged about His vineyard and cultivated it and preserved it. The Gentiles are like the forest of Lebanon, which is outside the covenant land of Israel. Now a marvelous work is to be done. Lebanon is to be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field to be esteemed as a forest!

Verse 17 can have no other meaning than that the people of Israel are to be treated as though they were outside of God's covenant, while those who were previously outside are to be brought nigh and to take a position as His own people.

This thought is further developed in verse 18. The previous verses have told us that these "wise" people, who have the law of God and are fully able to read it, have refused to do so, giving all sorts of excuses to hide their indifference. Those who are deaf are to be given the privilege of hearing the words of the Book, and those who are blind are to see out of obscurity and out of darkness. The heathen,

who had been outside of God's covenant, are now to be brought in and to take a foremost place among His people.

It is impossible to read these words without being reminded of the figure which the Apostle Paul gives in Romans 11 of the olive tree of which some of the branches were broken off and wild branches grafted in their place. Paul declares that a change took place in his day when the kingdom of God was taken away from those who had been God's own people and was given to strangers. However, He promises that the natural branches are again to be grafted in to their own olive tree, and that eventually all Israel shall be saved.

The close parallel to Isaiah 7 is also evident. There God pronounced His rebuke against Ahaz, the wicked king who, though occupying the throne of David, showed himself indifferent to David's relationship to God. God declared that in His own time He would replace this unworthy king with His own "Immanuel." Similarly, in Isaiah 29, He rebukes the wicked leaders of the people for their indifference to the Word of God. Professing themselves to be wise, they have become foolish; they are to be replaced with those whom they consider outside the pale.

Verses 19-21 show the meek and the poor among men rejoicing in the Holy One of Israel on account of His great judgments against iniquity and wickedness. Despite all the efforts of sinful men, God's plans will prevail and justice will be triumphant.

Verse 22 begins by reminding us that Abraham did not come into the family of God because of any goodness of his own, but because the Lord redeemed him. It is God's redemption and God's election which has caused Israel to be His people, and the God who did this is now exerting His sovereignty in other and unexpected ways. Nevertheless, He declares, "Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale." Jacob, who might be expected to be in misery over the apostasy of his children and the indifference of those who should be leaders of his people, is instead to find cause for rejoicing.

Verse 23 tells us why Jacob is to rejoice. In the midst of his people he is to see many who are specifically designated as "the work of mine hands." The true Israel is to be

increased by the addition of men who are not necessarily of the seed of Jacob according to the flesh, but who have been redeemed by the power of God, exactly as Abraham and Jacob themselves were redeemed. They are described as in a very particular sense the work of God's hands, because their inclusion in His family rests entirely upon His own mighty deeds of justification.

These who seem to be outside the pale -- these who are like Lebanon -- are to become a fruitful field, to take a place in the midst of the Israel of God, to sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and to fear the God of Israel.

Verse 24 concludes the chapter, looking into the still more distant future. The wise who turned away from God and became foolish have been cast aside, and the deaf and blind who were outside the pale were brought into the covenant of God. Verse 24 shows those who had erred in spirit also eventually coming to understanding, and those who were murmurers again receiving instruction (American Standard Version). It is a perfect parallel to the promise which Paul gives in Romans 11 that the natural branches of the olive tree, which have been broken off for a season, are again to be grafted into their own olive tree. Thus Isaiah 29 is a picture of the general course of the present age, closely paralleling that in Romans 11.

What a lesson there is for all of us in the declarations of this chapter! We can now look back and see how precisely the course of events here predicted has been fulfilled. We must realize that no one receives a place in God's kingdom solely because of birth or background, but only because of the marvelous electing grace of God. God is the potter and we are the clay. He works out His perfect plans. We have no righteousness of our own and deserve nothing good at His hand. For His own purposes God has chosen to take what was Lebanon, a forest, and make it into a fruitful field, and for a time to turn the former fruitful field into a forest. Let us not be high-minded, but fear, lest we also be cast out if we become forgetful of God. Let us rejoice that His own fruitful field is again to be brought back, and that the people of Israel as a nation are again to rejoice in God and to be saved through the marvelous redemptive grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 30

In the thirtieth chapter near and distant elements are so combined as to make it especially important that the historical background be kept clearly in mind.

It is impossible to say whether this chapter is a continuation of the same discourse or one given by Isaiah at a later time. It deals with events which follow within a few years. It is possible that it was written later on, but it is equally possible that it represents Isaiah's answer to the objections raised in the minds of the nobles while he was speaking at the banquet. It is as if they said to themselves: "He declares that our alliance with Assyria will bring us into great danger from that powerful aggressor. In that case we will simply turn to Egypt for help, and play off one of the great powers against the other." This was what they tried to do during the next few years. Isaiah begins chapter 30 with God's answer to the attempt of the Israelites to find help against Assyria from Egyptian sources instead of from Himself.

The chapter falls into four clearly defined sections. The first of these, verses 1-7, rebukes the people for failing to seek their help from God, and declares that their efforts to get help from Egypt will be of no avail whatever.

The beginning of verse 6 can be easily misunderstood, "The burden of the beasts of the south." The reader naturally remembers the many times in chapters 13-23 when a similar phrase is used to introduce God's declarations of doom against one of the heathen nations. Analogy suggests that here also we have a burden or declaration of doom by the Lord, and that it is against a nation referred to as "the beasts of the south." However, this makes no sense in the context, and it soon becomes clear that here "burden" is used in its simplest meaning and refers to the loads placed on the backs of the camels and donkeys which the Judeans would send southward to carry great presents to Egypt in the hope of securing Egyptian help against the Assyrians. The verse vividly describes the great amount of treasure to be sent to win the favor of Pharaoh, and declares that all this will be to no profit. Egypt will prove unwilling or unable to give material assistance against Assyria!

The second section of the chapter, verses 8-17, presents the Lord's condemnation of the leaders of the people for their indifference. The teaching of this whole part of the book of Isaiah is summed up in verse 15: "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." God is offering the Israelites salvation through simple trust in Him, but they are unwilling to accept it. They desire their prophets simply to be of assistance to them in carrying on their own schemes and plans. They are determined to trust in themselves instead of in God, and the result is that sudden destruction will come upon them (vv. 13-14).

Verse 17 gives a terrible conclusion to this section. Because the people have rejected God, they are to be thrown into such a state of panic and confusion that one thousand of them will flee at the approach of a single enemy and the whole nation will flee from five attackers. Yet He does not say that this will continue until the nation is entirely blotted out. It will continue "till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on an hill."

Thus, in the midst of the declaration of punishment, there is suggested a note of hope. Some of the nation are to be spared. A small remnant is to will continue and will stand as a witness to the whole world of God's judgment and of God's power.

How marvelously this verse has been fulfilled. The Assyrian and Egyptian empires of antiquity have sunk into the dust, but the Jew remains as an ensign upon a hill testifying by his very existence to the continuing power of God and His determination to carry out His purposes.

Millennial Blessing

The third section of the chapter, verses 18-26, develops this note of hope. Since the Lord is a God of judgment, He is now declaring justice and punishment in order that He may eventually be gracious and have mercy. Blessed are all they that wait for Him. A glorious future is promised to the people of Zion after the misery of the present judgment is passed. The promise looks far to a time that will come when the people will have

entirely turned away from idolatry and unbelief and will gladly follow the leading of the Spirit of God. It is to be a day of plenty and prosperity, a day of light and joyfulness. Verse 25 shows that this day is also to be introduced by great slaughter and falling of towers. The Millennium is not to come in gradually through the slow continuous spread of the Gospel, but is to be introduced by a great sudden act of God's power.

The final section of the chapter looks back again to the immediate situation. The terrible judgments predicted in verse 17 would have suggested that the Assyrian attack would cause the overthrow of Jerusalem. This, however, is not to be the case. The destruction there predicted remains in the more distant future. For the present God is determined to show His great power by delivering the people through His own strength alone. In chapter 29 it was indicated that the misery of the siege by the Assyrians would come to an end suddenly with a marvelous intervention of God. Here, this thought is stressed again. When the people are helpless to deliver themselves from Assyria, God is going to come with mighty power. "Through the voice of the LORD shall the Assyrian be beaten down, which smote with a rod" (v. 31). Verse 33 declares the terrible doom prepared for the king of Assyria. It is from God's voice and God's determination alone, and no credit for it is to go to human plans or human efforts. As we noticed in connection with chapter 29, this was marvelously fulfilled when the angel of the Lord destroyed the hosts of Sennacherib and delivered Jerusalem from him, as described in Isaiah 37.

Isaiah 31

Isaiah 31 might be described as a summary of Isaiah 30. Many of the same thoughts are repeated, with a few details added. The chapter begins where chapter 30 began, with rebuke upon those who seek their help from Egypt instead of from God. Verses 1-3 cover the ground dealt with in 30:1-7.

The remainder of the chapter deals particularly with the subject covered in the last section of Isaiah 30. Using many vivid figures of speech, the Lord shows how He is going to

deliver Jerusalem from the attack of Assyria. The power of the Lord is presented in verse 4 -- a power which nothing human can overthrow. Verse 5 describes the calm action of the Lord who need exercise no tremendous effort to accomplish His purpose -- "As birds flying, so will the LORD of hosts defend Jerusalem." Verse 8 shows that the Lord's purpose is not to be accomplished through human agency. The Assyrian will fall with the sword "not of a mighty man" and "not of a mean man." Verse 9 shows the Assyrians fleeing in fear before the power of the Lord. This verse contains an allusion to the beginning of chapter 29, where Jerusalem was called Ariel, which means "the hearth of God." Here, the Lord says that His fire is in Zion and His furnace in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the great scene of the outworking of His plan. Human efforts can accomplish nothing before the mighty power of God.

In this summary of the chapter we have skipped verses 6 and 7, which briefly parallel the third section of chapter 30, and indicate an eventual complete turning away from idols on the part of the people of Judah.

Thus chapter 31 is a summary and conclusion to the main themes dwelt upon in chapter 30, and drives home the lesson particularly as it relates to the immediate future.

Isaiah 32

The first verse of chapter 32 connects directly with the end of chapter 31, which gave assurance of the complete failure of the attempt of the Assyrian aggressor to establish a great world empire. It states that a world empire will indeed be established, but that it will be set up by God Himself, when He establishes His own king who will reign in righteousness and whose princes will rule in judgment.

Verse 2 tells us something about this king -- something, however, which hardly seems to refer to the time of his universal reign. In that period of glorious millennial prosperity, one will hardly need protection from those dangers which are here indicated by the figures of wind and tempest, for the king will put down everything that is destructive, and men will be able to sit in the open under their vines and fig trees with nothing to fear. Verse 2 is a beautiful picture of

protection from storms and from the terrible heat of the sun beating down upon the people. This protection is to be found in "a man"! It seems rather plain that this Man is the same One who is described in the previous verse as a King, and it is not at all unreasonable to consider that before he exerts his kingly power in putting down all that is wicked, he will be known as One through whom there can be found protection against winds and storm. He will be like "rivers of water in a dry place," and "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." It seems rather clear that we are here told of the great blessings which we have through Christ in this dispensation, prior to the time when He shall establish the great kingdom alluded to in verse 1.

It is interesting to note that verse 2 begins with the Hebrew word which is often translated "to be," but which more properly means "to happen, arise, or become." It is saying that a time will come in which there will be a Man who will perform these functions for those who put their trust in Him. In verses 3 and 4 we find the results of the activity of this Man. Those who believe on Him will find that, as they look, their eyes will not be dim, and as they listen, their ears will be able to hear clearly, because God will open their eyes and ears and will give them to understand His truth, as the result of the new birth that comes to all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 4 continues the description of the new birth. The hearts that were formerly obtuse will now be able to understand the knowledge of God, and the tongues that could not formerly present ideas clearly will now be able to speak out the praise of God through the Holy Spirit who will dwell in them.

Verses 5-8 describe the inevitable division of people into two classes through the preaching of the Gospel. It will become apparent that those who remain in their sins can properly be spoken of as vile or as churls, while those who are born again through Christ can be described as liberal, bountiful, or noble. The result of the preaching of the Gospel is that to some it is a savor of life unto life and to others it is a savor of death unto death. Moral distinctions will become more evident as people accept or reject the opportunity to put their trust in this Man.

The word that is rendered "liberal" in verses 5 and 8 in the King James Version simply means "generous" or "noble." In view of the various additional senses which the word "liberal" has taken on in recent years, it is perhaps better to follow the rendering of the American Standard Version which translates it as "noble."

Thus in this first section of chapter 32 (vv. 1-8) we see the declaration of the consummation of Christ's kingdom, when He shall reign over the whole earth in righteousness and His princes shall rule in judgment, and we also have a glimpse of the preceding period, when He, instead of putting an end to all danger and opposition, will be offering Himself as protection to all who put their trust in Him.

Rebuke to the Women

With verse 9 the prophet's attention reverts to the immediate situation. He delivers a stirring rebuke to those women who are taking an indifferent and careless attitude toward the Word of God. In days of prosperity when every thing is plentiful these women are failing to realize their dependence upon God and assuming that this period of abundance will continue forever. The prophet assures them that drought and famine are ahead, and that their joy will be turned into sorrow and lamentation.

In the King James Version, verse 12 does not seem very clear, but the rendering of the American Standard Version clears up all difficulty and is doubtless preferable.

With this passage we must compare Isaiah 3, with its rebuke against those women who are finding their pleasure in human adornment instead of in the will of God. Isaiah did not, of course, mean that women should not seek to be attractive. This is clearly God's will for them. What He criticizes is the attitude of making worldly adornment a final end in itself and a cause of pride and forgetfulness of God. Since the Judean women were doing that, they were to be told that their beauty would be turned into ugliness and that their men would be killed in battle in the midst of great calamities. After this Isaiah predicted the coming of a time when people would no longer find their great pleasure in worldly adornment, but instead would find their joy in the

coming one described in Isaiah 4:2, who is both the Son of God ("branch of the Lord"), and the perfect man ("fruit of the earth"). In chapter 4 the next verses described how He would protect His people from storm and rain. In the period described the dangers represented by storm and rain would still be present but His people would find protection and joy in Him.

Our present passage similarly declares that a time of depopulation is coming. Verses 13-14 vividly portray the desolation of the exile. The references to the coming up of thorns and briars and to the land being "a joy of wild asses" and "a pasture of flocks" remind us of the description of coming depopulation and exile in Isaiah 7:21-25. In verse 14 the Hebrew phrase translated "forever" does not necessarily mean "for eternity," but may mean "for an indefinitely long period in the future." Yet it hardly seems possible that a period so described can be comprehended simply in the length of the exile. The desolation seems to go on beyond the partial rebuilding which occurred at the return of Zerubbabel and was continued at the return of Ezra and Nehemiah a century later. It is pictured as continuing through all the "times of the Gentiles" when Israel's homeland is in a state of comparative desolation.

Pentecost Predicted

Verse 15 can easily be misunderstood if we take the conjunction "until," with which it begins, in our usual English sense of giving a terminus at which the thing described ends. The Hebrew word used here does not necessarily have this sense. Many passages might be quoted as proof, but one will be sufficient. In Genesis 19:37-38 this word is translated "unto" in the phrase "unto this day." It is stated that Moab is the father of the Moabites "unto this day," and that Ben-ammi is the father of the children of Ammon "unto this day." That certainly did not mean that they ceased to be the fathers of these people at the time when the book of Genesis was written. The relationship continued until that time and continued a great deal longer. We are thus warranted in understanding this preposition at the beginning of verse 15 as meaning that this condition will continue up to the time

when the event there described occurs, and perhaps much longer.

The fact that verse 15 does not necessarily mean an end to the condition described in verse 14 is quite important, because it is apparent that the verse is a description of the events centering around Pentecost. The first part of the verse -- "until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high" -- can be readily interpreted as describing the events on the day of Pentecost; the last part of the verse seems hardly to refer to any other event than that which occurred near the beginning of the spread of the Gospel, after the crucifixion of Christ. The last half of this verse is strikingly similar to Isaiah 29:17. It is better rendered in the American Standard Version than in the King James Version. The Hebrew word used here, which the King James Version translates "be" is better rendered in the American Standard Version as "become." The American Standard Version renders the last verb of the verse as "esteemed," and the King James Version renders it "counted." There is little difference in the meaning of these two English words in the context, but since the word "esteemed" is used for the identical Hebrew word in Isaiah 29:17, it is good to use it here also, so as to bring out the fact that the last half of Isaiah 29:17 and the last portion of this verse are identical. In Isaiah 29 we learned that Lebanon will be turned into a fruitful field and the fruitful field esteemed as a forest. Here we find that the wilderness will become a fruitful field and the fruitful field be esteemed as a forest. Very evidently the same event is indicated. In our discussion of that passage, we noticed that it was a description of the overturning which God predicted that He would bring when his Spirit would depart from the leaders of Israel and the apostles would turn to the Gentiles. In Romans 11 Paul would describe it as the cutting out of some of the natural branches and the grafting in of wild branches in their place. It is a complete overturning of the previous situation with regard to the Jews and the Gentiles. In Isaiah 29:17 the figurative expression, "the forest of Lebanon," which is often used as a figure for the great heathen powers, represented the Gentiles. Here "wilderness" is used similarly. Chapter 29 ended with a hint of the grafting in again of the natural branches into the olive tree. There is a similar

promise here in verse 16, pointing to the time when both the wilderness and the fruitful field will be included in the kingdom of God.

All Israel Saved

The first verb of verse 16 is peculiarly suited to describe the dwelling of God's judgment in the wilderness. It is not the ordinary word "to dwell," which usually has the sense of establishing a permanent abode, but a word which is used of dwelling in tents. It is the root from which we get the name of the "shekinah glory," the glory of the dwelling of God in His tabernacle. During the pilgrim journey of the people of God in this age, God dwells in their hearts in a way which is similar to the dwelling in tents of the Israelites in the wilderness, and to the dwelling of God in the tabernacle. Although, of course God's indwelling is permanent and will continue through this age and through the Millennium and forever, it is quite appropriate that it should be described here by this particular verb, because of the pilgrim character of our present time.

The verb translated "remain" in the latter part of the verse is the more usual Hebrew verb for dwell and is used more frequently of living in a settled habitation, although it may sometimes be used for living in tents. Unlike the first of these two words it is sometimes used with the meaning, "to sit." Its translation here as "remain," both in the King James Version and in the American Standard Version, is rather misleading since it suggests that there is something more continuous in the dwelling here described than in the dwelling mentioned in the first part of the verse. According to Young's Concordance, this second verb is translated "dwell" in the King James Version 434 times, "remain" 23 times, "abide" 69 times, "sit" 25 times, and in other ways a number of times, giving the general thought of continuous dwelling. Similarly, the verb used in the first part of the verse, according to Young's Concordance, is translated "dwell" 83 times, "remain" 4 times, "abide" 8 times, and occasionally in various other ways to give the general idea of dwelling. We thus see that while the one verb is used a great deal oftener than the other, the relative frequency of the idea of "remain"

or "abide" to that of "dwell" is approximately the same in both. It might be a more accurate representation of the original to say, "then judgment shall take up its dwelling in the wilderness and eventually righteousness shall take up its abode in the fruitful field." When the fruitful field is turned into a wilderness, God's judgment takes up its dwelling in what was formerly the wilderness, as the apostles turn to the Gentiles. However, as the verse tells us, the time is coming when God's righteousness shall again take up its abode in what was formerly the fruitful field, and "so all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:26).

Verse 17 describes the results of this indwelling of God's righteousness in the hearts of His people: "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever." This describes that peace of God which comes into the hearts of those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 18 we see the outworking of this peace in the external world. Only to a limited extent is this promise realized in the present age. God's people are entitled to peace within their hearts, but peaceable habitations and quiet resting places are not always found in this dispensation; often there is tribulation instead. This verse looks forward to its fulfillment after the return of Christ, when He shall put an end to all external danger and all His people will enjoy the blessing of universal peace.

The condition described in verse 18 is introduced by the outpouring of God's judgment depicted in verse 19. All that is contrary to His will is to be destroyed. The forest, typical of the great opposing world forces (cf. "Lebanon" in Is. 10:34), is overwhelmed by God's hail, and the city, typical of all civilization that leaves God out of account, is laid low. In the latter part of the verse the American Standard Version is preferable. This verse finds a limited fulfillment all through this age, but refers particularly to that great outpouring of God's wrath which immediately precedes the beginning of the Millennium.

Verse 20 gives the conclusion of this chapter's wonderful picture of God's dealing with His people in this age and on into the Millennium. In view of all that has been said, what is the duty of God's people? It is to carry the Word of God

out as widely as possible, in order that many shall be led into His glorious kingdom. "Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters." We are to sow the Word of Truth wherever we can, and also to send forth those who will take the Gospel to the far corners of the earth. Thus, in this context verse 20 is points both to missionary work and to personal evangelism.

Summary

In conclusion, let us briefly summarize the contents of this chapter in tabular form.

A. Verses 1-8

- 1) Verse 1 -- God's great world ruler who will establish the Millennium.
- 2) Verse 2 -- This king in the present age as the man in whom we can place our trust.
- 3) Verses 3 and 4 -- The new birth made possible through Him.
- 4) Verses 5 to 8 -- The resulting division of people into two classes -- those who are noble and those who are vile.

B. Verses 9 to 20

- 1) Verses 9 to 14 -- Judgment upon the women who are indifferent to God. Declaration that their prosperity is to be replaced by adversity and scarcity, and that depopulation and exile is to come.
- 2) Verse 15 -- Pentecost. The pouring out of God's Spirit and the reversal of the present relation of Jew and Gentile.
- 3) Verse 16 -- Eventually all are to be brought into His Kingdom.
- 4) Verse 17 -- The results of God's work in the hearts of those who believe in Him, whether Jew or Gentile.
- 5) Verse 18 -- The universal peace which will come to all of God's people in the Millennium.
- 6) Verse 19 -- God's destruction of all great powers that oppose Him.
- 7) Verse 20 -- The missionary call.

In the present section of the book of Isaiah (chs. 28-35), the chapters we have examined so far (chs. 28-32) have devoted a great part of their attention to the sin of the people in Jerusalem and to God's determination to punish them in the near and in the distant future. Chapter 32 ended with a wonderful vision of the outworking of God's Spirit in the age ahead, after the leadership of God's people would be taken away from the Judean nobles and given to others gathered from all the nations of the earth. In the rest of the section the stress is mainly upon God's deliverance of His people and the great blessings He has in store for them. Chapter 33 deals principally with events within the lifetime of Isaiah, placing most of its emphasis upon the wonderful deliverance from the armies of Sennacherib, -- a deliverance which God promised to perform without human aid.

Isaiah 33

Verse 1 contains a general statement regarding the future of the Assyrian Empire. This great aggressor which has dealt treacherously with so many nations is itself to fall through the treachery of its enemies. This result might be said to be foreshadowed in the defeat of Sennacherib's army, but finds its true fulfillment a century later, when Nineveh is destroyed and the Assyrian Empire completely ended. The principle contained in this verse may be applied to all who deal treacherously or who carry on aggression contrary to the principles of God's Word, but its specific application is only to Assyria.

Verse 2 contains a prayer. It deals not so much with the final outcome, which God has already revealed, as with a request that He will be gracious and give protection during the course of the events described. It is a prayer that His presence may abide with those who are trusting in Him. The latter part of the verse presents a difficulty in the fact that two different pronouns are used in it, "Be thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble." In the American Standard Version, "their arm" is changed to "our arm," and a footnote says "Hebrew their." This is hardly a satisfactory way to deal with the difficulty. There is no reason why the text should be changed. It is far better to

attempt to figure out exactly what it means. It is noticeable that the word "and" does not occur in the sentence. The word here translated "also" is defined in the standard Hebrew dictionary as a "conjunction denoting addition, especially of something greater." It is translated "how much more" in 1 Samuel 23:3. Our verse might be better rendered, "Be thou who art their arm every morning also our salvation in the time of trouble," or freely translated "Thou art their arm every morning; be thou also our salvation in the time of trouble." In all the events that occur in this world, God is in control. He uses the mighty Assyrian aggressor for His purposes; He uses the armies of the nations to carry out His will. How much more, then, may we pray to Him to be our salvation in the midst of trouble and to give deliverance and protection to those who are His own and who are trusting in Him.

Verses 3 and 4 vividly describe the fate that befell Sennacherib's army. When God lifted up His arm against it and multitudes of the troops died during the night, a great tumult arose. The people fled and the nations were scattered. The inhabitants of Jerusalem must have gone through the camp of the Assyrians like locusts as they exultantly gathered great amounts of spoil left after the departure of the few survivors.

Verse 5 praises the Lord for the wonderful things that He has done. By His defeat of Sennacherib, He has filled Zion with judgment and righteousness.

Verse 6 is addressed to Hezekiah, but its last phrase speaks about him in the third person. For some reason this seemed difficult to the editors of the American Standard Version, and they changed the expression "his treasure" to "thy treasure," and made a footnote "Hebrew his." Again, as in verse 2, the change of text is entirely unnecessary. In poetic discourse, such as makes up the greater part of the book of Isaiah, it is quite common to address an individual in one sentence and to speak about him in the next one.

Here Hezekiah is promised that in his time there will be stability with wisdom, knowledge, and strength of salvation. We know that Hezekiah instituted a great revival in the land. God blessed him with all manner of spiritual blessings, but financially his position was not good, as Sennacherib had

exacted a great amount of tribute from him before God intervened. Although gold and silver were no longer found in his treasury in abundance, "the fear of the Lord" was Hezekiah's treasure, as Isaiah points out in the latter part of the verse.

Recapitulation

The remainder of the chapter follows in general the same course of thought as has been briefly presented in verses 1-6. In verses 7-9 we see the situation of the land while Sennacherib and his army are there. We begin with the lamentation of Hezekiah's representatives who, as described in 2 Kings 18, went to Lachish, where Sennacherib's army was gathered, presented him with a great amount of tribute, and asked for honorable terms of peace. Instead of giving them such terms, Sennacherib sent his representative to Jerusalem to demand "unconditional surrender." It can well be imagined that the ambassadors who went seeking for peace returned weeping bitterly, as all Jerusalem was filled with terror and expectation of utter destruction at the hand of Sennacherib and his mighty army. Verse 8 tells of the end of all communication and travel in the land during more than two years, while Sennacherib's army was encamped at Lachish or in the Philistine plain. This period is vividly portrayed in Isaiah 37:30, where the people are described as unable to leave the city long enough to sow or reap but only occasionally able to rush out for a short time and gather what had grown by itself. They had constantly to be ready to rush back to the city at any moment, when they might see the advance of a raiding party from the Assyrian army. This continued, as described in that verse, for more than two years. It is no wonder that the land mourned and languished, as described in the ninth verse of the thirty-third chapter. The attractive portions of the country, Lebanon, Sharon, Bashan and Carmel, no longer produced fine wood or pleasant fruits. All were like a wilderness in the great misery of war and destruction.

Verses 10-12 picture the determination of God in the face of this terrible condition to give deliverance. Verse 10 points out that the time has now come when the Lord is determined

to intervene and to prove His supremacy and His power. The three-fold repetition of the word "now" in this verse is very striking.

Verse 11 vividly pictures the utter defeat of the Assyrian boaster's plans. It reminds us of the description in Isaiah 29:8, where the Assyrian king is dreaming of a great feast and then waking up to find that he is still hungry, since his dream of success was only a vision of the night. In verse 12 we see the melting away of his hosts. His people are but as the burning of lime; they disappear like thorns cut down and burned.

After God has declared in verses 10-12 what He is going to do, He then considers the thing as accomplished and in verse 13 He calls upon everyone, whether far or near, to see what He has done and to acknowledge His might. The results of the miraculous interposition by God's supernatural power are vividly described in verse 14. "The sinners in Zion are afraid: fearfulness has surprised the hypocrites." All these men who were going through the forms of religious life without meaning any of it are now filled with terror at seeing the reality of the power of God. It has become apparent that He is like a devouring fire, and they wonder who among them can endure in His presence. The answer is contained in verse 15. God cannot look upon iniquity.

A King in His Beauty

In verse 17, the prophet addresses the terrified people of Jerusalem and assures them that a different day for them is coming. Hezekiah, during the invasion, appeared to them as a man who was doomed. In imagination they could already see him carried in disgrace before the Assyrian king; possibly his eyes would be put out, as was done to many other captured kings. As he worked night and day, endeavoring to strengthen the fortifications and to encourage the people, he appeared like a man under a sentence of death. The prophet declared that he will not always seem like this. When God has performed His great work and Sennacherib's army has been destroyed, the people will again see Hezekiah as one reigning in glory. They will see a king in the beauty of his regal splendor. They the first part of this verse undoubtedly

refers directly and exclusively to Hezekiah after the invasion. In a secondary sense one may, of course, use it as a description of the wonderful blessings to which we look forward when we shall see the Lord Jesus Christ reigning in His beauty in that millennial age which all who believe on Him will share. We look with longing toward that glorious land which is far off from us now, and know that we shall see it with rejoicing. Yet this is not the direct meaning of the verse but only a secondary application, for in its context it refers to Hezekiah as God's representative, delivered from the threat of destruction by the Assyrian aggressor.

Verses 18-19 continue the description of the joy that will come after the downfall of the Assyrian. Verse 18 shows how the people of Jerusalem will look back over the time of terror through which they have gone. They "meditate" upon it, or, as the American Standard Version renders it, they "muse on the terror." It hardly seems real any more. This terrific danger which seemed certain to destroy them is now merely a memory of the past. It seems like a dream. They ask, "Where is the scribe? where is the receiver? there is he that counted the towers?" or, as the American Standard Version has it, "Where is he that counted, where is he that weighed the tribute? where is he that counted the towers?" It is possible to apply these words either to the representatives of the Assyrians or to the Israelite officials themselves. Doubtless the people occasionally saw the Assyrian representatives come within sight of the city to look upon its towers and count them and figure up just how large a force it would take to destroy them. The ambassadors told how the Assyrians had weighed out the tribute which was sent in vain by Hezekiah. The words might conceivably also include the Israelite tax collectors or the officials who counted out the ancient equivalent of ration points as they divided so carefully the little food which was available. The expressions are, from any viewpoint, a vivid description of the careful reckoning in the days of war when disaster seemed so near.

In view of the three-fold repetition of the word where in the questions here and of the use of the word scribe, it has been thought by many that Paul was thinking of this passage when he wrote 1 Corinthians 1:20: "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world?" Although

Paul does not quote the verse directly, it is extremely likely that it was in his mind. Isaiah pointed out how all the human figuring and planning came to nought as God by His marvelous intervention destroyed the army of Sennacherib. Paul also pointed out how all human plans and schemes prove worthless in the face of the marvelous intervention of God who gave salvation through the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross and through that alone. In both instances, God made foolish the wisdom of this world.

We have seen that the receivers of tribute will become but a memory. Verse 19 continues the description of the enemy who will disappear: "Thou shalt not see a fierce people, a people of deeper speech than thou canst perceive; of a stammering tongue, that thou canst not understand." The verse reminds us of Isaiah's words in chapter 28 at the banquet of the nobles a few years before this terrible Assyrian invasion. At that time when they thought that their clever scheme of securing help from Assyria would bring an end to all their troubles, Isaiah pointed out that the Assyrian would in the end be a menace to Judah itself. He declared then that people who would not listen to the simple teaching of God through His prophet would be taught "with stammering lips and another tongue." In the invasion of Sennacherib, this terrible experience has been theirs; now God will deliver them, and the invasion of brutal aliens will be at an end.

The Tent Not Torn Down

In verses 20-24, the attention of the prophet is turned to Zion. It is promised that the people will no longer see it as a city menaced by the forces of war, but rather as "a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down." It is worthy of note, however, that while it is described as a city that is not going to be taken down, the word tabernacle is still used. It is not a permanent dwelling place, but a "tabernacle." The Hebrew word is the same word which is elsewhere translated "tent." It is a temporary abode. For the time being, God's people are secure there. The stakes of this tent are not going to be removed or its cords broken down. It had seemed to be in danger of being completely destroyed.

Now the promise is given that it is to continue a while longer.

A portion of the English of verse 20 suggests something more permanent. We note the words *not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed*. The phrase *not one of* is not in the Hebrew. The American Standard Version is somewhat better here, for it simply says "the stakes whereof shall never be plucked up." Yet both of them, in using *ever* or *never* fail to get the exact meaning of the original. The Hebrew word is preceded by the preposition *for*, and should be rendered "forever" or "perpetually." The phrase is better translated "the stakes shall not be perpetually plucked up" or "removed forever." It does not suggest that the city is never going to be destroyed. As a matter of fact, we know that one hundred fifty years later, God Himself caused Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the city for the sin of the people and to take them into exile. What the passage means is that this city did not suffer from Sennacherib the same fate which other cities suffered at his hands. Those cities he utterly destroyed and left as a perpetual desolation. He pulled up their stakes forever. That he was unable to do to Jerusalem. We should note also that the word here translated "ever" is not the word usually so translated in the Old Testament. Observation of the few instances of its use listed under "EVER-," or under "EVER, for-" in Young's Concordance (entry no. 1 under both words) makes striking the comparison with the greater number of instances in which other words are so translated. Two interesting instances of its use may be cited. One of these is Jeremiah 15:18, where the prophet, complaining of the very bad treatment which he is receiving at the hands of those who refuse to accept his message, says, "Why is my pain perpetual?" We may note also Amos 1:11, where the prophet tells of God's judgment against Edom, because Edom, which became angered against Israel long before, continued to show enmity against his brother. This thought is expressed in the words and he kept his wrath forever. Clearly there is no thought of eternity in either of these two passages.

Verse 21 is rendered better in the American Standard Version than it is in the King James Version. It does not mean that God is going to be a place. The American Standard

Version reads: "But there Jehovah shall be with us in majesty, a place of broad rivers and streams." Jerusalem, which is on the top of the mountain, far removed from rivers or similar lines of communication, is to receive the blessings of accessibility which are possessed by such cities as Thebes and Ninevah, situated on the banks of great rivers. God will bring similar blessings to the people of Jerusalem, but will not bring with them the dangers which are apt to come with the advantages of the rivers. The last part of the verse declares that upon these rivers, which are imagined as being about Jerusalem, there will not come any galley with oars or any gallant ship. No warship will steam up to Jerusalem and take it. God is going to protect it.

Verse 22 describes the reason for the safety of the people: "The LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us." As long as they trust in Him and obey Him, they are safe. This has been proven in the defeat of Sennacherib's army.

In verse 23 we return to the figure of the gallant warship attacking the city. The Assyrian host, pictured as such a ship, is addressed, and its defeat by God's power is described: "Thy tacklings are loosed; they could not well strengthen their mast, they could not spread the sail." The downfall of the Assyrian host is further depicted: "then is the prey of a great spoil divided; the lame take the prey." Here again we have stress upon the fact that it was not by great human power that the Assyrians were driven back. Even those who could be described as cripples or lame are here mentioned as taking the prey. It is God's power and not man's power that has delivered Jerusalem.

Verse 24 describes the wonderful jubilation after the victory. People no longer feel that they have upon them a sickness which is going to lead to destruction and death. God has delivered them and they have been forgiven their iniquities. Hezekiah took the lead in a great revival in the land. Would that the people had continued to rejoice in God. Unfortunately, we know that this was not the case. During the reign of Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, the people turned away from God and followed abominations. It was necessary for God to punish them, and in the end to bring the ferocious Nebuchadnezzar as His instrument.

We have seen that the immediate teaching of chapter 33 relates entirely to the days of Hezekiah. Yet few chapters of the Bible have more vital lessons for us today. All the principles which characterized God's dealings with His people then are true today. If we trust in Him and obey Him, He is ready to deliver us from every evil and to bless us with all spiritual and material blessings. When everything looks black, He can drive away the clouds by His marvelous power, and give us deliverance far beyond what we could ask or think. Yet our life here is only a pilgrimage journey. What really matters is that we have Him for our lawgiver and king, and that through Christ we be forgiven our iniquity.

Isaiah 34-35

Isaiah 34

In this entire section of the book of Isaiah (chs. 28-35), we have seen the great importance of the historical background. The prophet has repeatedly concerned himself with events of his own day, and has described God's will in relation to them. Every now and then these events have been a starting point from which he has looked into the far distant future and has told how God will manifest His righteousness and His love in days to come. Hardly a chapter can be fully understood without careful consideration of the immediate situation.

Chapters 34 and 35 are quite different. As the climax and conclusion of the section, they contain very little which relates directly to the immediate historical situation. Instead, the prophet gives a view of great future events and holds them up before the eyes of God's people for their encouragement and comfort.

The two chapters form companion pictures. Chapter 34 shows God's judgment upon all the evil forces of the world, and describes His overthrow of a great coalition of wicked nations at the end of the age. Chapter 35 shows the ultimate glory and blessing which God will provide for His own.

Chapter 34 begins with a ringing call to all the nations to come together and see the results of God's indignation against the evil forces that oppose Him. It is His desire that all the

world shall witness the display of His great power and justice.

The next three verses vividly picture the overwhelming destruction of mighty armies. The closest parallel to this description is found in the latter part of Revelation 19, which portrays the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ over all the forces of wickedness before He establishes His great millennial kingdom.

Just about the only specific references in chapter 34 are those to Edom in verses 5 and 6. It is most probable that these verses do not refer to the Edomites as a people but to Edom as the land where the great judgment is to fall upon the armies of the wicked nations.

The succeeding verses describe the desolation which will follow God's victory. This desolation may be conceived as applying in particular to the land of Edom, where the great overthrow is to take place; yet in a sense it includes all the nations which oppose God and His will. Their power is to be reduced to utter nothingness, and some of their great palaces are to become merely abodes for wild animals. Vivid word pictures of the desolation are painted; the headquarters of sophistication and wickedness are to become the haunts of wild beasts.

Verses 16 and 17 strongly declare the certainty of these upheavals. God's people are exhorted to read the predictions in the book of the Lord. Not one of them will fail and none will lack its adequate fulfillment. All His declarations of the doom and destruction of what is wicked will come to pass. The building up of great ungodly forces may succeed during the present age, but the age will end with their complete destruction, giving absolute proof that whatever God had declared will be fulfilled in every detail.

Isaiah 35

In chapter 35 we find the opposite picture. It might well be called the great chapter of comfort. It is addressed to any of God's people who are oppressed by the temporary victories of evil and wickedness and tempted to cry out, "How long, O Lord?"

Verses 1 and 2 give a ringing declaration in general terms of the change of what is now a desert into a place of beauty. They contain a marvelous general picture of the glory of the millennial kingdom of Christ, portraying the blessed condition of those portions of the earth where God's people will live and be active. It hardly seems likely that they describe a condition of the earth as a whole, since chapter 34 describes the desolation of Edom as something that will continue for a long time. The ruins of the centers of wickedness will be a perpetual object lesson of the futility of opposing God and His righteousness. It may be noted that there was nothing in the description in chapter 34 inconsistent with removal of the curse from the entire earth. The wild animals there pictured are not said to be ferocious. Loneliness and desolation, not violence or danger, characterize the ruins.

With the wonderful picture in verses 1 and 2 before us, verses 3 and 4 contain an exhortation. When we are tempted to give way to weakness and despair, we should strengthen the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees, because we can know that God is certainly going to come with power and establish His wonderful promises.

The remainder of the chapter vividly portrays the great change in human life during the Millennium, when the curse is removed. There will be no more blindness or lameness, for each of God's people will have a resurrection body. No lion or ravenous beast will be found there. Streams will break out in the desert, and there will be established a way of holiness so plainly marked "that the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein."

Even in our pilgrim walk during this age we are constantly surprised at finding "streams in the desert." Springs break forth in unexpected places, giving us tastes of God's blessing and assurance of His presence. Yet during this age our highways are often beset with lions and we find dragons hiding in the tall grass. Sometimes it is necessary that we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, with sorrow and sighing all around us. In these situations God is present as our stay and comfort. We can always lean upon Him and be strengthened with His power. A great additional source of strength comes in the knowledge that He is going to fulfill the wonderful promises of this chapter and that the power

and grace of God will eventually be made manifest to all the world in that glorious millennial age which is here so beautifully described.

Only the redeemed are to share in this wonderful happiness which He promises. Only those who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and have been saved through His atoning sacrifice can look forward with joy to the glorious blessings described in this chapter. Then they will be able to come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy will be on their heads, though now they may have sorrow and sighing. All sorrow and sighing will flee away, because God will establish His wonderful kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy.

In these two chapters two pictures are presented to the reader. Are you sure which of them describes your own future? Is your lot cast with those who are opposing God, and who eventually are to meet with total destruction at His hand? Are all the wonderful plans you are building doomed to end in chaos, destruction and confusion. Will the center of all your hopes be given over to wild beasts for their habitations? If this is your situation you would be wise to read chapter 34 and ponder carefully over the terrible picture it contains. The step from chapter 34 to 35 is a small one, but an extremely important one, for it can result in your life being entirely changed. Look to the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. Believe on His Name and join the great army of the redeemed. Thus you may, in an instant, become one of the ransomed of the Lord. You will then come to Zion in that glorious day that is promised, and you will have a part in the wonderful millennial kingdom of Christ described in chapter 35.

This wonderful picture of climactic blessedness ends this glorious section of Isaiah's book.

Isaiah 36-39

We now come to a part of the book of Isaiah which is different from any other. It is the historical section which separates the two main portions of the prophecy. This part might well be entitled "The Prophet at Work" since it gives more of the historical background of the prophet's actions and tells more about the results which followed these actions than any other part of the book. Careful study of this section makes it easier to understand the other parts of the book of Isaiah

There is a parallel to these chapters in 2 Kings 18 and 19 and another in 2 Chronicles 32. The one in 2 Chronicles gives much of the same material in different words and includes some additional historical facts. The one in 2 Kings is almost identical in wording with many of the verses here.

The section is naturally divisible into two parts, each of which contains two chapters. The first of these -- chapters 36 and 37 -- describes the great threat against Jerusalem by King Sennacherib and the deliverance through the marvelous interposition of God. We have noticed that this event was predicted in various ways in earlier chapters of the book. These two chapters are particularly interesting since they show how remarkably those predictions were fulfilled.

Isaiah 36:1 tells of Sennacherib's coming in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah. The following verses may deal with events that happened a good many years later. It is probable that Sennacherib was not yet king of Assyria the first time he led an attack against Judah, but only general of the armies under his father. Perhaps his father had associated him with him on the throne, though keeping the main power in his own hands; in either case it would be entirely proper to carry back the title of king of Assyria to days when Sennacherib was not yet king.

The account passes over the many years of small attacks by the Assyrians and comes to the great attack which threatened the complete destruction of Jerusalem.

Both 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles give details of the beginning of the attack which are passed over by Isaiah. 2 Kings 18:14-16 tells how Hezekiah tried to placate the king of Assyria by sending him a great amount of tribute. We noticed references in Isaiah 33:7 to the mourning of "the

ambassadors of peace." This is doubtless a reference to the feelings of the men Hezekiah sent to attempt to make an honorable peace with Sennacherib, after they found that Sennacherib would be satisfied with nothing but unconditional surrender and the death of Hezekiah. 2 Chronicles 32:2ff tells how Hezekiah prepared for the expected attack by Sennacherib and how he dug a tunnel to bring water into the city so that the besiegers would not have a plentiful supply outside, while those inside would be able to avoid danger from thirst. Archeology has thrown interesting light on this action of Hezekiah, through the discovery in 1880 of the Siloam inscription, which gives a vivid idea of the haste of Hezekiah's men in building this tunnel in expectation of a terrible attack by the Assyrians.

In verse 2 of chapter 36 it is interesting to note that the place where the envoy of Sennacherib stood to talk to the representatives of Hezekiah was "by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field." This is the very place to which Isaiah had gone out, some years before, to meet Ahaz and to predict the inevitable results of his alliance with Assyria. Undoubtedly that is why the place is so precisely mentioned both in Isaiah 7:3 and here. What memories must have thronged Isaiah's mind as he saw this terrible drama at the very place where he had predicted the danger a few years before!

A Thrilling Rescue

The attack of the king of Assyria and his repulse by the power of God alone is one of the most thrilling events in all history. Who has not read Byron's poem, "The Assyrian Came Down Like the Wolf on the Fold"?

There are a number of interesting features of this attack which are less commonly known than its outstanding events. Thus the length of time through which the events described in these chapters extended is much longer than is realized by many Bible students, unless they have taken the trouble to read the passage with great care. Some have the impression that the Assyrian army came and attacked Jerusalem, that Isaiah prayed, and that in the following night God destroyed the army. The fact that this is an erroneous foreshortening

of the history is made clear by the prediction which Isaiah made in the thirtieth verse of the thirty-seventh chapter where he said, "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." Here Isaiah declares that the promise that God will deliver Jerusalem from the attack of the wicked Assyrian king will be fulfilled after about two years. The people would be closely shut up in Jerusalem for about two years, unable to venture far from its walls, since bands of Assyrians would occasionally come into the area, though the main Assyrian army was encamped about thirty miles away in the Philistine plain. The king of Assyria was busy taking other cities of Judah, capturing Philistine cities, and making preparations for an attack on Egypt. Jerusalem expected that any day it might be attacked; from time to time King Sennacherib sent envoys with boastful and blasphemous messages designed to scare the people into submission while sparing him the necessity of an actual attack. No real siege was brought against the city, but it would certainly have occurred soon if God had not intervened after the two year period of terror. Sennacherib had conquered far stronger cities than Jerusalem; no human force would have been able to deliver it.

The picture of the boastful and blasphemous character of the king of Assyria in these two chapters fits exactly with the picture of himself which he gives in his annals, where he describes his exploits in terms which boast that no one on earth can be considered as his equal.

God's Method

In Isaiah 37:36 we are not told how God smote the Assyrians. The statement reads: "Then the angel of the LORD went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses." It would be most natural to think of some sort of swift plague as the method the Lord used to free Jerusalem from this menace. There is a story told by Herodotus about this same King Sennacherib which he heard in Egypt. According to this

story, after Sennacherib made great preparations for an attack against Egypt, when the two armies were facing each other near Egypt's northeastern entrance, a great horde of field mice attacked Sennacherib's army in the night and ate the strings of their bows, thus rendering them unable to fight. It is interesting that this Egyptian tradition of a marvelous destruction of the power of an Assyrian army should refer to the same king as the account in the Bible. The mention of mice has led many scholars to think that probably the instrument the Lord used to destroy the Assyrian army was bubonic plague. All this is conjecture. What is clear is that the Bible says that a great visitation of God destroyed the great mass of Sennacherib's army and ended the Assyrian king's attempt to conquer Jerusalem.

While the records of King Sennacherib boast without measure of his great conquests of other cities, many of them larger and more powerful than Jerusalem, the best that he can say about Jerusalem is to claim that he shut Hezekiah up in it "like a bird in a cage." It is a pretty weak thing to boast about and is mute recognition of the fact described in this chapter that he was unable to conquer Jerusalem, even though he did not tell the reason why.

A minor point of interest is the fact that Isaiah 37:37-38 says that Sennacherib "went and returned and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his God, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword." Although the verses do not say that he was assassinated immediately after his return, many readers might erroneously make such an inference. Actually about twenty years passed before Sennacherib was slain.

So we see that the events described in these two chapters run through many years, since they begin with the first attack of Sennacherib against Judah and end with his death about twenty years after his final great invasion of Palestine.

The last part of our section -- chapters 38 and 39 -- deals with other events in the life of Hezekiah which probably occurred prior to the attack which takes up the bulk of chapters 36 and 37. Thus here, as at many other points in the Bible, the order is logical rather than chronological.

Isaiah 38 and 39

Chapter 38 describes Hezekiah's sickness and his wonderful recovery. That experience must have greatly strengthened his faith and prepared him for the trying days ahead.

How often faith leads to presumption! After God raised Hezekiah up, he fell into two great errors. One was to place his confidence in ungodly men whom he considered to be united with himself because they also were opposed to Assyria. The other was to glory in his possessions instead of giving all the credit to God. His rebuke for these errors may also have had a part in preparing him for the crisis ahead.

In chapter 39 we learn about these two serious mistakes of Hezekiah, which occurred in connection with the embassy of Merodach-baladan to congratulate him on recovery from his sickness. Undoubtedly the real purpose of the king of Babylon was to solicit Hezekiah's help in an uprising against the king of Assyria. Hezekiah was happy to show these envoys all his treasures, since he looked upon them as his allies in opposition to Sennacherib. Babylon was at this time a weak power, usually under the control of the Assyrian king, although sometimes in revolt during short periods of independence. God enabled Isaiah to predict to Hezekiah that this seemingly insignificant state of Babylon would be the place to which the descendants of Hezekiah would be taken as prisoners. He declared that it was not the great Assyria but the seemingly unimportant Babylon which would finally destroy the kingdom of Judah.

This prediction was probably given before the great invasion of Sennacherib. There are two reasons for the order of the sections here. One is a logical reason: chapters 36 and 37 deal with the great political events of the invasion by Sennacherib, and chapters 38 and 39 give the more personal touches. The second reason is that the passage thus ends with the prediction about the going of the people into captivity to Babylon, thus making an excellent end to the first thirty-nine chapters of the Book of Isaiah in which the attacks of Assyria occupy so outstanding a position, as well as an excellent introduction to chapters 40-66, in which deliverance from the Babylonian exile has so prominent a place.

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The structure and general attitude of these chapters is quite different from those in the earlier portions of the book.

Isaiah 40-66

With chapter 40 we enter a section of the book of Isaiah which is very different from all that has preceded. The difference is so great that it has led some to think that they were not written by Isaiah but by someone who lived a century or more after his time. From this developed the idea of "the two Isaiahs." However, there are very few today who believe in the theory of "two Isaiahs" as it was held a few decades ago. Most of those who now deny the unity of the book divide it up among many authors. Some of these writers are said to have written large sections and others only a few verses.

We do not have space here to discuss the arguments for and against a multiple authorship of the book. It must suffice us to point out that they fall under three heads. The first includes those from the differences in historical background. This is the most important of the arguments.

The second type of argument is said to be based upon comparison of style and phraseology. Arguments of this second type are extremely technical and usually fail to produce conclusive evidence. While certain differences of phraseology and expression are found in the second part of Isaiah, as over against the first, there are also many remarkable similarities of expression. In fact all parts of the book are so similar in general form of expression that it would be quite easy for one to recognize almost any part of the book as different from other books of the Old Testament.

The third type of argument is based upon the claim that there is a difference of theological viewpoint between the two portions of the book. This argument requires examination of many passages and rests to a large extent upon philosophical presuppositions. The most important of the three arguments for multiple authorship comes from the difference of historical background. We shall briefly glance at this argument.

A Different Historical Background

It is undeniable that Isaiah 40 to 52 has in general a very different historical background from that of the earlier portions of the book.

The earlier chapters contain many passages in which the people are strongly rebuked for their sin. In these later chapters such passages occur comparatively seldom. The earlier chapters include frequent statements that God is going to send the people into exile for their sins. In the later portion we find no such prediction; instead it is assumed that the people are already in exile for their sins, and emphasis is laid on the promise that God will deliver them from this captivity.

In the first part of the book there are many mentions of the Assyrians as the great enemy from whom danger is apparent. In the latter chapters the Assyrians are rarely mentioned but there are many references to the Babylonians (also called Chaldeans). The people are considered as in bondage to the Chaldeans, but soon to be rescued by the hand of God. Thus we see a marked difference in historical standpoint between the first and second portions of the book. This can only be explained in two ways. The explanation proposed by the critics is that the latter part of the book is written by a different author at a later time, after the exile has been in progress for many years. The other view is that Isaiah himself wrote it, but that in writing it he had primarily in mind the purpose of giving comfort to his countrymen after they would go into exile, and also of promising that God would deliver them from this exile.

If we take this latter view -- and it must be taken by all who hold to the unity of the book -- it is necessary to ask ourselves whether there would be any purpose in Isaiah's writing something which would have particular reference to a situation that would not exist until a century after his time. No one who believes in God can deny that God might, if He chose to do so, have dictated to Isaiah word for word a long book meant for people of a later age. However we must recognize that this is not the usual method by which God gave the prophetic writings. We have seen that ordinarily the prophets deal with the events of their own time. The marvelous glimpses of the future which God gives them are meant in the first place as an answer to situations in their own day, and secondly, as help and guidance for the people of God in later ages. Is such a view of these chapters also possible? It is my conviction that it is.

Isaiah's Purpose in Writing These Chapters

I am convinced that these chapters, although dealing with events more than a century after Isaiah's time, had a very definite purpose in relation to the people of his own day. We have noticed that Isaiah had two objects before him in writing the earlier chapters of the book. One was to declare to the nation as a whole its sin against God and its duty to repent, and to tell it that God would punish it for its sin by sending it into exile. The other was to give comfort to the believers and to assure them that God had great plans for blessing those who would be true to him. Many people were loyally supporting Isaiah and individuals from the multitude of the people of Judah were constantly being won to God, though, in general, his message was not well received. More and more it was becoming apparent that the people were turning away from God. The terrible prediction of Isaiah 6:9-10 was being fulfilled, and it was clear that the exile predicted in 6:11-12 would inevitably follow.

After the death of Hezekiah, his wicked son, Manasseh, became king, and it was soon clear that the nation as a whole was apostate. 2 Kings 21 tells us how very bad conditions became at this time. According to Jewish tradition, Isaiah was actually sawn asunder by the henchmen of the wicked king. After the death of the good king Hezekiah it must have become absolutely clear to Isaiah that the nation as a whole was not going to repent and that the exile was inevitable. This would also have been obvious to the true people of God who were loyally following the prophet. Under these circumstances there was no longer a need to bring the message of rebuke and condemnation to the people as a whole. That had already been done. Now the great need was to bring words of comfort and hope to the true people of God who were following Isaiah.

There is a foreglimpse of this purpose in Isaiah 8:16 where the prophet is ordered to seal up the truth and bind up the testimony among his disciples, in order to keep the Word of God alive during difficult days. These loyal followers of the Lord, as they heard from Isaiah the message of doom and destruction against Jerusalem for its sin, and saw the increasing wickedness of the people, must have felt as if the

exile was already upon them. They knew that it was absolutely inevitable and they tended to despair and to think that the nation was absolutely finished. They might even be tempted to question God's power and even His existence, as they saw more and more of the nation turning away from Him to wicked acts and deeds and thoughts. Their frame of mind would thus be very similar to that of the true believers a century later, after they had gone into captivity. Those people would see the land in ruins, the temple destroyed, nearly everything in Judah a desolation, and themselves enslaved, impoverished, and transported to a distant land. In the distant land they would wonder whether there was any future for their people and would be tempted to despair even of the existence of God and of His power. Thus the message of Isaiah, that God was going to deliver His people -- the message which would comfort the true people of God, sorrowing in exile a century later -- was also needed to comfort the true people of God in the days of increasing apostasy.

It would have been possible for God to dictate to Isaiah a message containing many elements of historic fact which were not known in his day, but this would be unusual. God does give the prophets glimpses of particular truths of future days, but the messages as a whole generally bear relation to their own times. We find this also to be true in Isaiah 40 and the chapters which follow. Aside from the one marvelous revelation of the name of Cyrus, the great king whom God would send to deliver the Israelites from their bondage, there is hardly anything in these chapters of factual background which might not already have been known to Isaiah.

We must not forget that in Isaiah's day the northern kingdom had already gone into exile. Doubtless he had talked with refugees who had told him of the terrible sufferings of the people of the kingdom of Ephraim as they were carried off into cruel bondage by the Assyrians. Occasionally someone would come from the land to which the Assyrians had taken them, bringing to Jerusalem news about their suffering and misery. As Isaiah heard these stories of the fate of the people of the northern kingdom and knew that a similar fate awaited the people of his own land, he could not but have looked to God for comfort and consolation in the face of this inevitable catastrophe. As the increasing wickedness

of the people of Judah made it necessary for Isaiah and the true people of God to be more and more limited to secret meetings and private discussions, God enabled the prophet to give wonderful messages of hope to those who were standing true and these same messages would bring God's consolation to the people later on, after they had actually gone into exile.

Exile to Babylon

One other fact of importance must be noticed. We saw that chapter 39 ended with the prediction that the people of Judah would go into bondage, not to the great power of Assyria but to the distant city of Babylon. We saw how impossible it must have seemed to the people of Isaiah's day that this city, which itself was then subject to Assyria, would become independent and grow strong enough to take the people of Judah into captivity. This was a wonderful element of specific prediction which God gave through Isaiah to the people. In the arrangement of the historical section, chapters 36 to 39, this prediction is placed at the end of the section, although chronologically its utterance probably was earlier than some of the other events described in this passage. It is placed at the end in order to form an introduction to the words of consolation which follow as Isaiah assures the true people of God that the exile is not the end but that God is still with His people and that there is a marvelous future still ahead for them. So we must say that while the historical background of Isaiah 40 to 52 is that of people already in exile, with their city destroyed and the temple in ruins people longing for deliverance and tending to despair of God -- there is no reason why the passage might not have been written by Isaiah himself almost a century before the exile even commenced. That is what the Christian Church and the Jews have believed, all through the ages, about this part of the book of Isaiah.

The Unity of Isaiah 40-66

We have noticed that the book of Isaiah is divided into two large sections of prophecy which are separated by a historical section made up of chapters 36 to 39. The first of these main

prophetic sections, chapters 1 to 35, is, in turn, divided into several smaller sections, most of which spring from a particular historical situation. These situations consist mostly of a particular act of a king, or a particular danger of war, or some matter of immediate concern. Chapters 40 to 66 are different: in them we find no mention of a relationship to a particular incident that occurred during the lifetime of Isaiah. The entire section deals with the great problem of the exile and the predicted deliverance. It discusses these matters at length. It cannot, like the earlier part of the book, be divided into sharply defined sections dealing with particular incidents, but forms a long and continuous unit, in which there is progress of thought, beginning with return from exile and then dealing with other parts of God's program for His people.

The Babylonian captivity is either in the background or the foreground of the mind of the writer in most of the material from chapters 40 to 52, but thereafter it largely disappears from his attention as his thought moves forward to the time following the people's return to their homeland. In recent years this change of viewpoint led to an interesting development in connection with the discussion of the criticism of the book. When arguments were first advanced seeking to prove that the book of Isaiah consisted of two different writings by two different authors, many passages were quoted from Isaiah 40 and following to show that the latter part of the book has as its background the time of the exile rather than of the time of Isaiah under the Judean kings. Although these passages were mostly taken from chapters 40 to 52 the claim was made that 40 to 66 was the so-called "second Isaiah." In answer the conservative defenders of the unity of the book brought evidence to show that the background was not one of people in a Babylonian captivity but of people in Palestine and it was found that most of the evidence of this type came from sections after chapter 52. Before long the critics changed their claim that the latter part of the book formed a "second Isaiah" and began to say that there was actually "a third Isaiah," written after the people returned to Palestine. We who believe in the unity of the book, as it was held by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, do not take this position but say rather that the thought of the prophet moves

ahead: after dealing with the deliverance of the people from exile he moves forward to the time after their return.

There is a remarkable similarity in the style of all parts of the Book of Isaiah, despite the differences in subject matter. Isaiah's style is unique, and strikingly different from that of most portions of the Old Testament. It is difficult to believe that two authors would have styles so strikingly similar, and the difficulty is greatly increased by the suggestion that this was true of three or more authors.

The Symphonic Structure

This continuous passage from Isaiah 40 to 66 is not like a history or an address given at a banquet. Its style may be compared with that of a musical composition such as a symphony. Different problems are before the writer and different themes occur. These themes are dealt with one by one. After one has been discussed, the minds of the prophet and the listeners are temporarily satisfied on that point, but then a second problem comes to mind. The prophet launches into discussion of this second problem; then he goes on to a third problem, or perhaps back to the first. It is like a great piece of music in which different moods are dealt with. Thus solutions are brought to various problems, one after another, in a psychological rather than a logical manner. This phenomenon will become clearer as we look at the details of the chapters.

Isaiah 40: The Prelude

Isaiah 40 forms a unit somewhat distinct from those that follow. It contains no word which in itself gives a specific historic background. The chapter is like a prelude or an overture to a musical composition. It touches upon a number of the themes that will be prominent in what follows. It does not aim to deal with precise situations but rather to evoke certain needed emotions. The result is that we do not find that chapter 40 (like Isaiah 7, for instance) makes specific predictions which relate exclusively to one time or another, but rather that it presents emotional attitudes which can apply to various situations. God is declaring to the people

that He is going to deliver them, but here He is not referring exclusively to one specific deliverance. In fact, three aspects of deliverance are involved. God is assuring the people who are in misery in the exile that they are to be delivered from their suffering. He is assuring those who are suffering from the result of the sin which has sent them into exile that He is going to deal with the sin question and to send His great deliverance from it in the person of Jesus Christ the Redeemer. Jesus Christ, by His death on the cross, won deliverance from the guilt and result of sin. This has been won in principle by what He has done, but it is to be worked out completely at His return; hence joy over the return of Christ is also involved, along with joy over deliverance from exile and joy over the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Since these three situations are in the mind of the writer it is no wonder that Isaiah 40 is one of the grandest chapters in the entire Bible. Let us run through it and see how the various emotional themes are touched upon.

It begins in verses 1 and 2 with a declaration of comfort. God declares that comfort will come to Jerusalem. Jerusalem has been in suffering; she has received from the Lord's hand the equivalent for all her sins; her warfare is accomplished. Therefore, God commands that His people be comforted.

This, of course, is an exhortation which is appropriate to the time of deliverance from Babylon and which is equally appropriate to the other two deliverances mentioned.

In verse 3 the note of deliverance is further stressed. God's deliverance is right at hand; a way is to be made straight for Him. This can be expressed in relation to the return from exile: the people in Babylon see hills and valleys separating them from the homeland for which they long. God declares that all these difficulties will be straightened out. In Matthew 3:3 this verse is applied to John the Baptist as he prepares the way for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. All the rough places are to be made plain in order that God may bring His mighty redemption.

When the children of Israel have gone into exile and the gods of the heathen have had their standards planted on the very site of the temple at Jerusalem, it appears to most of the world as if the God of Israel is no longer of any importance, possibly even that He has ceased to exist. Now,

however, His glory is to be revealed and all flesh will see it together (v. 5). Thus assurance is given of God's existence and of His power.

God's Omniscience

The end of verse 5 brings another note -- the knowledge of God, Who knows the end from the beginning. We can be sure that the wonderful deliverance will come, "for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it." This note of the omniscience of God is one of the great themes of the following chapters of the book. It is stressed again in the glorious verses that come next. One of the great proofs of God's existence is His power to predict the future.

Verses 6-8 show the failure of everything human and earthly to endure. All the goodness of man is as the flower of grass. When the Spirit of the Lord blows on it, it withers away, "but the Word of our God shall stand forever." These verses are very appropriately quoted at the end of 1 Peter 1. It is marvelous in our day to see archeology bringing to light many of the great varied civilizations of the past; mighty conquerors are being brought back to our knowledge, some of whom had been completely forgotten for centuries. It is thrilling to see how the Word of God, which had predicted the destruction of some of these great figures of the past, has endured long after they had disappeared.

In verse 9, the theme again reverts to the idea of comfort to Zion and Jerusalem because God is bringing deliverance. In verses 10 and 11 the gentleness of His deliverance is stressed. His arm is strong to accomplish what He desires, but toward His own He is like a Shepherd who "gathers the lambs with His arm and carries them in His bosom and gently leads those that are with young."

Between verse 11 and verse 12 there is a rather sharp transition. It is as if one part of the orchestra ceases and another comes in with a strong triumphant note of a different type. The gentleness of the Lord has been stressed, but if He is to be gentle He must also be strong and able to accomplish. Verse 12 and the following verses compare Him with the gods of the heathen and point to His creative power, declaring that

to Him all the forces of the earth are as nothing, for He has created them all and can do with them what He will.

This great note of the omnipotent power of God will be particularly needed later on, when the people will be suffering in exile, but it is equally needed by the godly followers of Isaiah as they see the nation falling deeper and deeper into sin. In such times it is easy to think that God does not exist or that He is powerless. There are more passages declaring the greatness of God in Isaiah 40-50 than anywhere else in the Scriptures, except in the latter chapters of Job. Both books were written in a situation where the heart was tempted to doubt God, so God used them to give His people assurance of His power and of His faithfulness.

In verse 18 another related note is struck: comparison of God to the idols. This note is also frequent in the following chapters. It emphasizes the utter weakness and futility of the idols, which are the work of men's hands, and the absurdity of comparing them with God. To whom is God to be likened? God is great in power and glory and none of the idols of the heathen can be compared with Him!

After all these verses on the power, glory and knowledge of God, verse 27 comes almost as a rebuke. Why does Jacob say, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?" How can this One who is so powerful forget those whom He has set apart for His own purposes?

Verses 28 to 31 give the answer to this question. The answer is not given in specific terms which may apply only to one situation, but in general terms which apply to all the situations in which people are tempted to doubt God. If God's plan does not seem to be working out, it is not because He is too weak to do what He chooses. It is rather because we do not fully understand His plan. It is impossible for us to search His understanding. He knows the end from the beginning. His power is sufficient to accomplish anything He undertakes. He never faints and never is weary. Not only is He not weary but He gives power to those who tend to become weary. The situations that are ahead may be so terrible that even the strongest of us will faint and be utterly weary "but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they

shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (40:31).

This ends the general prelude to chapters 40 to 66. With chapter 41 we begin more specific consideration of Israel's difficulties.

Isaiah 41

In chapter 40 some of the principal themes of the section we are now beginning were stressed in a general way. We now begin the main body of the symphony.

The outstanding theme of chapter 41 is the supremacy of God over all the false gods of the heathen. In the first verse He calls the people of all the lands to appear before Him and to answer the declaration of His supremacy. The chapter ends with a verdict against all the gods of the heathen: "Behold, they are all vanity; their works are nothing; their molten images are wind and confusion."

In verse 2 God asserts His supremacy by declaring His control over all the forces of history. He points to "the righteous man from the east," a powerful monarch who has been conquering for a number of years and is even beginning to appear as a menace to Babylon itself. God declares that He Himself is the One Who raised up this mighty king and gave him power over the nations. In the following chapters there are many allusions to this king who is to be used as God's agent in the deliverance of His people.

Verse 4 again declares that God is the One who has brought this great historical force into being.

Verses 5 and 6 present a vivid picture of a nation filled with fear as they see the advance of the conquering armies of Cyrus. The words, "the isles," which occur here and also in verse 1 are generally used in the Scriptures as a reference to the Greeks, many of whom were established on the islands around Greece or on those in the neighborhood of Asia Minor. A few years before Cyrus made his attack on Babylon he directed a great campaign, leading his armies clear across Asia Minor from east to west, and the Greek cities were filled with terror. During this campaign he conquered the famous Croesus, king of Lydia. Verses 5 and 6 depict the terror of these Greeks and of the other enemies of King Cyrus as he

approaches. In verse 7 we see them rushing to their idols for protection and even building new idols in the thought that thus they may be safe from the great force which God has raised up. Verse 8 and the following verses contrast Israel's situation with that of these nations that are filled with such terror by the approach of Cyrus. God declares that He will protect Israel.

Verse 8 is particularly interesting because in it the Lord gives the reason why He is going to protect Israel. He does not say that Israel is God's pet and that therefore He wishes to give her special preference over the nations. He declares instead that He has chosen Israel as one who is to be His servant to accomplish a work that He has planned. It is for this reason that Israel is to be protected, in order that through her the great purpose of God may be accomplished.

The Servant of the Lord

This is the first appearance of the phrase "the servant of the Lord" in the book of Isaiah. It is a theme which constantly grows in importance from chapter 41 until its great climax in chapter 53. At first sight it is not altogether clear exactly what is meant by the phrase, and there has been much discussion about it. As we go on its meaning gradually becomes clearer.

In studying the Bible it is important to recognize the principle of progressive revelation. This does not mean that God reveals something at one time and then reveals something contradictory at a later time. God's truth is fixed and final and He never declares anything which is false. Yet, of course, He does not necessarily tell all the truth at one time. The greatness of God and the comprehensiveness of His plans are so tremendous that the finite mind could not comprehend all the truth about Him. Gradually we are enabled to understand more and more. God adapts His presentation to our minds in order that we may be able to grasp His truths and gradually to understand more and more about them. The first glimpses He gives us are true, but they are far from complete. As the revelation is continued He gives new glimpses which enable us more fully to understand what has previously been revealed.

A very interesting instance of the working out of this principle of progressive revelation is found in connection with this theme, "the servant of the Lord." This phrase appears first in verse 8 and is repeated in verse 9.

Here God declares that Israel is His servant -- not His pet. He has raised up Israel to be His servant, to accomplish a vital task. Until this task is performed no one could destroy Israel.

Verse 10 declares God's protection over His people. It is a wonderful promise-one which is often used by people today to strengthen them in times of adversity.

Do we have a right to take this verse out of its context and apply it to ourselves? In order to determine this we must examine the situation under which it is spoken. We note that the context is entirely addressed to Israel. Yet it is not given simply as a sign of special favor to Israel, but because Israel is recognized as being the servant of God. If one of us is sure that he is a servant of God and that his life is being used for God's glory, then truly he has a right to apply this verse to himself even though it is originally addressed to Israel in exile in Babylon.

Verse 11 is not quoted as frequently as verse 10; yet it is equally true. How often verses 11 and 12 have proven true in the history of the Jews! Men who have attempted to destroy them have indeed been ashamed and confounded. Even in our own day we have seen severe retribution come to those who have persecuted Israel.

What a statement is contained in verse 12: "Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them." Today we look in vain for any remnant of the great empires of Assyria and Babylonia. The great forces which have persecuted the Jews through the ages have disappeared and been forgotten. Only a few remains of broken walls and ruined buildings attest the one-time greatness of these mighty empires. We can seek in vain for those who have persecuted God's people, but God's people remain.

The preservation of the Jew is one of the great proofs of the truth of God's Word. Everything which God has not planted shall be rooted up (Mat. 15:13). That which truly is established by the Lord will abide forever.

God's protecting care over Israel is further described in verses 13 and following. Verse 13, like verse 10, is one which the true believer may apply to himself. Next come verses 15 and 16, in which God predicts the destruction of those who injure His people, while in verses 17 to 19 He promises gentle care of His own. These three verses find a beautiful spiritual application in the lives of God's people through the ages, but will have a literal fulfillment in the time when God's righteousness shall cover the earth "as the waters cover the sea."

Evidence of Fulfilled Prophecy

Verse 20 reverts to the main theme of the chapter. Although the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians might seem to have proved that God has no power and perhaps does not even exist, He is showing through His great acts in history that He is indeed the powerful and almighty God.

In verse 21, God again challenges the idols to bring any proof of their power or even of their existence.

Verses 22 and 23 introduce the thought of God's omniscience. We have already noticed what a wonderful proof of God's existence and power is available in the proofs of His omniscience. Only He can truly predict the future. Here He calls upon the false gods to give a similar proof for themselves. In the course of history many men have claimed to predict the future but few indeed have been able to justify such claims. Mohammed had the good judgment not to make any claims of this type. In the writings of ancient Greece and Rome we occasionally find attempted predictions. These were usually given in such ambiguous language that the prediction might seem to be true no matter what happened. How utterly different are the many cases in the Bible where God predicts exactly what is going to happen.

In verse 25 Cyrus is again referred to as the one who comes from the northeast who will destroy princes as mortar. Through him God will deliver Israel. Verse 27 declares that good tidings will be brought to Jerusalem.

As the chapter ends, the utter vanity and worthlessness of the idols and false gods of the heathen is stressed again.

Isaiah 42

This is a striking chapter. At first sight it seems to contradict itself. We find its first verses speaking in most exalted terms of the servant of the Lord and then in verse 19 we find this question: "Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf as my messenger that I sent?" God's truth is being progressively revealed in this chapter. Let us examine its detail.

The theme of the servant of the Lord has already been introduced in Isaiah 41:8-9. In 42:1-4 we find an enlargement on the theme. It is not here stated who the servant is, as in 41:8-9, where he was declared to be Israel. Here an ideal picture is presented of the work which the servant is intended to do. What a marvelous picture it is! This is one in whom the soul of the Lord delights. The Spirit of the Lord is upon Him. Through Him, judgment will be brought, not only to God's people but also to the Gentiles. We thus find a world-wide ministry promised to this great figure. Verses 2 to 4 describe the dignity and gentleness of His conduct. He is not one who must exert violent effort to accomplish His task. He never despairs of the outcome or tends to fall into discouragement. In accomplishing His great purpose He does not tread on those that get in His way, or cast aside those who are unable to do the work themselves. "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench." The accomplishment of His work is certain. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He have set judgment in the earth; and the isles shall wait for His law." His ministry is to be world-wide.

What an idea! What a wonderful picture! It has already been stated in 41:8-9 that Israel is God's servant, but how can Israel fulfill the ideal described here? How can a people struggling and suffering in bondage and misery hope to fulfill the glorious task here attributed to "the Servant of the Lord?" This question is not merely one which occurs to the modern mind; we find it clearly expressed in the latter part of the chapter. Before looking at it let us examine the verses which intervene.

Verse 5 again declares the omnipotence of God. Even the people who deny His existence receive their breath only because He chooses to give it to them. He is the One who

has created all things. What is the duty of His servant? Verses 6 and 7 declare that God's servant is to be a covenant of the people and a light of the Gentiles. His servant is to open blind eyes and to bring out prisoners from the prison. How can Israel do this when she is herself a prisoner?

In verses 8-18 the theme of the greatness of God as compared with the futility of the idols is constantly in mind. It is God who will accomplish the deliverance and bring mighty things to pass. Those who trust in idols will be greatly ashamed.

A Perplexing Problem

The misgivings we have mentioned as inevitably occurring in the mind of Israel in relation to the wonderful picture of the ideal servant are clearly expressed in verse 19 and following. The Lord says, "Who is blind but my servant, or deaf, as my messenger that I sent?" Verse 21 tells us that the Lord will indeed magnify His righteousness, but in verse 22 we are again brought face to face with the great difficulty. How can Israel fulfill the demands of the work of the servant of the Lord when "this is a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses?"

It is a problem which seems unanswerable. However, there is an additional note that deserves to be stressed. Verse 24 points out the reason why Israel has come into this condition. "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." It is for this reason that God has had to send His people into exile and suffering, because they had sinned against Him. The servant of the Lord is to bring light and deliverance to the nations. Israel is God's servant, but how can Israel do this when Israel is itself in bondage and in darkness? Israel itself needs a deliverer. A deliverer from exile is a necessity, but far more important is a deliverer from the sin that has caused the exile and has made it unthinkable that Israel should be able to fulfill the great world-wide ministry of the servant of the Lord. Thus the problem has been clearly set before us in this chapter.

Several more chapters must be read, however, before the answer will be found.

Isaiah 43

Some of the great themes of chapter 42 are repeated in chapter 43. The reference to God's judgment on Israel with which chapter 42 ended is expanded at the end of 43 with a pathetic statement of His disappointment over the sin of His beloved people who have turned away from Him. Surely there is no more pathetic passage in the Scriptures than Isaiah 43:22-24.

The chapter begins in sharp contrast to the end of the preceding chapter, with a rapid transition to the theme of comfort and deliverance. Despite Israel's sin and failure, God is going to deliver her. When she passes through the waters, He will be with her. It will be impossible for the flames to destroy her because God will protect her. In verse 3, He declares that He will give Egypt for her ransom and Ethiopia and Seba for her. These lands were later conquered by Cyrus and are here represented as given by the Lord to Cyrus as a reward for releasing Israel. We shall find further reference to this same idea in 45:14.

The theme of God's love for Israel and the certainty that He will regather and deliver them is continued in verses 4-7.

In verse 8, the theme of the vanity of idols recurs. All the nations are called upon to appear before the Lord and to attempt to show that their false gods have either knowledge or power. In contrast God declares in verse 10 that the Israelites are His witnesses. They are His servant whom He has chosen; in spite of everything that has happened Israel is to be the medium through which His world-wide work will be accomplished.

Verses 11 and 12 repeat the thought that God is the only possible savior. Verses 14-17 stress the deliverance from Babylon which God will bring about. In verses 18-21 He declares that even His great deeds of old will be surpassed by the new wonderful acts which He will perform and that this people which He formed for Himself will yet show forth His praise.

Between verses 21 and 22 occurs a sharp transition from God's promises of wonderful things He will do for His people to His recognition of their present attitude. In verses 22-24, the Lord tells how He yearns over His people and longs that they shall really love Him and endeavor to be true to Him. Can we not imagine Him even today yearning over those who believe in Him? How He must look upon us with longing that we would truly serve Him and turn away from the many minor things which we allow to usurp His place in our lives and to keep us from giving Him that full devotion which He desires and deserves!

Even despite the sin of Israel so pathetically remembered here God declares in verse 25 that He is not merely going to deliver them from Babylon but that He is actually going to blot out their transgressions and to put an end to the sins which are responsible for the suffering into which they have come. This theme is only briefly touched upon in verse 25. Verses 27 and 28 revert to emphasis upon the sin of the people and declaration of the punishment which God has already given by sending them into exile.

Isaiah 44-47

We have noticed that this section of Isaiah is not arranged as a logical discourse presenting arguments and evidences for its position; its structure is more like that of a symphony with recurring themes, as it deals with various emotions in the hearts of the Babylonian exiles. It touches upon a theme, presenting some phase of God's answer to it; then the attention turns to other themes, then the first again comes to the front and demands to be discussed once more.

Outstanding is the idea of the certainty of God's deliverance of His people Israel from the terrible suffering of the exile into which they have come. God is not bringing them this deliverance simply because they are "pets," but rather because Israel is His servant through whom He intends to perform a great work. All through these chapters we find frequently stressed the theme of the supremacy and omnipotence of God. Israel is tempted to doubt this in view of His seeming inability to protect them from conquest by the Babylonians but He declares repeatedly that He alone is powerful

and that other gods do not even exist. He asserts that Israel has gone into exile, not through any inability of His to deliver them, but because He chose that they should suffer this punishment for their sins. He often repeats His promise to deliver them by His own hand. Most important of all, every now and then we find clear suggestions that the basic problem of sin will be dealt with by the Lord in His own complete and satisfying way.

Chapter 44 begins with a declaration of the certainty of the fulfillment of the work which God has committed to Israel His servant. In verses 1-5 we read that Jacob need not fear, for God is going to pour out His Spirit upon the seed of Israel and to bring into existence a great multitude of descendants, springing up as willows by the water courses; "one shall say, I am the LORD's, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob."

This presentation of God's plan for the future inevitably raises in the minds of the listeners the old, and yet ever important question, how do we know that God is able to perform this? Consequently, verse 6 declares once more His omnipotence and the fact that He alone is God. In verses 7 and 8 He brings forward as proof of this the fact of His omniscience; His ability to predict the future, as we have seen, is stressed more in this part of Isaiah than anywhere else in the Bible.

In verses 9-20, we revert to the familiar theme of the vanity of the idol worship. Vividly the prophet points out the folly of worshipping something that man himself has made. How absurd it is (v. 15) to use part of a tree as fuel for a fire with which to warm oneself, to use another portion for baking bread, and out of still a third portion to make a god and worship it! Even in our own day this passage has been of use to missionaries as they seek to convert worshippers of idols. In verse 21, the prophet turns to His servant Israel and exhorts him to remember the vanity of idol worship. We have just been reading how the heathen formed their gods. Here in contrast it is stated that God Himself has formed Israel. Verses 22 and 23 declare that God will bring to an end the cause of all of Israel's suffering. He is going to blot out their transgressions.

Cyrus Predicted by Name

In Isaiah 44:24-28, we have a poem constantly increasing in strength and emphasis, stressing the omnipotence and especially the omniscience of God, and reaching its great climax with the declaration that God will rebuild Jerusalem, that He will destroy the Mesopotamian power (which He indicates by the statement "dry up thy rivers"), and that He has raised up Cyrus as His instrument to perform these things.

This mention of the name of Cyrus, not as one newly introduced but as one known to the readers, has presented a great problem to many students of the book of Isaiah. His name occurs in this last verse of chapter 44 and again in the first verse of chapter 45. It is a striking instance of predictive prophecy, that God would thus give the name of the king who would deliver the people from the Babylonian power, more than one hundred years before his actual appearance on the scene of history. Destructive critics use it as one of their main arguments to show that this part of Isaiah was not written by the prophet but is a product of a later age. Yet anyone who believes in the supernatural should find no difficulty in believing that God might choose to predict the exact name of a ruler over a century before his time. Although we do not often find this occurring in Scripture, this is not the only instance. In 1 Kings 13:2 the name of Josiah, king of Judah, was predicted three hundred years before his appearance.

The first three verses of chapter 45 declare that Cyrus is commissioned by God to conquer many nations; God will open before him even the two-leaved gates of powerful Babylon. The riches hidden in secret places by mighty Babylonian kings will be given to him; when this occurs all those who have read Isaiah's prediction will have convincing proof of the power of the God of Israel. Verse 4 tells us that all the victories of Cyrus are brought about for the sake of "Jacob my servant." Although Cyrus has not known God by name, God has named Cyrus a century before his time and God is bringing Cyrus into history in order to fulfill God's purposes. Thus the prophet makes the claim that history is controlled by God and that God is sovereign in all that occurs. Many

events which appear great and important to us human beings are comparatively small in God's sight. Everything in the end relates to God's purpose for His own. This mighty conqueror who regarded Israel as only one of many nations with which he had to do was actually controlled by the Lord directly for the purpose of releasing Israel from the Babylonian captivity.

The Sovereignty of God

Naturally enough, this declaration of God's power in history leads to renewed emphasis on God's supremacy and control in verses 5-12. It is a remarkable passage for teaching the sovereignty of God. In verse 7 God declares the falsity of any dualistic idea of the universe. He is not, as held by some modern philosophers, a finite god, trying his hardest to bring good out of a disagreeable situation. Nor is He a spirit of good, struggling against a spirit of evil, as was held by the later Persian religion. God controls all things; He forms the light and creates the darkness; He makes peace and He creates evil. The word translated "evil" here does not mean moral evil, which would make God the author of sin. It means physical evil-calamity or destruction. It is the same word that is used in Genesis 41:3-4 for the cows which were thin and scrawny. Evidently no moral factor is involved.

The Hebrew word translated "peace" has a much larger meaning than our English word "peace." It covers the whole idea of well-being or freedom from trouble. When things that are pleasant come into our lives we can thank God because He has sent them. When things that are disagreeable come into our lives we know that He has sent these also and if we are children of His we know that He has sent them for His own good purposes and they can be means of blessing to us if we see His hand in them.

Verses 9 and 10 are very similar to Paul's statement in Romans 9:20 about the sovereignty of God. "Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou?"

This great passage about the supremacy of God ends with a note which always arouses wonder and admiration in the mind of one who observes nature. God is the Creator of all

things. Our telescopes pierce the great distances of the celestial world which stretch so far beyond our vision; all the wonders of the heavens have been created and established by Him.

In verse 13 God declares again that Cyrus has been raised up by Him for His own righteous purposes and that He will control all the actions of this great world conqueror. God predicts that Cyrus will let the Israelite captives go, not for price nor reward but because this is part of God's plan. In verse 14 He declares that He will deliver Egypt and Ethiopia and Seba to Cyrus in return for allowing the Israelites to go. We recall that this had already been predicted in Isaiah 43:3.

Verse 15 is probably the declaration of one who is troubled. He says that God is hidden; he cannot understand the ways of God. God's answer follows. The idol worshippers will be confounded. They have no answer to the problem of life. Israel is to be saved and will not be ashamed, world without end. God established the universe with a definite plan and He is now declaring that plan. In verse 18, He states that He did not create the earth in order that it might be destroyed. He formed it to be inhabited; He has His own great purposes in all that occurs. Although sin seems to have destroyed the appearance of God's wonderful creation, we know that He will yet restore all things as in the beginning and will establish His wonderful millennium upon this earth.

In verse 19, God says that He did not speak in secret, but that He has declared these things openly. He did not tell the seed of Jacob to seek Him in vain but He is speaking righteousness and He will open the way for the attainment of His righteousness by those who truly seek Him. Just how is He to do this? The full answer is not yet given. We do not reach it in its completeness until we come to chapter 53!

In verse 20 God again calls upon those who worship an idol to prove that it has any power whatever. He demonstrates His own power in verse 21 by the argument so often stressed in these chapters -- His power to predict the future. He tells us what He will do and then He proceeds to do it; consequently we know that He actually exists and has the power to perform these things. Many a man has attempted to predict the future and has utterly failed. There are so many circumstances involved in prediction that it takes more

than mere human knowledge to make a true prediction of matters involving any degree of complexity. Yet the Scriptures are full of predictions that have come true. God alone knows the future. He controls all things and consequently is able, when He chooses, to tell exactly what is going to happen.

In verses 22-25 we have a wonderful call, which God gives not merely to Israel but to all the earth, to look unto Him and be saved. He has declared that in the end every knee is going to bow to Him. Now He is giving to the very "ends of the earth" an opportunity to come to His righteousness and strength. The day is coming, He tells us in verse 25, when all the seed of Israel will be justified in the Lord. This refers to that wonderful time when a nation shall be born in a day and all of Israel shall believe in Christ.

Isaiah 46

Up to this point all denunciation of idols has been made in general terms without naming any particular gods. Now we find a specific declaration that the two leading gods of Babylon, Bel and Nebo, are going to be proven utterly unable to accomplish anything. They themselves have to be carried, and will go into captivity when Cyrus conquers their land. In contrast to these idols which have to be carried by their people, God points out in verses 3 and 4 that He himself carries His people and is going to carry them and deliver them from youngest childhood to old age.

Verses 5-7 again revert to the general theme of the futility of the idols.

In verses 9-11 the omniscience of the God who is able to predict the future is again stressed as the great proof of His existence and power. The clinching argument is again His prediction of the coming of Cyrus who is to accomplish all of God's purposes for the deliverance of Israel from exile. It is interesting to see that in verse 11 Cyrus is called "a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country." What a contrast to the reference in Isaiah 41:2 as "the righteous man from the east." Both are pictures of Cyrus' character. He is the one who is to carry out the righteous purposes of God. In God's divine purpose this is

his character. In himself, however, he is indeed "a ravenous bird," one who is never satisfied but who is anxious to conquer more and more territory and who thinks that he is doing it for his own aggrandizement. How often it is true that the characters who strut their little part upon the stage of life think that they are carrying out their own purposes and plans when actually they are only doing what God has determined to perform through them!

In verses 12 and 13 there is an exhortation to those whose hearts are hardened and who are not ready to believe God's righteous plan. They are assured that God's salvation will not tarry but that He will accomplish His great purposes.

Isaiah 47

Chapter 47 is largely devoted to development of the theme which was stressed in the first two verses of chapter 46. There we were told that Nebo and Bel will not be able to deliver Babylon from destruction. Here Babylon herself is addressed under the figure of a woman. This one who is used to Luxurious living, enjoying the fruits of all the nations, is to be humbled to the very dust and made to perform menial labors. No more is Babylon to be called "the lady of kingdoms" (v. 5). She is to be conquered and to become weak. At various times in previous centuries Babylon had appeared as a great mistress of nations. Now her rule has come to an end; from this time on she will be subject to foreign powers. The downfall of Babylon was indeed sudden. She seemed to be at the very apex of her strength when suddenly Cyrus attacked her and ended her rule. Verses 12 and 13 speak of her enchantments and astrologers. All these are to prove of no avail. How silly it is for a nation to trust to its knowledge of secrets -- even the secret of how to make an atomic bomb. These things cannot give lasting security. Only in obeying God and carrying out His commands can a nation live in security and have any expectation of lasting peace.

The chapter is a vivid picture of a nation used to luxury and supremacy but suddenly reduced to captivity and feebleness. Such is the fate eventually of all those who oppose God.

The chapters from 48 on proceed with ever increasing velocity toward the great climax in Isaiah 53 -- the solution of the problem of sin. This is the work of the servant of God. Israel is the servant, but Israel cannot do the work. Yet the work is definitely to be performed.

Isaiah 48

At first sight this chapter does not appear to differ greatly from the chapters we have studied previously. It brings in a few new ideas, but these are closely related to themes already expressed. It is only in one verse that we find something extremely startling and new. We shall consider this verse, the sixteenth, at some length after examining the chapter as a whole.

The first half of the chapter, verses 1-11, appears like a rebuke to the people of Israel. On examination, however, it is seen to be quite different from the rebukes which are so frequent in the early chapters of Isaiah. There the prophet constantly warned the people that if they continued in their sin God would send them into exile. Here, as in the latter part of chapters 42 and 43, the assumption is that the people are already in exile and that God is going to deliver them. In chapters 42 and 43, the reason why God had sent the people into exile was discussed; here the fear that they may be obstinate and rebellious even after deliverance is suggested. Israel may be so stubborn as to attribute even the deliverance to a false god, rather than give the Lord the glory. How similar to people today, who are constantly seeking material reasons for their prosperity, and attributing deliverance from disaster to their own might or wisdom, rather than to the goodness of God.

The theme of God's omniscience, which has been so frequently touched upon in these chapters, is the outstanding idea in the verses before us. It is used as a means of answering the expected objection from the rebellious in Israel. These obstinate people will give credit for the deliverance to an idol if it is not clearly proven that the eternal God is the actual deliverer (vv. 4-5). For this reason God is predicting the deliverance so explicitly that it should be impossible for anyone to assert that some other than He has performed it.

The concluding verses of this section (9-11) state that it is for the sake of His own name that God will desist from pouring out His anger further at this time, but will instead deliver His erring people.

Verses 12-15 again stress the omnipotence of God as the Creator who controls all things and point out that the deliverance of Israel through Cyrus is due to God's activity. It is God who has brought him and who is going to make his way prosperous.

Verse 16 again stresses the note of omniscience. God has spoken these things from the beginning; He has performed them and will continue to perform them. Thus the verse fits neatly into the context; yet it contains a new and striking idea, consideration of which we shall leave until after we have examined the chapter as a whole.

Verses 17-19 again express God's regret that Israel has sinned and gone its own way instead of following in the path which He has pointed out to it. The miseries of the exile would never have been theirs if sin had not come in and turned them away from Him.

Verses 20 and 21 declare that God is going to perform the great deliverance of the Israelites from Babylon. God calls on them to rejoice as His mercy goes with them on the return journey. They are to declare to the ends of the world the fact that God has redeemed His servant Jacob and has given them marvelous water out of the rock to quench their thirst. These words are a clear reference to the wonderful deeds of mercy which He performed for them at the time when they were going through the wilderness after He had delivered them from Egypt. The promise is that similar mercies will continue with them -- mercies which will be shown not merely in giving material water but also in giving great spiritual blessings which will meet the need of sinful and erring Israel. Verse 22 declares that, apart from God's mercy, true peace and well-being can never be found. While the verse stands alone here, it reiterates the thought of a great part of the chapter. It is taken by many as indicating the end of a main section of the book, because it occurs again at the end of the chapter 57. However, chapters 48 and 49 are closely linked together and there is no place for a main division of the book here. There is even less excuse for making a main division

at the end of chapter 57. Dividing a book into sections because of the occurrence of similar phrases or by other artificial signs is always dangerous. Such signs are sometimes inserted to indicate a division, but we must always look for other and clearer indications; otherwise one may be greatly misled.

A Remarkable Verse

Isaiah 48:16 is one of the most remarkable verses in the entire book. If it is interpreted merely in the light of the immediate context and the larger context is not taken into consideration, it presents an insoluble mystery. For this reason the only way out of the difficulty which modernistic interpreters are able to find is to say that it is an error and that the phrase that causes difficulty should be omitted. In his translation of the Bible, James Moffatt simply omits the last part of the verse altogether. This he does without note or indication to show that he is departing from the text of the Bible.

Moffatt's translation sometimes uses phrases or words which are helpful to the reader, giving him an idea of the true meaning of the original, which may be somewhat obscured by the seventeenth century English wording of our common version. Yet, unfortunately, his translation is of little use to those who are really anxious to know what the Bible says, since he frequently omits verses or phrases, or inserts into his translation words or phrases which are not found in the original at all. Instead of a translation of the Bible as it is, he has given a presentation of what he thinks the Bible ought to have said. The book is useful to one who desires to find out what James Moffatt thinks, but is not of much help if one's purpose is to learn what the Bible actually says.

As it starts, the verse seems to be spoken by the One who has been telling of His own great power. In this verse He calls upon all to come near to Him and listen. He declares that He has not spoken in secret from the beginning. From the time that any of these things were happening He was present. What a marvelous picture of the fact of God's great omnipotence, of His power, of His accomplishments, and of

the fact that He has spoken to the prophets. Then, at the end of the verse, there is a very striking statement: "And now the Lord GOD, and His Spirit, hath sent me." The first part of the verse can hardly be spoken by anyone other than God, yet this latter part declares the speaker to be sent by God. There can be no satisfactory explanation of the verse other than that it is spoken by the Servant of the Lord, and that this Servant is Himself God.

The "I" in the verse cannot possibly represent Isaiah, for he could not be said to have been present at the time of the original declaration of these things, and still to be present at the time of their accomplishment. Only God Himself could use such language. It reminds us of the statement of our Lord in John 8:58, "Before Abraham was, I am." Clearly it is God who is speaking, and yet the speaker declares that God has sent Him. The deity of the Servant is clearly suggested here, and no other explanation is satisfactory. It is another of the instances where a profound truth is suggested before it is fully explained. Full explanation of the ineffable mystery of the person of Christ is never given in the Old Testament, but occasionally, as here, the note is touched upon and a suggestion, sometimes rather faint, sometimes quite distinct, is given of wonderful truths to be more fully revealed later. We have already noticed that such a procedure is typical of the whole presentation of Isaiah's teaching about the servant of the Lord.

Injection of the idea that the servant is speaking in this verse (and possibly also for some time previous to it) may seem unwarranted, in view of the fact that there is no other mention of him in the chapter. This, however, is not a great difficulty. Only a few verses later, in the early part of chapter 49, we find the speaker declaring that he is the servant of the Lord. If he can speak in that passage, without specific introduction, there is no reason to doubt the possibility that he is speaking similarly here. As a matter of fact, no other explanation of the verse gives much sense. Thus the deity of Christ, which is clearly suggested in some of the early chapters of Isaiah, is here suggested again, and that in terms which can hardly be interpreted otherwise.

The Trinity Indicated

Still another startling element of this striking verse must be noticed. Not only is the speaker, whose deity is indicated, designated as one sent by the Lord God, but there is mention of the Spirit of God in the same phrase. The presence of the Holy Spirit, as the third member of the Trinity, is undoubtedly suggested. Again we find a great truth suggested in anticipation of later full explanation. One can never truly understand the divine Book without recognizing the fact that it often suggests great truths before they are fully explained.

While this may seem strange in some of the books of the Bible, it is just what one would expect in a poem with such a structure as that of this part of Isaiah. Sometimes a note is heard so faintly as to be hardly recognizable. Again and again it may recur, constantly becoming clearer, until at last it may become the great theme of a longer section. The theme of Cyrus, the deliverer from Babylon, has been presented in exactly this fashion. The theme of the real cause of the exile -- the sin which caused it -- has been similarly treated. Now we are fast approaching the point where the theme of redemption from sin -- an evil even greater than the exile which it has caused -- must be more fully dealt with.

A minor point in connection with the teaching regarding the Holy Spirit calls for attention. We have noticed that the King James Version ends the verse with the words, "and now the Lord GOD and his Spirit, hath sent me." In the American Standard Version the translation is somewhat different. It reads, "and now the Lord Jehovah hath sent me, and his Spirit." Thus the King James Version takes the Spirit to be associated with God in the sending, while the American Standard Version considers the Spirit to be sent with the servant. The original Hebrew contains no indication whether the phrase "and his Spirit" is subject or object. One is free to take it either way, depending on which he considers to be most in line with the teaching of Scripture elsewhere.

Isaiah 49 and 50

These two chapters form a section which is divisible into three parts. The first is 49:1-13; the second is 49:14-50:3;

the third is 50:4-11. In the first and third of these the servant of the Lord is speaking. In the middle section God is answering Zion's complaints. Beginning with the first mention of the servant of the Lord, in chapter 42, we have frequently noticed references to this great theme. It has often been suddenly interjected, and has occupied our attention for a verse or two, or, occasionally, for a somewhat longer passage. Now we find the theme considered in a passage which is longer than any that we have read so far.

In verses 1-12 it is very clear that the servant is speaking. This is made evident by the use of the word "servant" in verses 3 and 5-7, and also by the repetition in verses 8 and 9 of some of the phrases used in reference to the servant in Isaiah 42:6-7.

The identity of the servant might seem to be made clear in verse 3: "And he said unto me, Thou art my servant; Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (American Standard Version). (The King James Version inserts the word "O" which does not occur in the Hebrew). It is here said that the speaker is God's servant, Israel. Yet as we look further we find the speaker sharply differentiated from Israel. Thus we read in verse 5 that he has been called "to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him." The verse continues, "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious." Again in verse 6 he quotes God's words: "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; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles." Thus the servant is clearly differentiated from Israel, for we are told these three times that he is the one who is to restore Israel. How can we explain the fact that here the servant is both called Israel and differentiated from Israel?

In the light of the previous chapters, the interpretation is simple. Israel has been called to perform the work of the servant and to be a light to the Gentiles. This work Israel is unable to do because Israel is weak and sinful and has been sent into captivity as a result of its wickedness. Nevertheless, the work is to be performed by Israel, so the one who is to do the work must be one who is of Israel and who represents Israel. The personal phrases and expressions used

make it quite clear that he is an individual who comes out of Israel and who represents Israel, but who can yet be distinguished from the rest of Israel. So this individual who represents Israel is to gather Israel, to restore the tribes of Jacob, to restore the preserved of Israel, and yet is also to carry out the great work for which Israel was brought into being -- to bring light to the Gentiles and the salvation of God to the very ends of the earth. The individuality of the servant, suggested in previous chapters, is thus made absolutely clear in this chapter.

The note of universality is prominent in this chapter. It is stated in verse 6 that the servant is not merely to restore Israel, which is suffering, but is also to accomplish the work of the Lord to the ends of the earth. This was already indicated in the very first verse, which begins with a summons to the distant isles to listen to the Word of God as given by His servant.

In verse 1 the reference to the mother in connection with the servant is interesting. Ordinarily in Scripture one is spoken of as the seed of his father; only rarely is special reference made to the mother. We find, however, a thread beginning in Genesis 3:15, where mention is made of the seed of the woman, recurring in Isaiah 7:14, where it is predicted that a virgin will bring forth the coming King, Immanuel, and even touched upon in Micah 5:3 in connection with the promise of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem of Judah. This reference to the mother in 49:1 may be an allusion to these other passages.

The second verse contains two ideas. The first is that the servant's mouth is made like a sharp sword and that he is a polished shaft. This reminds us of the beautiful picture in Isaiah 42 of the quiet, successful progress of the servant. He is ideally fitted to perform his work and will never be discouraged until it has been completed. From the mouth of Christ, in His earthly ministry, there came such teaching that it has been the marvel of the world ever since. In the future His mouth will perform tasks of quite a different sort. In Isaiah 11:4 we read "and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked!" 2 Thessalonians 2:8 and Revelation 19:15, 21

show us that this great activity of the servant's mouth lies still in the future.

The other thought in this verse is that God has hid him "in the shadow of his hand" and "in his quiver." God has protected his servant. Though all the forces of the ancient world attempted to destroy God's people Israel, they could not succeed because God's hand was protecting. Though all the forces of wickedness have tried to destroy the Word of Christ, they have never succeeded. God's Word is eternal because God Himself protects it.

We have already looked at the third verse and seen what it reveals about the relation of the servant to Israel.

Apparent Failure

Verse 4 suggests a note which is hard at first sight to reconcile with the description in chapter 42 of the claims and successful accomplishments of the servant. The suggestion has been made that in this verse the nation of Israel interjects a statement of its inability to fulfill the tremendous task that has been assigned. Although this may be the correct view, it is not impossible to consider that the servant himself is here expressing the apparent failure of the nation, which he represents, and suggesting the additional fact that his own work would appear to many as a failure. Truly that is how it appeared to the little band of disciples immediately after Calvary. Yet his judgment is with the Lord, and there is no reason for discouragement. God will make sure that the work which He has planned will be accomplished.

Verse 5 echoes the thought of the "seed of the woman" and points out that the servant is to bring Jacob again to the Lord, and is himself to be glorified through the strength of God.

In verse 6 the work of the servant for the tribes of Jacob, while recognized as a matter of tremendous importance, is nevertheless subordinated to the far greater task of being a light to the Gentiles and bringing the Lord's salvation to the very ends of the earth.

In verse 7 the humiliation of the servant is contrasted with his later exaltation. In anticipation we enter into the teaching clearly developed a few chapters later, in chapter 53.

Sometimes there is an attempt to explain this verse as referring to Israel rather than to the servant. Such an interpretation, however, is not completely satisfactory, for it does not meet the requirements of this and the following verses. As in the similar expressions in Isaiah 42:6-7, the ideal picture presented is beyond the capacity of the nation to fulfill. Israel has indeed been humiliated, but the cause of the humiliation has been its own sin, and therefore it can never lead to the exalted accomplishment of these verses.

Verses 8-9 repeat the teaching of Isaiah 42:6-7 about the work of the ideal servant.

Verse 10 shows the wonderful blessings of those who follow the servant of God, as He leads them by the springs of waters. In verse 11 we are told how He makes a way for them through the mountains and exalts the highways on which they must travel. This brings to a focus the wonderful statements of the prelude to our symphony in Isaiah 40:3-4. In verse 12 the remarkable extent of the work of the servant is clearly indicated with people coming to his light from the north and from the west and even from the land of Sinim (China). What a marvelous prediction of the extension of the gospel of deliverance from sin through the servant of the Lord to the very ends of the world! How wonderfully it has been fulfilled in these days when groups of believers have come to the Savior from so many sections of the earth, even including this very land of China, which must have seemed in the days of Isaiah to be the utmost fringe of civilization. Truly He has become "a light to the Gentiles."

Verse 13 concludes this section with an exhortation to the heavens and the earth to break forth into joy because of the wonderful salvation which the Lord brings to His people.

Thus we have seen that the first part of Isaiah 49 contains a wonderful declaration by "the Servant of the Lord" of the work to which God has called Him. He recounts the promise that the Lord will sustain Him in the performance of this work and will cause its results to extend to the very ends of the earth. It is no wonder that in verse 13 the prophet utters an exclamation of great joy over God's mercy.

In marked contrast to this we now find in verse 14 that Zion makes a despairing complaint. She finds it impossible to recognize the wonders of the promises which have been given.

She says, "The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me."

The predictions given in our present section of Isaiah are so astounding and overwhelming that the prophet needs to explain them little by little. Only gradually can it dawn on the hearer exactly what is the full import of these wonderful promises. The revelations given to Isaiah contain a depth of meaning far beyond what can be immediately grasped. Much in them which becomes crystal clear in the light of the actual fulfillment in the New Testament must have been extremely difficult for the people who originally heard it to grasp.

In view of this it is no wonder that Zion should recur to her old complaint of incredulity and despair. She fears that everything is at an end for her. She is in bondage, in suffering, in exile far from home.

In Isaiah 49:15-50:3 God answers the complaint of Zion. Before we examine His answer it is necessary that we note exactly who it is that has made the complaint. Literally, Zion indicates the southeastern bill of Jerusalem, on which David's palace was built. The term is often extended to stand for the entire city of Jerusalem. In the passage before us, however, it is easy to see that the complaint does not represent the despair of a bit of ground, or of the earth or rock which formed the hill on which David's palace stood. The complainant is not a city, but a people described under the figure of a city.

We note further that this people which is here represented as complaining is not the entire nation of Israel. In earlier portions of Isaiah the prophet has often addressed the entire people of Israel, and declared to them God's rebuke for their sin and His declaration of the inevitable punishment. Very frequently such passages were followed immediately by verses in which the prophet's attention was turned away from the nation as a whole, and directed instead to the little group of the godly who were trying to follow God and to do His will. The mass of the people have no right to complain that the Lord has forsaken them. They know only too well that they are suffering the just deserts of their deeds. The little group of the godly recognizes that it, as part of the nation, is implicated in the sin into which the nation has fallen, and deserves punishment; it tends to give way to despair as it

sees the terrible fate which is ahead for the nation. From Isaiah 40 on, it is this portion of the people which is primarily in mind. Their punishment is not so much a matter of penalty as one of purification and cleansing in order to make them fit to carry on the work that God desires them to do. Zion here represents the godly portion of Israel at that time, and may be used as a figure to represent the true people of God at any time.

Occasionally in the New Testament we find a contrast between the Jerusalem that now is and the Jerusalem that is above. The one represents the great mass of people who profess the name of God, and the other stands for those who are really His own. Thus in Galatians 4:26 we read: "For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answers to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all." There we have a contrast between two Jerusalems, each of which represents an attitude towards God's work. Again in Hebrews 12:22, we read: "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels." In the New Testament, Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, represents the true people of God in all ages regardless of their racial background.

As evidence of His wonderful love, God condescends to answer Zion's objection and to relieve her from her despair.

God's Answer

The Lord's answer to Zion's complaint is given in three sections. The first, which runs from verse 15 to verse 23, is the longest. It begins with the figure of a woman's relation to her child: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yes, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." God declares His relationship to His people. He has begotten them Himself and He bears a relation to them even closer than that of a mother to her own child.

Verse 16 continues the assurance of God's permanent relation to His people. He has engraved them upon the palms of His hands. Their protection is ever before Him.

After this assurance God gives the wonderful promise which begins in verse 17. Its essential element is the prediction that the children of the Lord are not to come to an end but are, in fact, to be wonderfully increased in number. The destroyers and enemies of God's people are to be crushed and driven away, but the children of Zion will be her splendid ornament. Zion can look back on the glorious days of King David, when the kingdom was so prosperous and successful that it appeared as if nothing but glory was ahead for the people of God. As she looks back on the spaciousness and wonder of her situation at that time and thinks of the present condition of her former headquarters -- a heap of ruins, desolate, and filled with vast unpopulated areas, she is assured by the Lord that the good old days will not merely return -- they will be far surpassed. The land which appeared so expansive and all-sufficient for the people of God in those glorious days will even come to appear too small, so that the children that will replace the others who have been lost will say that they need more space (v. 20).

The future reaction of Zion to this situation is described in verse 21. She will seem unable to comprehend it. She will say, "Who has begotten me these, seeing that I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, one wandering to and fro? who has brought up these?" The fact that Zion is called "one wandering to and fro" (or "driven away") is clear proof that the word here does not represent a place, but that it is a personification of the people of God. Her former children have disappeared, but the time is coming when she will have great numbers of new children and will ask in amazement: "Whence have these come?"

At this point we are inevitably reminded of the wonderful promise of Isaiah 29:22-23 that Jacob will see children whom God Himself has created ("the work of mine hands") and will praise "the LORD who redeemed Abraham." John the Baptist declared "that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Mat. 3:9). Abraham was redeemed by the power of God. It was not mere natural generation which made Abraham a part of Zion, but God's wonderful grace. God is promising here that in the future He will bring many new ones from sources utterly unsuspected at present and that He Himself will cause them to be born into the family of

God. Isaiah 49:21, like Isaiah 29:22-23, presents another wonderful promise of what Paul predicted when he spoke of the grafting of wild branches into the olive tree of God's grace, so that the Gentiles would have a part in the inheritance of Abraham (Rom. 11).

In verses 22-23 the Lord vividly points out how the kingdom is to be extended. Many of the leaders of the Gentiles are to be "nursing fathers" and "nursing mothers" to the new children of Zion; they will bow down before the Lord and will perform their part in upbuilding the family of God.

This, of course, does not mean that in all periods of the future the people of God will seem to be successful. Plainly enough there will be ups and downs, times of progress and times of seeming defeat, but over the centuries this promise has been abundantly fulfilled. God has used many kings of the earth -- some of them voluntarily through love of God, others against their will -- as His instruments in building up His people.

Verse 23 ends with a wonderful promise: "for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me." God does not promise that there may not be temporary embarrassment or even seeming failure, but in the end His will is bound to be accomplished. Those who truly and sincerely seek to serve Him will often find their efforts rewarded in ways far beyond what they had ever dreamed. God makes even the wrath of man to praise Him and brings things to pass in most unexpected and wonderful ways. Surely the people of God, reading these words of the prophet Isaiah, would have their faith strengthened and be encouraged to wait for the Lord, well assured that His wonderful promises would be fulfilled.

The Second and Third Answers

The second answer to Zion's complaint is found in verses 24-26. God says in effect, "It may seem difficult to you that the mighty should be forced to disgorge their prey or to surrender the captives they have taken. However, My power is far greater than that of any of the mighty of the earth and I shall exert this power to save the children of Zion." He will save them not merely from physical oppression and from the Babylonian captivity, as He has promised to do through

Cyrus, but also from something far worse. He will deliver them from the terrible bondage of sin.

In verse 26 He points out the fate ahead for the oppressors. They are to be filled with confusion and their paths will lead to destruction. We have seen this in our own generation in the case of many who have sought to obtain their own ends at the expense of human suffering. We have seen them fall into confusion and terrible disaster. God promises that this will be the fate of those who oppose His will or oppress His people. He is going to make it plain to all that He the Lord is the Savior and the Redeemer and the Mighty One of Jacob.

The third answer to Zion's complaint is based upon the Lord's relationship to Zion (Isa. 50:1-3). He asks the people of Zion, "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement?" A better rendering would be, "Where is there a bill of divorcement of your mother? What evidence is there that God has put her away, or that He has sold her to a creditor?" He declares that He has never taken such action. The fate of the Jews is a result of their iniquity; it came because of their transgressions. They have fallen into serious difficulty as a result of sin. God has called but no man has answered (v. 2). There is none other who is able to deliver the people from the fate which they have brought upon themselves. However, He announces that His hand is not shortened so that He cannot redeem. He proceeds to refer to a number of His former actions in connection with the deliverance of the people from Egypt. At His rebuke He dried up the sea; He caused the fish of the river to die; He caused darkness to cover the face of the earth. These are examples of the wonderful work which God performed in Egypt, showing the supremacy of His mighty power. The Egyptian bondage was typical of the bondage to sin -- a captivity which is far more dangerous than any outward captivity which results from it. God declares His power to establish supremacy over the forces of evil, bringing darkness and ineffectiveness to their efforts. He who has done this in the past can do it again; He still maintains His relationship to those He has redeemed. He is still married to them and has never put them away from Him.

This finishes the direct treatment of the complaint of Zion but does not conclude the matter; what follows gives a clue to the decisive answer to the whole problem. The full bearing of this answer does not become entirely clear until chapter 53 has been reached, but its main elements are described in the words of the servant in the next section.

The Servant's Declaration

In various sections of the book so far we have had statements by the servant of the Lord that He is to be a light to the Gentiles; that He is to deliver the people from captivity; that He is to set free those who are in bondage. However, up to the present we have not been told in any clear way just how He is to do this. Now the explanation of the way in which He is to do it is begun. The means of redemption which He describes is something which mere human wisdom could never have imagined. Only God Himself could have revealed it.

In 50:4-9 we have a statement by the servant describing the suffering which He is to go through and the great justification which He is to accomplish by it. As we read this passage describing the sufferings of the servant of the Lord -- a theme which has been hardly touched upon thus far -- it is natural to ask whether it is necessary to consider this passage as spoken by the servant, or whether it can be taken instead as a description of the sufferings which Israel is undergoing in exile. The answer to this question is furnished by verse 5. There the speaker declares that He has not been rebellious nor turned away from doing the will of God; giving His back to the smiters, He has voluntarily undergone the sufferings here described. Such a statement is utterly out of harmony with the picture of Israel contained in the previous chapters of this book. Israel was there represented as a servant who is dumb and blind and rebellious. He has been sent into captivity for his sin (Isa. 42:19-24); he has failed to bring any sweet cane to the Lord or any signs of love (43:23-24), but has turned away his ear and been rebellious (48:8). For Israel then to turn to the Lord and say, "I was not rebellious, neither turned away back" would be utterly inconsistent with the previous chapters. It is inconceivable

that the same book would contain those pictures and this one. Clearly the speaker here is not Israel, but the servant of the Lord taking the place of Israel and of the people of God, and undergoing in their place the suffering which they deserve.

This passage begins with a declaration of the wonderful teaching work of God's servant. God has indeed given Him the tongue of the learned. We read in the Gospels that people said of Christ: "Never did man speak like this Man." He was able to speak a word in season to the weary. He said, "Come unto Me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

The very close relation of the Servant to His Father is here described. God wakened Him morning by morning, wakening His ear to hear God's message.

In verse 5 we have a statement which no other who ever lived except the Lord Jesus Christ could truly say. "I was not rebellious neither turned I away back." Every other has failed God at some point or other. This One was absolutely true to the work to which God called Him.

In verse 6 we have the voluntary suffering of Christ. It is utterly different from the involuntary suffering that Israel went through for its own sin. He went as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth. He hid not His face from shame and spitting but willingly offered Himself a ransom for many.

In verse 7 He declares that with the help of God He set His face as a flint to perform the work that God gave Him. We read in Luke 9:53 that He set His face to go up to Jerusalem. He knew what was ahead of Him there but nothing could deter Him from doing His Father's will.

Perhaps in verses 8-9 we hear the Servant continuing to speak and declaring His certainty that God will enable Him to carry out the work to which He has been called. It is more likely, however, that the speaker in these verses is one of those who believe in the finished work of Christ, joyfully proclaiming that the One Who has justified him is near, and that consequently, he fears no one. He is ready to face the adversary in the knowledge that he is perfectly safe because God has procured his justification, and God is ready to protect him. All who oppose the work of God shall wax old

as a garment, and moths shall eat them up. Only those who are true to the Lord remain safe forever.

Two Possible Fates

Verses 10-11 contain a declaration addressed to two classes of people: those who fear the Lord, and those who kindle opposition to Him. The first group is urged to trust in the Lord. "In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:8,9 American Standard Version). One who obeys the voice of God's true Servant need never walk in darkness and be without light. Even though he cannot see the way which is ahead, he can safely trust in God and know that God will bring him through; his feet are on the solid Rock of the finished work of redemption provided by the Servant of the Lord.

In contrast to verse 10, verse 11 tells the fate of those who oppose God and kindle fiery darts of destruction and confusion. By their own fires they are to perish. Their own schemes will bring swift destruction upon them. This is their fate from the hand of God: they will lie down in everlasting sorrow. These verses state clearly the two possibilities before every man. He may accept the finished work of Christ and enjoy perfect peace in God, or, resisting the Lord and opposing His Son, he will receive eternal sorrow and death as his portion.

Isaiah 51:1-52:12

The great passage about the Servant of the Lord which we have just examined and the even greater one in Isaiah 52:13-53:12, are separated by a passage of exhortation.

This passage is divisible into three main sections, of which the first has three sub-divisions, each beginning with the word "hearken." The second section has three sub-divisions, each of which begins with "awake." The third is a chorus of joy, made up of three subdivisions. These portions begin as follows:

The Three Harkens

1. Is. 51:1 -- "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness."
2. Is. 51:4 -- "Hearken unto me, my people."
3. Is. 51:7 -- "Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness."

The Three Awakes

1. Is. 51:9 -- "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord."
2. Is. 51:17 -- "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem."
3. Is. 52:1 -- "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion."

The Chorus of Joy

1. Is. 52:7 -- "How beautiful upon the mountains."
2. Is. 52:9 -- "Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem."
3. Is. 52:11 -- "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence."

The first of these parts, 51:1-3, is addressed to those who are following after righteousness. They are told that the way to find it is to look to the original source through which they came into the Kingdom of God. It is pointed out that Abraham was called alone when God chose him out of all the people of the earth, to be the source of blessing. Those who now are following after righteousness are told to look to the rock from which they have been hewn and to know that even as God blessed Abraham He can also bless them. Verse 3 gives definite assurance that God will indeed comfort Zion.

Verses 4-6 are addressed to God's people who are tempted to be weak in faith and to question whether He will really perform His promises. Their attention is called to the celestial forces which God has established. He will eventually cause these to vanish away like smoke, but He declares that His salvation will last forever and ever.

Verses 7-8 are addressed to the people who know righteousness -- those whose hearts are steadfastly fixed upon the Word of God. They are assured that God's righteousness is permanent and will not perish like earthly things.

We now begin the sections introduced by "awake." The first of these seems not to be a statement of the Lord, like

the previous three "hearkens," but to present the words of the people as they call upon God to show His great power in the earth. Reference is made to His great acts in ancient times in delivering His people from Egypt. In connection with verse 9 we should note Ezekiel 29:3, which refers to Egypt under the same figure of the dragon. The name Rahab is also similarly used elsewhere of Egypt (e.g. Psalm 87:4). In answer to the prayer which verses 9-10 address to God, the following verses contain His promise that His redeemed will indeed return, because He is the One who will comfort them. The Lord exhorts them not to be afraid of men, who will die, but to fix their faith upon Him.

The second of the sections introduced by the word "awake" is spoken by the Lord and addressed to Jerusalem. He calls upon her to awaken from her misery and to know that God will surely bring an end to all her suffering.

It is hard to understand why a chapter division should be made between 51:23 and 52:1, for the third of the three sections introduced by "awake" begins here. It closely parallels the second. Jerusalem is called upon to shake herself loose from her despair and misery and to recognize that God is really going to redeem her. In verse 3 He points out that He never sold them for gain to Himself. The fact that they went into exile was entirely due to their own sin and to their departure from God. However, He will reclaim them by His own power. In verses 5-6 He declares that His name is being blasphemed because His people are in exile and promises that He will cause people everywhere to know His name by the great works which He will do in behalf of His own.

The chorus of joy (52:7-12) begins with exultation over the coming of God's great salvation. Its first four verses reach the very summit of poetic expression of joy. The nature of the salvation over which they rejoice is not specified very clearly here, and it might be thought that only return from exile is in mind. However, the phraseology seems to go beyond what this alone would call for. Surely there is also in view God's redemption of His people from that which was the real cause of the exile -- their sin. After these four verses it is quite appropriate that the people of God should be called upon in verses 11-12 to

separate themselves from all that is wicked and to touch no unclean thing. They do not have to go forth in haste if God is leading them. They can go calmly and peacefully, because His power is so great that there is no need of hurried flight. In view of the phrase "ye that bear the vessels of the LORD" it is impossible to escape here an allusion to the return from the exile, when Cyrus allowed the people to take the vessels of the temple back to Jerusalem under his own personal patronage. He gave them permission to rebuild their temple and to reestablish God's worship in their homeland. However, this is the only touch in the verse which could suggest that it be restricted to this phase of God's redemption. Surely the greater phase is also in view. God's people are to depart from evil, and to do it with the assurance that His power and presence will be with them.

This leads very naturally to the beginning of chapter 53 -- the great climactic passage about the redemptive work of the Servant of God. It is the last time that the Servant is specifically mentioned in the book of Isaiah. The passage includes the last three verses of chapter 52, and it is extremely unfortunate that it is interrupted by a chapter division at this point. The section from 51:1 to 52:12 forms a fitting introduction to it, particularly the great chorus of joy in 52:7-12. This wonderful passage from 52:13 to 53:12 has been called the very "Holy of Holies" of the Bible.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

We now come to one of the grandest passages in the entire Bible. It is the climax of all the words of comfort that we have read between Isaiah 40 and Isaiah 52, and also of all the wonderful teaching about the mission of the Servant of the Lord. After this "servants of God" occurs but never "servant."

Previous to this point we have seen recurrent hints, and then a clear view in Isaiah 49, of the fact that the Servant of the Lord is distinct from Israel. He is Israel in a true sense because He is from Israel and represents Israel; yet He can be sharply distinguished from the nation as a whole. Israel is the servant of the Lord, called to perform a great work and to be a light to the Gentiles, but Israel has fallen into sin and

has proven that it is impossible for her to carry out this great work. The work must be carried out by the true Servant, who represents Israel. In view of the great stress which has been laid hitherto on the matter of return from exile it seems rather surprising at first that this great passage should contain no reference to the exile. Neither does it touch upon the great theme of the omnipotence of God or on that of His power to predict the future. No mention of deliverance from Babylon is found in it. Everything previous has been leading to a great climactic passage; to our surprise the passage itself does not specifically refer to these great thoughts which have previously been so prominent in this portion of the book.

It is, however, God's answer to the greatest problem of all - the problem of the sin which has caused the exile and which causes all the ills of humanity.

After the great chorus of joy in Isaiah 52:7-12 we find the declaration of the reason for the joy. Verse 13 announces the success of the Servant in carrying out His work: "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently" or (as better rendered) "shall prosper."

The rest of the verse consists of three words for exaltation. The second of them is translated "extolled" in the King James Version, but this is not a very good rendering. It is, literally, "lifted up." Literally this part of the verse reads: "He shall be high and be lifted up and be very high." Delitzsch suggests that we have here His resurrection ("He shall be high"), His ascension ("He shall be lifted up"), and His sitting at the right hand of God the Father ("and be very high"). It can hardly be said that this is clearly taught here, but there may be a suggestion of these great facts in the life of Christ. Otherwise, it is hard to explain why there should be this heaping up of these particular three words to show His marvelous exaltation. It is another instance where a truth is briefly suggested prior to the time when it can be clearly and fully explained.

In striking contrast to what precedes, verse 14 jumps from the exaltation of Christ to His previous humiliation. This is a truth which would at first be very hard for readers of Isaiah to understand.

Previously Israel has been described as God's servant humiliated by its suffering and hence unable to perform the work of God. It has been taught that a Servant is to represent Israel in performing this great work, but there has been as yet only one brief suggestion, in Isaiah 50:4-6, that this Servant is to suffer.

Isaiah 52:14 is not translated particularly well in the King James Version. It seems clear that the translators missed the full meaning of the verse. Evidently they did not fully understand the teaching of the earlier chapters of the book, as to the difference between Israel (which is repeatedly addressed in the second person in the fifty-second chapter), and the Servant of the Lord, who is to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to be a light to the Gentiles. In this verse the second person is used of Israel and the third person is used of the Servant. "Just as many were astonished at thee, O Israel, because of the suffering through which thou hast gone, similarly His visage is to be so marred that He hardly seems human." The fact that this is the correct interpretation is demonstrated when we note that, in the Hebrew, the word "so" is at the very beginning of the second phrase. "As many were astonished at thee, so marred was His visage...."

We have thus seen the comparison between the humiliation of the Servant and the humiliation of Israel. Yet we recall that there is a vital difference between the two humiliations. The humiliation of Israel is a result of its sin and accomplishes no good purpose in itself. It is proof of Israel's inability to carry out the work assigned to her. The humiliation of the Servant is not due to any sin of His own, for He is without sin. He is the One who calmly and without haste proceeds to the accomplishment of His work. Yet He must undergo humiliation. Why must He do so? The following verse gives us the answer: "So shall he sprinkle many nations."

The word translated "sprinkle" here is the word which is used repeatedly in Leviticus for the ceremonial cleansing of the objects in the temple. Sometimes this was done with water and sometimes with blood. The purpose of the humiliation of the Servant is to cleanse many nations. It is to bring to them God's redeeming power and to free them from their sin. Thus right in the beginning of this passage its great

note is suggested. The Servant is to accomplish His work and as a result to be exalted. He is to go through great humiliation But the result of His humiliation is to be the purification of the nation.

Under the word "sprinkle" the American Standard Version has a footnote which says "or startle." Many modern interpreters like to substitute the word "startle" for "sprinkle." There is no philological justification for this. The word "sprinkle" in this form is used repeatedly in the Pentateuch to describe the sprinkling of water, oil, or blood on the various vessels of the tabernacle in order to cleanse them. It is exactly the work which He is to do -- to bring purification to the nations by means of His suffering. The only way that the idea of "startle" is found here is by assuming that just as one causes water or blood to jump when he sprinkles it, so he causes the nations to jump or leap in joy. There is no use of the word in such a sense anywhere else in Hebrew. In favor of reading "startle" it is suggested that it parallels the beginning of verse 14 and the rest of verse 15. But this is not really the fact. In verse 14 the word translated "astonied" in the King James Version would be much better translated "appalled." It is not an attitude of joy or excitement, but rather such an impulse as would cause one to close his mouth in misery. Moreover, the idea of the rest of verse 15 is altogether different. If the kings were startled you would expect them to open their mouths, rather than to shut their mouths. The passage means that many kings will stand in silent awe. The Servant has shown the vileness of sin and has provided the cure for it. The nations have been sprinkled; the kings can offer no valid objection to that which has been done. Many of them accept it and believe on Him. This prophecy has been literally fulfilled in Christian history.

It would be much better to have the first clause of verse 15 to be a part of verse 14 and to have the rest of 15 be a verse by itself. "So shall He sprinkle many nations" is closely connected with what precedes rather than with what follows. Someone may ask whether this is not changing the Word of God. The answer is, "No." The verse divisions are not original. They were made in a very early time but are not part of the inspired text. Psalm 19:4 indicates clearly that they are sometimes wrong, for there the last sentence of one

stanza of a poem and the first clause of its next stanza are illogically combined into one verse. This is doubtless true in many cases in the Bible. Certainly here verse 15 should be divided differently.

The kings are filled with awe at what they see, for it is something which they never would have believed possible. "That which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider." This verse is quoted by Paul in Romans 15:21, where it is rendered: "To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand." The Hebrew can equally well be rendered this way, and it is translated approximately so by the Douay Version, following the Vulgate. However, it does not make a great deal of difference to the sense which of the two ways we take it. Chapter 53:1 follows immediately after that. Many kings and various nations are filled with awe at what they have seen and say, "Who would ever have believed what we have heard?"

As we have noticed, this important section of the book of Isaiah begins with verse 13 of chapter 52. We saw that the first verse of chapter 53 expresses the attitude of many kings of the earth and leaders of various nations. They declare their wonderment at the remarkable way in which the Lord has brought salvation, saying: "Who would have believed what we have heard?" In English the word "report" may mean something that we hear or something that we tell, but the Hebrew word used here is unambiguous; it means something that is heard.

The reason for this attitude is shown in the second verse, which contains two thoughts. First, his origin is not what might have been expected; second, he does not have that attractiveness about him which might have been looked for in the coming deliverer. He is like a root out of a dry ground. He came from Israel, which in the time of Christ seemed to most nations to be parched and barren, desolate of hope for the future. Who would have thought that it would be from this nation -- and in fact from one of the less prominent sections of the nation -- that One would come who would bring deliverance to the whole world. Even one of His own countrymen said, when told of Him: "Can there any good

thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Out of what was apparently a dry ground there grew up a tender plant!

The last half of verse 2 -- "he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" -- is not speaking of the character of Christ, but solely of that aspect of His life which is most vital to the salvation which He brings. Indeed, the character of Christ had a fascination surpassing that of all others. Men said of Him, "Never man spake like this man." (John 7:46). Great crowds followed Him and were impressed with the wonder of His teaching and with the glory of His miracles. This verse refers not to His character or His life but to His death. Who would have thought that salvation would come to the whole world from One who died a criminal's death on the humiliating cross? When men see His cruel death there is no beauty that they should desire Him. The Redeemer did not come as a great general leading a mighty army to conquer nations and to establish peace and righteousness by force. One who died a tragic death became thereby the source of salvation to the whole world. It would hardly have been expected that the news of such an event would have conquered great nations and led whole peoples to come to the foot of His cross. Yet that is exactly what occurred.

Verse 3 continues to describe the sorrow and misery connected with His death. Cast out and rejected -- even His disciples fleeing -- He was conspired against by men of His own nation, and subjected to cruel torture and death at the hands of brutal foreigners. "He was despised and we esteemed Him not."

The first half of verse 4 is often misunderstood and was probably not correctly interpreted by the translators of our King James Version. The words rendered "griefs" and "sorrows" are in the Hebrew much narrower words than this translation would suggest. They do not indicate sorrow or grief in general, but specifically physical injury or sickness. It would be more literal to translate it, "Surely He has borne our infirmities and carried our sicknesses."

In connection with this phrase many Bibles have a marginal reference to Matthew 8:17 and 1 Peter 2:24. Some, however, contain only the reference to Matthew. When we look at these two New Testament statements we find that if

they both refer to this verse in Isaiah 53 their editor's interpretations of Isaiah contradict one another.

Matthew is referring to the healing ministry of Christ and the miracles He worked on earth, while Peter is referring to the atonement. 1 Peter 2:24 reads as follows: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." It is impossible to escape noticing that this verse (and the one following it) refer to Isaiah 53. Yet to say that it refers to the first half of Isaiah 53:4 is utterly unwarranted, for the only word it has in common with that verse is "bare." The words for "sickness" or "infirmity," even if translated "grief" and "sorrow," are certainly not the equivalent of "sin." Only confusion is introduced by using this particular New Testament verse as an explanatory comment to Isaiah 53:4. It is quite different when we look at Matthew 8:17. After Matthew described how Jesus healed those who were sick, he added the words: "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, Esaias, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." Clearly Matthew interprets the passage in Isaiah as describing how Jesus would take away the sicknesses of human beings and deliver them from their infirmities.

The verse in Isaiah means: we saw Him do these wonderful miracles of healing, we realized that He was not only a great teacher but also One who could do mighty miracles, and yet, when He was crucified, we thought that He was "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." It reminds us of the men on the road to Emmaus who are described in Luke 24. They told of the wonderful deeds of Jesus "which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people." Then they said: "The chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and have crucified Him. But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." They saw the wondrous acts which He had performed and yet they thought that the fact that He had been taken by cruel hands and killed proved Him not to be the Savior. Isaiah 53:4 exactly describes the situation of these men. They had seen Him heal physical suffering and work mighty miracles; yet when He was crucified they thought that His mighty work was at an end.

Verse 5 gives the conclusion reached on the road to Emmaus by the disciples to whom Jesus Christ had spoken -- a conclusion to which everyone must come who sees Christ in His true character. Such a One as He could not be killed as a common malefactor, without a deeper meaning being involved: "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." Here indeed the atonement is described, rather than in the first half of verse 4.

If the atonement had been presented in the first half of verse 4, which describes the removal of physical suffering, it would warrant the conclusion that the atonement provides healing from all diseases and physical injuries and that we now have a right to claim such healing. Such a conclusion would be false. The Bible contains abundant evidence that it is God's will that in this age many of His people should be subject to infirmity and sickness, and sometimes He uses these hardships as instruments for our development and sanctification.

It is God's desire that we should use every possible means of securing health, and sometimes He chooses marvelously to heal one of His people after medical science has reached its very limit. Yet in this age we have no right to claim this as a right, for it is often God's will to withhold physical healing. We see this even in such a man as the apostle Paul, who prayed in vain that God would remove his "thorn in the flesh." Only in the millennium, when we have been given the resurrection body, will we experience the full outworking of the result of the death of Christ on the cross, in the removal of all physical suffering and the end of all sickness and pain.

In verse 6 believers in Christ, both Jew and Gentile, acknowledge their individual guilt, and recognize that for every true believer this guilt has been laid on the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 7 we have absolute proof that the One who is here described is not the nation of Israel but the individual Servant of the Lord who represents Israel and comes out from Israel but who nevertheless is distinct from the nation as a whole. Who could say of Israel in the Babylonian captivity that "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb so he

openeth not his mouth"? In the previous chapters we have seen the complaints of Israel and have observed its tendency to despair, and even sometimes to turn against God instead of recognizing the fact of guilt and the need of deliverance from sin. This is true of all human beings. None of us suffer like this One who is described here. He is the perfect Son of God. Before His persecutors He does not answer back. As Peter says, "When he was reviled he reviled not again" (1 Pet. 2:23).

Verse 8 describes the seeming hopelessness of the end of His life. He was taken from prison and from judgment and who shall say that there is any future for Him? "Who shall declare His generation?" He died as a young man, only thirty years of age. He had no posterity. A small group of disciples had followed Him, but even these had fled in panic. He was cut off from the land of the living, but it was "for the transgression of my people" that He was stricken.

Verse 9 is a little hard to understand at first. "He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death." This is not a good translation. Its first verb does not mean "made" but "gave" or "appointed." Its subject should be the impersonal "one" rather than "he." This expression is common in many languages, but in modern English it is usually expressed by the passive. We would say: "He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but at His death He was buried with the rich." In English an adjective used as a noun refers to a plural idea, as when we speak of "the living and the dead." In Hebrew, as in most languages, such an adjective indicates the singular unless a plural form is used. It would be more correctly translated, "One appointed for Him a grave with the wicked but at His death He was buried with a rich man." It had been understood that He would be cast, without identification or ceremony, into the graves where the malefactors were buried, but after His death He was placed in the tomb of a rich man. The version issued by the Jewish Publication Society of America (published in 1917) renders this verse, "And they made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich his tomb."

It is not part of the humiliation of the Servant that He is to be buried in the tomb of a rich man; neither is it much of a sign of exaltation; nor does it contribute anything to the

actual accomplishment of His work. It is simply an indication making it easier to identify the exact one here described. This unusual circumstance occurred in connection with the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was buried in the tomb of the rich man, Joseph of Arimathea. The verse is like an indicator, pointing to Him and saying, "This is the One who is described in Isaiah 53."

It is interesting that the fulfillment in Christ, which requires some explanation in our Christian version, should be more obvious in the Jewish translation!

The latter part of verse 9 shows a reason why the actual burial should be so different from what would have been expected. It was because "he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth." Joseph recognized that Jesus did not deserve to die on the cross. He had done no violence like Barabbas and the two thieves. There had been no deceit in His life; He alone of all who ever lived could say: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John 8:46).

Despite this fact it is pointed out again in verse 10 that he suffered the terrible death on the cross. "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief." We must pause here over the first phrase: "It hath pleased the LORD to bruise Him." It was not that He was involved in a situation which He could not escape. It was not the result of purely human circumstances. It was an act of God foreordained from before the foundation of the world. It was God's pleasure that this should come to Him. It was God's purpose that salvation should be attained in this way. "It pleased the LORD to bruise Him."

In connection with this phrase we should note the end of the verse: "the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand." God gave His Son to die on the cross, but He did not give Him in vain. What God has planned will be accomplished. Those who believe on Him are actually redeemed through His death. The sovereignty of God is the wonderful thought in this verse. Sin may rage; Satan may appear triumphant; things may seem hopeless and almost drive Christians to despair at times, but God's hand is always on the rudder and His plan is bound to succeed in the end. It was part of God's purpose that He should be bruised and God's full purpose will prosper in His hand.

The second phrase in verse 10, "he hath put him to grief," uses the same Hebrew word as the one translated "grief" in verse 4. It can be better rendered "he has made him sick" or "he has caused him physical injury." It refers to the act of God in causing that Jesus should go through the terrible suffering and physical torture of the cross.

"When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin" could just as well be translated "when his soul shall make a sin offering." It does not make much difference to the sense which rendering we take, except that there is no obvious reason for the insertion of the second personal pronoun at this point in the chapter.

Verse 10 also contains a remarkable statement about the result of the Servant's sacrifice. We have noticed that He seemed to be stricken and cut off from the land of the living so that no one could see any prospect for Him of posterity or of continuing accomplishment (v. 8). Yet it is promised that, as a result of the offering which He will make, "he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand." It is a seeming paradox -- one of the marvels of history -- that this man, cut off at a very young age, and leaving only a small group of scattered disciples, should nevertheless see a following that would stretch on and on through the ages, until the time of His return, and that His name should be praised as far as the sun's rays extend.

"He shall prolong his days." His days seemed to be cut off, but here is the suggestion that they are again to be continued. Only three days after His life seemed to have ended He rose from the tomb in triumph and began that resurrection life which continues to this very day and will never end.

"He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied" (v. 11). Many a man performs great labor and toil and dies without seeing much accomplished, wondering whether his life will prove futile or whether something worthwhile may yet come out of it. This One returned from the dead and saw the fruits of His labors. As He sits at the right hand of God making intercession for us, He sees the results of His accomplishment on Calvary's cross. As each new individual comes to believe in Christ and to receive salvation through His finished work, He is satisfied.

"By his knowledge." Most probably the "his" here is an objective rather than a subjective genitive, and thus the phrase means "by the knowledge of Him." By the knowledge of Himself, Christ, the righteous Servant, will justify many, because of His substitutionary atonement. It is not merely that His example makes an effect upon us and changes our lives. If He accomplished nothing actual by His death on the cross, His example would have no influence upon us; it would seem just like an empty show or an unnecessary suffering. He has actually borne our iniquity: our guilt was laid upon Him; He suffered for us. The substitutionary atonement is clearly taught in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah.

In verse 12 we find it plainly shown that universalism is not the teaching of the Scripture. It does not say that Christ is going to redeem all the world. God "will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong." Surely "the great" and "the strong" here refers to the one who is "the prince of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Satan often seems to be triumphant everywhere, and the whole world seems to lie in his grasp. It looks as if there is no power that could overcome him. Yet Jesus Christ, the humble Servant of God who died on the cross, has divided the spoil with Satan and has already torn away from him much of his strength. He has broken the bonds of death and made it possible that everyone who will believe on Him should escape out of the snare of the evil one.

He did this because "He hath poured out His soul unto death: and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

Many interpreters have tried to represent Isaiah 53 as a description of Israel in captivity and in suffering. It simply does not fit. Many a phrase here could not possibly refer to Israel. The whole note of substitutionary atonement here described can find no satisfactory interpretation as relating to anything that Israel as a race has undergone. The passage makes no sense at all from any other interpretation than that it is a wonderful prediction, 700 years in advance, of the meaning of the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross. In this interpretation it makes absolute sense. Every detail fits into place. It is a marvelous description of

God's answer to the problem of sin -- that problem that in the previous chapters has been coming more and more to the front.

With this chapter we have our last occurrence in Isaiah of the phrases, "Servant of the LORD " and "my Servant," which have been so frequent in recent chapters. After this the word "servant" is only used in the plural. It refers to the servants of God -- those who are the followers of the great Servant of God -- those who are redeemed Through what He has done.

Isaiah 54 begins a great call to extend the Gospel message to all the Gentiles, and in chapter 55 we have the wonderful Gospel call itself, the result of what God has done, as described in chapter 53.

Isaiah 54:1-56:8

The Results of the Work of the Suffering Servant

The section we are about to study cannot be understood apart from its relation to what precedes. Chapter 53 gave the glorious climax of the work of the Servant of the Lord, describing His humiliation and suffering, and touching upon the resulting redemption and justification of those many people whose iniquities He bore. Now we learn in more detail some of the results of this work.

The section divides naturally into three parts:

- (1) Isaiah 54:1-17 assures God's people of future extension and blessing, as a result of the work of the righteous Servant.
- (2) Isaiah 55:1-56:2 gives the Gospel call, inviting individuals to avail themselves of the free offer of salvation.
- (3) Isaiah 56:3-8 declares that the call is not limited to any race or nation, but is open to all.

It is important to note that in this section the prophet is addressing the people of God, who at the time of Isaiah formed a substantial part of the nation of Israel. These chapters have little specific reference to Israel as a nation, but deal with God's true people, regardless of racial or national background. They are the people who feel the certainty of the coming exile, and who, during the course of

chapters 41 to 53, have come to see more and more clearly that the essential question is not captivity to Babylon, but captivity to sin, and to feel their consequent inability to carry out the glorious world-wide mission assigned to the Servant of the Lord. This phrase, "Servant of the LORD" does not occur after Isaiah 53; in later chapters the prophet speaks instead of "servants of the LORD," as he tells how the followers of God's true Servant are to enjoy the fruits of His accomplishment and yield themselves as instruments to do His bidding.

When these people were driven into exile they would tend to feel desolate and abandoned, and during the subsequent years, as the exile continued, these feelings would be intensified. In chapter 54 God gives His suffering people words of joy and encouragement, based on the results of the work of the Servant.

The chapter is divisible into three parts. Verses 1-5 call on the people to rejoice because of the great increase which is to come to them. Verses 6-10 stress the permanence of the blessing God has in store for them. Verses 11-17 picture the stability of their future condition. In this chapter the people are addressed collectively as a unit.

In verse 1 the people is called "barren" because of its inability to carry out the world-wide mission, but it is told to sing and rejoice because "more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife." They who seemed doomed to ineffectiveness and sterility are assured that God will use them to accomplish a greater work than was possible even in the days when David reigned in Jerusalem and God seemed truly to be married to His people.

The next two verses dwell on the extension of the people, as the influence goes out to the right and to the left, and distant nations and desolate cities become centers of the true people of God. The figure of the tent in verse 2 is peculiarly appropriate to a description of God's blessing upon His people during their pilgrimage journey. A similar figure was used in chapter 4. There it was God's protection that was stressed; here it is their extension and widening influence. William Carey used this verse as his text in his famous sermon, as he urged his hearers to send the Gospel to the people of India. In the light of the context it is clear that he

was not selecting a verse at random to present a thought unrelated to the rest of the chapter, but urging his hearers to be God's instruments in carrying out the duty that the verse describes.

Verses 4 and 5 assure God's people that they need not fear to undertake this great missionary task. The accomplishment of the Servant, in His humiliation and death, has assured the success of the world-wide ministry to which His followers are called. The reproach of the time when they seemed to be forsaken and widowed is to be forgotten in the glory of Him Who purchased them with His own blood. Their Creator is their husband; He Who has redeemed them is the Holy One Who called Israel out of Egypt; He is to be recognized as the God of the whole earth.

Verses 6-10 point out the permanence of the blessing which God will give His people. In verse 6 He looks back to their present condition, which He compares to that of "a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit," or of one who, after being a wife of youth, was then cast aside. So great is the mercy ahead that this time of apparent rejection will seem to have been only "a small moment" (v. 7). In verse 9 the assured continuance of God's blessing upon those who are redeemed through His Suffering Servant is compared to His explanation to Noah that the rainbow in the heavens would be a sign of God's promise never again to overwhelm the earth by waters of a flood (Gen. 9:11-15).

It is hard to imagine much stronger language than that used in verse 10 regarding the permanence of God's mercy toward His people. This paragraph makes a clear and strong presentation of the doctrine of the perseverance (or preservation) of the saints.

Built into the Temple

In verse 2 the extension of God's people was presented under the figure of a tent. Verses 11 and 12 use another figure - that of a temple. This is to stress the stability of the people whom God creates for Himself. The people which has been afflicted and tossed is to be established on a foundation of strength and beauty. The members are compared to

precious stones, built into the temple of the living God. Paul uses the same figure in Ephesians 2:19-22.

Verse 13 shows the privileges of the succeeding generations of God's people. They are to be "taught of the LORD." His Spirit will dwell in their hearts, to guide them into His truth and to illumine their minds (John 16:13-14). This promise is found at various points in the Old Testament; compare Jeremiah 31:33-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27. Not only is God to teach them, but He is to implant His wonderful peace in their hearts; compare John 14:27.

Verse 14 promises the establishment of God's people in righteousness. In such passages the attempt is sometimes made to translate the word "righteousness" as "victory." Such a rendering, however, does violence to the Hebrew word. It always conveys the sense of conformity to what is right. God's people are to be firmly implanted in righteousness, and as a result are assured that no weapon will prosper against them. They will be, like the tree in the first Psalm, planted by the rivers of water of God's truth, and their works will prosper.

The following verses stress the fact that God will protect His people from destruction. The Babylonian exile was part of His Purpose, and He will deliver His people. He stresses the fact that all the forces of iniquity can do nothing without His permission (v. 16). Even the enemies of God are part of His creation, and they can go only as far as He permits.

Verse 17 is the climax of this passage. It adds the thought that even those who attempt to speak in judgment against God's people will be condemned. Jesus promised His followers that when they would be called before magistrates on account of preaching the Gospel they would be given the proper words to say (Matt. 10:18-20).

Christianity has a reply to every attack. Much time and study may sometimes be required, but God assures us that there is a satisfactory answer to every attack against His Word. Two duties which should be performed by God's people are often neglected. One is to study diligently to find the true answer to each attack of unbelief. The other is to use every possible means to spread the knowledge of these answers. It would be well for each Christian to ask himself what he ought to do to further these vital tasks.

Chapter 54 ends with the assurance that the promises given belong to the "servants of the LORD," those who follow "the Servant of the Lord." They were redeemed at Calvary. They have no righteousness of their own. Like all others, they have gone astray. But He sees them in His Son, and justifies and sanctifies them by the working of His marvelous grace. "Their righteousness is from me, saith the LORD" (v. 17).

Isaiah 55:1-56:2

Like Isaiah 54 and 56:3-8, our present passage rests directly upon the description in Isaiah 53 of the redeeming work of the promised Servant of the Lord. It consists of a gracious invitation to all people to avail themselves of the results of what He accomplished there.

The first two verses and the first half of the third present God's invitation in general. From these sentences alone it is impossible to learn much about the exact nature of the invitation. Great stress is laid upon the fact that, while people are diligently laboring to secure that which can never fully satisfy, God is offering them true satisfaction without cost. The invitation is presented in most urgent language; people are called upon to forsake their vain hunt for things that will never give them true happiness and to accept instead the free offer which God is laying before them.

The first two verses give little idea of the precise nature of the invitation. The listener is invited to come to "the waters," to buy "wine and milk," to eat "that which is good" and to let his soul "delight itself in fatness." Clearly most of these terms are figurative. It is not physical bread, water, wine or milk that is meant, but something which may properly be compared to them. They are merely examples of what is desirable and necessary in life. We recall the words of the Lord Jesus to the woman of Samaria in John 4:14: "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

The first part of verse 3 shows that the invitation deals with the most essential thing in the world -- spiritual life. This, we are told, is freely offered to all who hear.

Many readers of the chapter could omit the last half of verse 3 and the following two verses without realizing that anything was missing. These verses depart from the simple invitation and bring in an idea which at first sight may seem strange, but which, on closer examination, is found to be at the very heart of the chapter. They deal with the basis of the invitation and the reason that it is given. God offers an "everlasting covenant" which may be described as "the sure mercies of David." This covenant is to be made with those who listen to the invitation that the Lord has so graciously given.

In order to ascertain the nature of this covenant we must inquire what is meant by the phrase "sure mercies of David." In modern English to show mercy means to refrain from inflicting injury, but this is not the principal meaning of the Hebrew word used here. Usually it would be better translated "lovingkindness." "Blessing" might fit, but is somewhat too general.

What are the mercies that were given to David that are here presented as offered to all who become partakers of God's covenant?

In answering this question we must note in the first place the nature of God's relation to David. David's life was far from being an example of consistent holiness. Sometimes he fell into sins which impress us as very degrading. From a moral viewpoint Saul might appear as a better man than David. The difference, however, is that the sins of David were largely sins of the flesh while those of Saul were sins of the spirit. Saul was characterized by pride and unwillingness to admit that he was wrong. In the life of David we constantly find evidence of a tender conscience and of a desire to turn away from the evil into which he had fallen and to receive God's forgiveness. It was for this reason that God called David "a man after mine own heart" (Acts 13:22). Surely, then, the everlasting covenant includes maintenance of a similar relation between God and His people.

The outstanding feature of the covenant God made with David is His promise regarding a son. God promised David a continuing line of men to sit upon his throne (2 Sam. 7; 1 Chron. 17). He indicated that this line would reach its climax in the greatest Son of David, the One who is pictured

in His kingly characteristics in the 2nd, 24th, and 110th Psalms, and in His priestly character in the 22nd Psalm. In Psalm 16 David predicted the resurrection of this great Son of his, and this passage was quoted by Peter on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:25-31) to prove that it was necessary that Jesus Christ should rise from the dead. The everlasting covenant of "the sure mercies of David" has as its center the promise of the coming of the One who is to be Prophet, Priest, and King; who is to bear the sins of His people on Calvary's cross; who is to reign in their hearts and lives and who is eventually to reign in complete victory over this entire earth.

Verses 4 and 5 deal more specifically with the covenant. These verses are not speaking of David as an individual, but of that One who was the center of God's greatest promise to David -- the coming Messiah. Of Him it is stated that He is given "for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people."

In this verse it is preferable to follow the American Standard Version in translating the Hebrew plural "peoples" rather than "people," as in the King James Version. For the use of the same Hebrew word in the singular, compare the latter part of Genesis 25:23, where Isaac's descendants are called "two nations" and it is said that "the one people shall be stronger than the other people." Moreover the article "the" which occurs in verse 4 in both versions before each occurrence of "people" or "peoples" does not occur here in the Hebrew; the passage might be more accurately (though less beautifully) translated without it. The great Son of David is to be a witness to many peoples to declare God's truth and to show how far they fall short of God's demands. The word "witness" here is almost always used in the Hebrew with the preposition "against." It does not relate to witnessing in the sense of Christian witness, but rather to declaration of sin. It indicates the condemnatory aspect of Christ's ministry. The latter part of the verse points out the leadership which Christ is to have over those peoples who will follow and obey Him, gathered from every tongue and nation.

As we turn to verse 5 we note the parallel between these two verses and verses 6 to 8 of the 2nd Psalm: "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the

decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." God has established Christ to be the Leader and Commander of all His people. In verse 5, as in Psalm 2:7-8, He addresses Him directly. In this case He is not, as in the 2nd Psalm, pointing mainly to the material victory which Christ is to win over all the world at the beginning of the Millennium, but is referring more particularly to the outgoing of the Gospel and to the coming of nations which had no connection with Him in His earthly ministry, to believe on Him and to become parts of the Church of Christ. While it is possible, of course, to consider the verse as continuing on in its fulfillment and eventually including the activities of the Millennium, its main stress is certainly on the call of Christ as it goes out in this age to many nations with which He had made no direct connection during His earthly ministry. Nations of whom the Jews in Palestine at that time had not even heard would later become prominent parts of the Church of God, because the Lord would glorify His Son (end of v. 5). Compare John 17:5: "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

In verses 6 and 7 the Gospel invitation is repeated but this time with specific emphasis upon the feature of pardon. Verses 1 and 2 did not address the listeners as unrighteous or wicked. Reference was simply made there to the hunger for something real which is found in every human heart. Now, however, the specific notes of departure from sin and of need of God's pardon are stressed. This is vital to the Gospel and no call to salvation is ever complete without it. Yet it is not always necessary to begin at this point. Often the Gospel call may, as in this chapter, begin with an appeal to the heart hunger of the listener rather than with a specific call for repentance and a specific pointing out of sin.

In verse 6 the English word "while" is a rather free translation. Literally the Hebrew reads: "Seek ye the Lord, in his being found, call ye upon Him in his being near." Such Hebrew phrases are often used to express the time in which something occurs, but may also indicate the reason for its occurrence. The verse does not necessarily mean, as the

translation suggests, that the time of the call is limited, and that it is therefore vital to take advantage of it while it is still available. Such a fact is clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture (cf. Jer. 8:20), but is probably not suggested here. The idea of this verse is that since God has made it possible for man to come to Him, by giving His own Son to die for sin, as described in Isaiah 53, man is urged to accept the gracious invitation. We could not ourselves win deliverance from the guilt and power of sin. Now that God has done it, through the redemption wrought by Christ, He is near and available so that we may freely call upon Him. The first two verses of the chapter gave the wonderful invitation to all who have heart hunger to come and be satisfied. In verse 6 we imagine a sincere and honest seeker as saying, "How can I avail myself of this wonderful offer, seeing that I am wicked and sinful and deserve nothing good at the hand of God?" The answer is, "Seek the Lord who may now be found, call upon Him, since He is near as a result of what Jesus has done on Calvary." No one need lose the opportunity of salvation because of his wickedness or sin. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Horn. 3:23), but God has freely and abundantly made provision for pardon for those who come through the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 7 the word "mercy" is a different word from that used in verse 3. It means "compassion" or "pity." It is used in Psalm 103:13 of the attitude of a father toward his child. The last two words of the verse are striking. Literally the Hebrew reads, "will multiply to pardon." God does not give a grudging forgiveness, but is ready most abundantly and fully to pardon all who come to Him through the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses 8 and 9 provide a necessary thought at this point. It is not the attitude of the natural man to forgive those who have sinned against him. The more usual impulse, as we find it on every side of us, is to demand a full recompense in order to "get even." Certainly the natural man would never think of offering himself to bear the penalty due to the law by someone who has wronged him. These two verses point out how utterly different God is. He does not think as we would think nor act as we would act. He provides a wonderful method of salvation which would never have occurred to

us, and which would be contrary to all our impulses. His thoughts and His ways are just as superior to ours as the heaven is high above the earth.

Besides looking back to the wonderful offer of pardon in the previous verses, verses 8-9 also look forward to the assurance contained in verses 10-11. At Christ's first coming the Jews expected Him to set up His kingdom by force. Instead of doing so He paid the penalty for sin on Calvary's cross and then sent forth a small band of disciples to declare His Word. How futile it seemed to human eyes! "Surely," His enemies thought, "in a short time the memory of Him will completely perish; some of His followers will soon lose their interest; the others will die off, and nothing will remain of the movement He began." How different was the result! In the next few centuries the Word of God was carried all through the then-known world, and sinners were redeemed in many continents. The method is one which would appear futile to human eyes -- this method of spreading knowledge of God through the simple word of salvation -- but it is one which God declared would accomplish His will. Just as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and man is powerless to stop them, so will God's Word accomplish the purpose He has in mind.

It is fascinating to visit one of the great desert areas in eastern California in the springtime. Ordinarily nothing is visible but barren desolation, but what a change the spring rains bring! Soon the whole region is covered with a carpet of beautiful wild flowers! How similar is the result God's Word will accomplish when He pours it forth upon the earth. It will not return to Him void!

There are two opposite errors in the study of the prophetic books. One is to neglect the teaching regarding the Millennium. Some interpreters even twist such clear millennial passages as Micah 4, Isaiah 2, and Isaiah 11 into predictions of the church of this age. Such fanciful methods could make anything mean anything. The millennial kingdom of Christ is clearly taught in both Testaments and no reasonable interpretation can remove it. This, however, should not lead us to the opposite error of finding the Millennium everywhere. Some passages have one subject, and some another, and each must be carefully determined. Our present passage

has as its subject the accomplishment predicted through the going forth of God's message of salvation.

At the same time we must carefully note exactly what result is predicted. "It shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." The objection is sometimes raised to premillennialism that it underestimates the Power of the Gospel to convert the world. It should be noted that nowhere either in the Old or New Testament is it declared that the Gospel will convert the world. That certainly is not the case in this verse. God declares that His Word will not return to Him void but will accomplish what He pleases. That is to say, His Gospel is going to win to Him all the redeemed, out of every nation and tongue, and no earthly power can stop this result. God has never declared it to be His will that the entire world be conquered by the Gospel in this age. The complete conquest of the earth is to be effected at Christ's coming by the other means described in Isaiah 11 and in Revelation 19.

After the declaration in verses 10-11 of the certainty of the carrying out of God's plan, we find in verses 12-13 a beautiful figurative statement of the results of His mercy. As God's people depart from sin and go forth into newness of life, the very mountains and hills before them are pictured as breaking forth into singing, and the trees of the field are imagined as clapping their hands with joy. All nature seems to rejoice in the regeneration of those who are saved through the mercy of Christ. In the hearts of the redeemed thorns and briers spring up no longer; their place is filled with the shade of the fir tree and the beauty of the myrtle tree. The character which is implanted becomes "to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." The unanswerable argument for the truth of the Scripture and the reality of the Gospel is found in the changed lives it produces.

From any viewpoint Isaiah 55:12 is clearly figurative. It is the present writer's opinion that verse 13 is also figurative. Upon this, however, I would not altogether insist. It is not impossible that it looks on to some extent beyond the redemption described in the previous verses to that time when the outworking of God's redemption is to be made evident in the removal of the curse from the entire earth, since such passages as Romans 8:19-23 show that a time is coming

when the curse of Genesis 3:17-19 will have been removed from the earth and the original condition of blessing reestablished. It would be foolish to base the hope of that wonderful occurrence upon this verse, since the verse may properly be taken as figurative, and such a construction fits excellently into the present context.

The statement in verse 13, "it shall be to the LORD for a name," reminds us of Acts 15:13-18, where James declared to the Council at Jerusalem that God visited the Gentiles "to take out of them a people for His name" and (in v. 17) quoted the prediction of Amos 9:12 that at Christ's return there would still be "Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the LORD who doeth all these things."

Isaiah 56:1 and 2 are properly part of chapter 55 rather than of the following chapter. The exhortation they express is closely related to what precedes, and verse 3 begins a new major section of the book.

These verses declare that God's grace results in good works. They are a denial of antinomianism -- the idea that a man can continue willingly in sin after having become a Christian. This error is vigorously assailed by the Apostle Paul in Romans 6. He says in verse 2: "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" God's people are saved from sin, but unto righteousness.

The two verses probably seemed to the archbishop who made the chapter divisions to be an anticlimax to chapter 55 and hence to belong in a separate chapter. Yet such an idea would not take into account the usage of Scripture. After wonderful passages declaring God's glory there is often a brief practical exhortation. Among the many illustrations of this which might be cited, an interesting one is the last chapter of 1 John, where, after the wonderful presentation of the relation of God to His people, the apostle adds as a last verse: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

In verse 1 the same Hebrew word is translated both "justice" and "righteousness" in the King James Version. The American Standard Version makes an improvement here by translating it "righteousness" in both places. God's people are exhorted to "keep judgment" -- in other words to avoid all clear breaking of the moral law or of the law of the land. In addition they are exhorted to "do righteousness." It is God's

desire that our lives should be in conformity with His standard of holiness and should thus form a sounding board for our words. The Christian life alone is not a witness to the Lord; words of testimony are necessary, but the words are empty sounds if they are not backed up by a life that is constantly growing more and more into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The latter part of verse 1 shows that this command to God's people to maintain holy living is not based upon human effort and human struggling but upon the presence of God's salvation and of His righteousness. It is not that we can by ourselves attain to a standard of righteousness, but that we should put on His righteousness, which is revealed through the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 2 God declares that He will give great blessing to those who are truly born again and lay hold on God's free grace. Christ said, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love" (John 15:10). God wants us to observe those holy ordinances which He has established and to keep our hands from doing evil. These verses are where they belong, not at the beginning of the offer of salvation, which is not dependent upon the performance of works of righteousness, but at the end of the promise, as an indication of the kind of life the redeemed man should live.

Isaiah 56:3 to 8 properly forms a third main section of this portion dealing with the results of the work of the righteous Servant as described in Isaiah 53. It might be helpful to give a summary of the passage from Isaiah 55:1 to 56:2:

- 1-3a God's Invitation in General Terms
- 3b-5 The Covenant of David
- 6-7 God's Invitation to Receive Pardon
- 8-9 God's Thoughts Different from Man's Thoughts
- 10-11 God's Word not to Return to Him Void
- 12-13 The Results of God's Mercy
- 1-2 God's Grace Results in Good Works

Isaiah 56:3-8

This short section which stresses the universality of the work of the suffering Servant would bring comfort to believers

at the time of the exile, when they seemed cut off from the temple and the sacrifices and it was difficult to carry out the full details of God's law. Yet the assurance given is far broader than merely to meet these exilic conditions. Its message is addressed to "the son of the stranger," to "the eunuch" -- in fact, to all people. Those who seem cut off because of ceremonial uncleanness, or of failure to meet the hereditary conditions that make entrance into the ranks of God's people easy, are assured that God has a wonderful place for them in His kingdom if they will but believe in His Son and accept the covenant which He offers them. They can receive the sure mercies of David if they show the sincerity of their faith by keeping His Sabbaths from pollution and taking hold of His covenant. Their burnt offerings will be received upon His altar.

We know, of course, that all the burnt offerings found their fulfillment in what they signified -- the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross. God's house is not going to be limited in any nationalistic way. It is not to be merely for one race or group, but it is called "an house of prayer for all people." Thus this little passage greatly stresses the universality of the Gospel call. It reaches out to all the nations of the earth and invites them to come and accept the water of life that can be obtained without money and without price.

The chapter divisions which Archbishop Langton introduced into the Latin Bible in the 13th century are a great help for quickly locating Bible passages, but we should never forget that they were put in rather hastily and that they often hide the natural divisions of the text instead of making them visible. Thus it is hard for us to imagine any reason why there should be a chapter division after 56:12. The subject matter of the latter part of chapter 56 and that of the early part of chapter 57 are continuous and there is absolutely no division of thought. On the other hand, it is strange that 56:1-8 and 56:9-12 should be part of the same chapter. They are not merely distinct sections, but actually are parts of entirely different divisions of the book. Verse 8 ends the great passage of blessing describing the results of the work of the Servant which runs from chapter 54:1 to 56:8. Verses 9-12 begin a long passage of denunciation of sin. There are few sharper breaks in any book of the Bible than that

between verses 8 and 9 of chapter 56. If there is any place in the Bible where a chapter division is required by the context it is surely at this point.

A New Section of the Book: Isaiah 56:9 ff.

At verse 9 we begin an entirely new division which carries us to the end of the book of Isaiah. From the beginning of chapter 40 to this point there has been a rather continuous stress on the problems of Israel in the exile, and God's answer has been traced to its culmination in the work of the suffering Messiah with its wonderful results for the whole world. All through these chapters Israel in general, or Israel in the exile, was in mind, but not particularly the Israelite nation of Isaiah's day. It was, in fact, only the godly among the Israelites of Isaiah's day for whom these chapters had any particular appropriateness. However, at verse 9 the prophet turns his attention back to the nation of his day and deals with its immediate problems in a manner quite similar to that in which he discussed them in many earlier portions of the book.

Here Isaiah begins a three-fold passage of denunciation of the people's sin and declaration of the punishment that is sure to come as its result. Each of the first two denunciations is followed by a declaration of God's mercy upon those who are true to Him, while the third leads into another great passage of blessing, further describing the results of the Servant's work, and including most of the remaining chapters of the Book of Isaiah. This material can be briefly outlined as follows:

- A. (1) Rebuke upon the watchmen and leaders of the people, 56:9-57:13a
- (2) Declaration of God's mercy upon those who trust Him, 57:13b-19
- (3) Brief epilogue contrasting the restless situation of the wicked, 57:20-21
- B. (1) Rebuke upon formalism and insincere worship, 58:1-5
- (2) God's blessing upon those who seek Him in sincerity and truth, 58:6-14

- C. (1) God's severe rebuke upon the people's iniquity, 59:1-8
- (2) A prayer of repentance in the mouths of God's suffering people, 59:9-15a
- (3) God's answer to the prayer of repentance, and His declaration that with His own hands He will bring salvation and blessing to His people, 59:15b,ff., leading into the great passages of blessing which make up most of the remainder of the book.

A. (1) God's Rebuke upon the Sinful Leaders of His People (Isaiah 56:9-57:13a)

This passage begins dramatically with an invitation to the beasts of the field to come and devour the people who have been left unprotected because of the negligence of their watchman. Those who should be protecting God's people, leading them in the knowledge of God, and keeping them from going astray, have turned aside to personal greediness and drunkenness. As a result the people are at the mercy of the forces of wickedness. In 57:1-2, the prophet points out the failure of the leaders to recognize the fact that when a righteous man dies he is actually fortunate in being taken away from the evil into which their wickedness is inevitably leading the nation. Verses 3-8 point out the particular sins and types of idolatry which were common among the apostate people of Isaiah's day. In verse 9 there is an allusion to the effort of the leaders of Judah to seek protection by sending presents to heathen rulers. It is a rebuke upon all those who seek to gain safety by appeasement of wicked aggressors. Verse 11 contains God's rebuke upon all men of this type, whether it be the Judean seeking peace by appeasement of Assyria (cf. Isa. 7, 8, 28, etc.) or England and France seeking to appease Hitler, or the United Nations seeking to appease the aggressive tyranny and godlessness of Russia today. Men are seeking peace by compromise with wickedness, and such efforts will never succeed. Only by trusting God and seeking to do His will can anything worthwhile be secured. This lesson is stressed over and over in the Book of Isaiah. It is wrong for a nation to make alliances with wicked nations

which deny God and cast aside all the principles of the Scripture. Such actions can lead only to misery and suffering. God's answer is found in verses 12 and 13. These works will not profit; in time of crisis their futility will become apparent: "the wind shall carry them all away."

**A. (2) Blessing upon Those who Trust in the Lord
(Isaiah 57:13b-19)**

In sharp contrast to all that precedes, the end of verse 13 points out that even physical blessing is secured in any lasting way only by those who put their trust in God. God will ultimately bring healing and restoration of comfort to all who contritely and humbly seek His will. True peace is found only in seeking to carry out His will and to maintain the principles which He pronounces in His Word. Verse 19 shows the only source of true peace. Peace in the heart, peace with God, peace with our neighbors, peace with foreign nations -- all come only through God's mercy.

A. (3) Epilogue (Isaiah 57:20-21)

In sharp contrast to what precedes, the next two verses show that there is no peace to those who seek it other than through God's own appointed means. "The wicked are like the troubled sea"; there is no true happiness apart from God.

It is a little hard to be sure whether these verses form a separate unit or should be taken as part of the rebuke with which the next chapter begins. Since the theme of peace has just been stressed, it is probably better to consider them an epilogue to this section. Besides, the next chapter, while still dealing with wickedness and rebuking those who sin against God, stresses a particular kind of wickedness not mentioned in these verses.

**B. (1) Rebuke for Formalism and Insincere Worship
(Isaiah 58:1-5)**

In these verses the prophet rebukes those people who, assiduously carrying out the practices of religion, expect God's blessing simply from forms and ceremonies. He points out

that mere forms and ceremonies will never bring happiness or secure God's blessing. Their purpose is only to present to the mind the great truths taught in God's Word. If the form or ceremony is made an end in itself, it soon becomes a snare and a delusion, rather than a means of salvation.

B. (2) God's Blessing on Those Who Seek Him in Sincerity and Truth (Isaiah 58:6-14)

In contrast with verse 5, which declares that God will not give His mercy to people simply because they go through the forms and ceremony of a fast, verse 6 points out that the real fast that He accepts is that which leads to righteousness, justice, and kindness. True religion inevitably leads to kindness and helpfulness. If this result does not come it is plain that the forms and ceremonies involved are mere empty vanity. The one who is truly fasting before God will break every yoke by which he is oppressing someone else, and will loose every band that brings harm to a neighbor. If true trust in God results in truly righteous living, then the result described in verse 8 and following will inevitably come. God will no longer seem far away, but will be near and will guide His people continually; He will allow them to build up what has been torn down and destroyed as a result of sin.

Modern critics point to v.12 as evidence that this passage is part of a so-called "third Isaiah," written by an unknown author about a century after the return from exile, when the people, already back from Babylon and dwelling in their own land, had made little headway in rebuilding, but there is little else in these chapters to suggest such an idea. The verse does not require such an interpretation. While it could give great comfort to people in difficult days after the exile, it could apply equally well to people in Isaiah's day or at any other time who see about them waste and destruction which has come as a result of sin and wickedness.

In verses 13 and 14 the promised blessing reaches a wonderful climax, as God declares to His people that if they will cease from using His ordinances simply as a means to bring pleasure to themselves, and will endeavor instead to seek to do His will in connection with them, He will cause them "to ride upon the high places of the earth."

C. (1) Severe Rebuke upon Iniquity (Isaiah 59:1-8)

In chapter 59 the alternation of rebuke and blessing which has been found in the previous two chapters heads toward a great climax. The denunciation in verses 1-8 goes even beyond that contained in the previous chapters. Here the people are represented as coming into the situation which is inevitable when their leaders take the attitude described in chapter 57, seeking their own desires instead of the welfare of the nation, and when the religion of the nation falls into a condition of mere formalism, as described in chapter 58. Here the whole nation is pictured as having fallen into sin and wickedness.

It must be recognized, of course, that this description does not apply to every single individual in the nation. There was still a large group of godly, faithful people who were trusting in the Lord and anxious to receive His blessing. It is to comfort this group in particular that chapters 40 to 66 have been written. Yet they feel themselves involved in the sin of the nation in general and have to confess that they deserve punishment with the nation for their implication in its sin.

C. (2) The Prayer of Repentance (Isaiah 59:9-15a)

It is this group that is represented as in prayer before God, confessing the terrible sin of their nation and describing its inevitable result, which they already see as if actually present. These words could be spoken by the godly in Isaiah's day, as they looked forward to the punishment which would inevitably come upon the nation; they would be equally appropriate in the mouths of the godly when the punishment has actually fallen. The speakers make no attempt to deny their implication in the sin. They recognize that the judgment against the nation is right and proper, but they cry to the Lord for help.

C. (3) God's Answer to His People's Prayer of Repentance (Isaiah 59:15b-63:6)

Here the transition is quite sudden, coming in the middle of verse 15. The Lord sees the terrible condition and knows

that only He can bring help. His answer takes us into the great visions of future blessing which make up most of the remainder of the book.

In these chapters the primary attention is focused upon the nation of Israel in the prophet's time and during subsequent ages. Special attention is naturally paid to the godly portion of the nation.

Examination of this extended passage soon reveals that it has what might be called an envelope structure, or a chiasmic structure (after its resemblance to the Greek letter X [chi]). Its first part corresponds to its last part, the second to the second from the end, etc. Certain of its aspects are not as yet crystal clear to the writer. (I am particularly uncertain about the division between section D and that which follows it, and so wish to express a word of caution, as further study may necessitate some alterations in the outline). Yet with considerable confidence the following division is tentatively advanced:

- A. God's Sovereign interposition to overthrow His adversaries
(Isaiah 59:15b-19a)
 - B. A banner is raised and a Redeemer comes to Zion
(Isaiah 59:19b-21)
 - C. Millennial blessing (Isaiah 60:1-22)
 - D. The Redeemer describes His work (Isaiah 61:1-11)
 - C. Millennial blessing (Isaiah 62:1-9)
 - B. A banner is raised and a Redeemer comes to Zion
(Isaiah 62:10-12)
 - A. God's sovereign interposition to overthrow His adversaries
(Isaiah 63:1-6)

Isaiah 59:15b-19a

Here we see the sovereign interposition of God. The previous denunciation and prayer of repentance have revealed a condition of wide-spread depravity and misery. Human effort is seen to be at an end. Once again it is forcefully declared that all human activity tends to corruption and decay, and only the interposition of the grace of God prevents the absolute victory of wickedness. Man is by nature evil, and he can attain goodness only by an unmerited act of God. Apart from the preserving influence of God's people -- the salt

of the earth -- the world would inevitably reach the condition into which it fell just before the Flood. Isaiah 59:1-15a described a situation so bad that it seems that the passage must refer specifically to the very end of the age. "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man" (Luke 17:26).

When things become so bad that no human escape seems possible, God intervenes in sovereignty. Verse 16 greatly stresses the fact that only He can bring relief. When man reaches his extremity, refuge is found in the grace and mercy of God.

These verses emphasize the destruction of God's adversaries, pointing to that great overthrow of His enemies, just prior to the establishment of the millennial kingdom, which is described in Revelation 19:11-21, Isaiah 11:4b, and elsewhere.

Verse 17 gives an interesting description of the preparation of the sovereign God for His mighty act. A striking interpretation of its terms is given by Professor Franz Delitzsch on page 378 of Vol. 2 of his Commentary on Isaiah (Edinburgh, 1910):

Judiciously and beautifully is the inexorable justice of God compared to the impenetrable brazen coat-of-mail; His gladdening salvation to the protecting helmet glittering afar; His vengeance, having many modes of inflicting effective chastisement, to the bright-coloured garments over the coat-of-mail; and His wrathful jealousy to the fiery red military cloak. No weapon is mentioned -- neither sword nor bow -- for His arm, and this alone, procures Him help."

In verses 18 and 19a we see the outpouring of God's wrath with the resulting spread of His fear to the west and to the east.

In this section of Isaiah the verse divisions were not well made. Although the verse divisions were put in the Old Testament many centuries earlier than the chapter divisions, they are not a part of the original text and are not inspired. They frequently correspond to sentence divisions, but often a sentence is divided into two or more verses and occasionally two sentences, or even the last half of one sentence and the

first part of the following sentence, are contained in one verse. Thus in Psalm 19 the division between the first and second stanzas of the poem occurs in the middle of verse 4. In our present chapter the prayer of repentance ends and the account of the Lord's interposition begins in the middle of verse 15. Similarly the account of the overthrow of His enemies ends and the following brief section begins in the middle of verse 19.

Isaiah 59:19b-21

The half verse with which this section begins has caused much discussion among commentators. Since some of its expressions are rather unusual its translation has been much disputed. The rendering of the King James Version is good: "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him." The American Standard Version makes it a continuation of the previous sentence, and renders it as follows: "For he will come as a rushing stream, which the breath of Jehovah driveth." The King James Version translation is preferable on philological grounds and gives a better sense in the context. The verse describes the activity of the divine Spirit in the terrible days at the end of the age, although, like many other verses, it may properly be taken by analogy to show principles which are true of the method of God's working in other periods of history. The striking parallel to Isaiah 62:1-12 will be discussed later.

Verse 20 is another verse which is somewhat difficult to translate. In the King James Version it reads: "And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD." In the early Greek translation called the Septuagint the last part reads: "and he shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." It is easy to make an argument for the superiority of the Septuagint translation. The Hebrew phrase that the King James Version translated "unto them that turn from transgression" reads literally "to the returners of transgression." While this might theoretically mean "those that return (or turn away) from transgression," it would be a very unusual Hebrew usage. The word "return" sometimes has an accusative after it to indicate that

to which one returns, but so far as I know is never followed by a noun to indicate something from which one returns except by the use of the preposition "from." Two slight changes in the verb would make it read "to cause transgression to return (or turn away)" and this would correspond closely to the way the verse is quoted by Paul in Romans 11:26, "And shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." This translation probably represents the original Hebrew text. Thus the verse describes the coming of a Redeemer who will put an end to transgression among the people of Israel.

The next verse describes God's establishment of continuing blessing upon the people descended from Jacob. The passage describes the future restoration of all Israel and is used by Paul in Romans 11 as proof of the eventual grafting of the olive branches back into their own olive tree. A nation is to be born in a day.

Verse 21 describes the future establishment of God's mercy upon Israel, leading into the Millennium. He promises that His words will remain continuously in the mouths of the descendants of Jacob "from henceforth and forever." This verse is summarized by Paul in the words: "For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins" (Romans 11:27).

Isaiah 60

Isaiah 59:19b-21 dealt with the theme: "A Banner is raised, and the Redeemer comes to Zion." The passage ended with God's covenant that His Spirit and His Word would remain with His people forever. Chapter 60 describes the work of the Redeemer. Since the passage at the end of chapter 59 is quoted by the Apostle Paul in Romans 11:26 to show that all Israel is to be saved at the end of the present age, it is natural to expect that chapter 60 would contain a picture of blessing upon God's people in the period following this age, namely, the Millennium. On examination we find that the material in the chapter accords with this expectation. The chapter consists of an address to one who is always referred to in the second person singular feminine. The identity of the one addressed may be gathered from the latter part of verse 14, which says: "And they shall call thee, The

city of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel." The various statements in the chapter make it quite clear that it is not primarily addressing a geographical area or a group of houses, but a people who may be personified as "the city of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel." The geographical area is kept in mind and is involved in the chapter, but the primary reference is to a people rather than a place. In Isaiah's day God's true people were filled with despair as they realized that the terrible predictions of exile and suffering, made necessary by the sin of the nation as a whole, would certainly be fulfilled.

What a comfort it must have been to them to know that eventually, after all the misery and suffering of the exile and dispersion, God would save the entire nation and Jerusalem would again become a center where His glory would be wonderfully established. He would again make Zion a place of joy and happiness. Although a city is addressed, God's faithful people in Israel are really the object of discussion.

The chapter may be divided into six sections:

1. The Light of God's Glory vv. 1-2.
2. Ingathering vv. 3-4.
3. Material Prosperity vv. 5-17b.
4. External Peace and Safety vv. 17c-18.
5. The Light of God's Glory (the theme of vv. 1-2 stressed again) vv. 19-20.
6. The Permanence and Wide Extension of the Promised Blessing vv. 21-22.

We shall now examine each of these sections separately.

1. The Light of God's Glory, verses 1-2.

The chapter begins with a call to Zion to rejoice at the coming of the light of the glory of God, in sharp contrast to the thick darkness which will cover the whole earth during the trying days at the end of the present age. The two main sections of the Book of Isaiah are bound together by the presence of many common emphases. One of these is the frequent occurrence of references to the light of the knowledge and glory of God. The word "light" occurs more

frequently in Isaiah than in all the other prophetic books put together, and occurs about the same number of times in the last twenty-seven chapters as in the first thirty-nine. The note is struck very early, for Isaiah's first great picture of future millennial glory is immediately followed by the words: "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD" (Isa. 2:5).

It is natural to find this concept stressed, for many of the problems dealt with in Isaiah are problems of the understanding. He is trying to encourage the true people of God to trust God's goodness and have confidence in the wisdom of His inscrutable plan. Even when the immediate future appears dark and obscure, even when troubles and difficulties might seem great enough to drive them to despair, God's people can know that He has a fixed purpose of future blessing, and that He will eventually bring His people into the wonderful light of His glorious promises.

At the first extensive picture of the Servant of the Lord it was predicted that He would "be for a light of the Gentiles" (Isa. 42:6) and God gave His people this promise: "I will make darkness light before them" (Isa. 42:16). In Isaiah 49:6 the Servant was told: "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." The same figure is used in Isaiah 51:4 and in Isaiah 58:8 and 10. Our present chapter refers to light six times (vv. 1, 3, 19, 20) -- more than any other chapter in the book.

Verse 2 shows the true source of light. Though darkness may cover the entire earth, when the Lord arises upon a person there is light, both for himself and for a blessing to others.

The similarity of these first two verses to some of the statements about the Servant of the Lord might lead an English reader to think that the Servant was the one addressed, but in the light of the Hebrew (as well as of the succeeding verses) this is impossible, since the Hebrew words translated "thy" and "thee" in this chapter are feminine and refer to the people of God, represented as a city.

2. Ingathering, verses 3-4

This section begins with the outreaching of the Light. The Gentiles come to the Light. There is nothing new in this theme, for it has already been touched upon in Isaiah 2:2-3; 11:10; 42:1, 6; 49:6; 52:15; and 55:5.

In Isaiah 2:3 and in Micah 4:2 it is said that in the Millennium all nations will come up to Jerusalem to learn the ways of God, so that they may walk in His paths. Not only the meek and the humble, the Poor and lowly of all nations, but also their leaders will come. "Kings" shall come "to the brightness of thy rising." Jerusalem will be the center to which all the nations will go to learn God's truth -- the center from which His light will go out to all the ends of the earth.

The same truth was referred to by James in the conclusion of his address before the Jerusalem Council, as described in Acts 15. In order to show that there would be Gentiles at the time of the return of Christ who would already be believers, and hence that there was no need of circumcising all converted Gentiles and thus making them Jews, he quoted a passage from the Book of Amos describing the coming of men from all nations to seek the Lord at Jerusalem during the Millennium. The Hebrew of Amos 9:11-12, as contained in our Hebrew Bibles today, differs somewhat from what was in the manuscripts at the time of the apostles. Of this there can be no doubt, since James could hardly have based his main argument in a hotly disputed controversy on a misquotation from the Old Testament. The learned group assembled before him would have been very ready to call attention to such a misquotation and thus to destroy his argument. The reason he quotes from Amos instead of from one of the other passages which describe the same coming event, is that Amos clearly brings out the fact that those who come up to Jerusalem will include many Gentiles who are already believers and hence can be properly designated as "Gentiles upon whom my name is called" (cf. Acts 15:14, 17 and Eph. 3:15). In modern discussions that passage has often been misunderstood. but under any other interpretation it has no relevance to the matter of circumcision, which was the problem under discussion. Other suggested interpretations fail to take into account either the natural meaning of the terms used or the

relation of the verse to great truths clearly taught in other passages of both the Old and the New Testament.

It is somewhat uncertain whether another phase of the ingathering is touched upon in Isaiah 60:4, or whether the sons who come from far are actually the same men as the Gentiles who are described in verse 3 as coming "to thy light" and "to the brightness of thy rising."

Students of prophecy believe that there is to be a great regathering of the Jews to Palestine just before the end of the present age. That regathering is not what is referred to in this verse and also in verse 9, which describes the sons of Zion as coming in "ships of Tarshish," for these verses refer to something that happens after the light comes, rather than during the dark days at the end of this age. The sons who come during the Millennium may be Gentiles who can properly be considered as true sons of Zion, or may be made up entirely or largely of Jews who were not included in the regathering prior to the Millennium. Thus it is not sure whether verse 4 is synonymous with verse 3, or whether it presents another phase of the ingathering.

3. Material Prosperity, verses 5-17b.

The greater part of this chapter is filled with direct statements and figurative descriptions of the material prosperity which is to come to God's people during the Millennium. The products of all the world will glorify the center of God's government. Nations which had been known as oppressors of God's people will send their very best to add to the prosperity of Jerusalem.

Verse 12 presents the one somber note in the chapter, as it describes the utter devastation of any nation that refuses to serve Jerusalem. Perhaps it refers to the fact that Christ is to rule with absolute firmness and to brook no opposition to His righteous judgments. More likely, however, it is a reference back to the destruction of nations which would refuse to submit to the rule of Christ, prior to the beginning of the Millennium. There is a striking parallel in Isaiah 35, with its description of the lasting desolation of Edom. During the Millennium these events will be but a memory. No nation will remain on earth which is unwilling to serve the

King. The condition here described cannot be connected with any period of earth's history other than that of the millennial kingdom of Christ.

Verse 15 presents special consolation to the followers of Isaiah who look forward with sadness to the devastation of the exile. For a time Jerusalem is to be deserted and alone, but later she is to become "an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations."

A peculiar figure is used in verse 16: "Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings." Delitzsch well comments on this verse: "We can by no means think of enrichment by plunder (as Hitzig does); the sucking is that of a child, not a vampire. One would have expected to read 'queens' instead of 'kings'; but by intentional employment of the latter term ... the literal and natural interpretation of the statement is shown to be impossible" (Commentary on Isaiah, Vol. 2, p. 391). The meaning of the verse is clear: the nations and their leaders are freely to give their vital substance for the welfare of Christ's Kingdom.

The latter part of this verse again stresses a thought that needs constant re-emphasis. Study of each of the many aspects of the progress of God's plan must always lead to greater and greater assurance "that I the LORD am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."

It is hard to understand why the verses should have been divided in such a way that verse 17 would contain not only the statement about the precious metals which are to be brought to God's city, but also a sentence which is properly a part of the next section.

4. External Peace and Safety, verses 17c-18.

"I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise."

This section places strong emphasis upon the external peace and security which is so prominently stressed in Isaiah 2, Micah 4, and Isaiah 11 as an outstanding feature of the millennial reign of Christ. No such freedom from violence and

destruction has yet existed, nor can we expect it prior to the Millennium. Thus this section gives clear evidence that this chapter refers directly to that period.

5. The Light of God's Glory, vv. 19-20.

Here we have again the note which was stressed in the first two verses. The greatness of the glory of God will be so brilliant upon Jerusalem, which will be the center of God's government, that, in comparison, the brightness of the sun and moon will seem insignificant. There is a New Testament parallel in Revelation 21:23-24, "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it."

These verses do not mean that there will actually be no sun and no moon, but that the glory of Christ will shine so brightly that they will sink into insignificance in comparison. Isaiah 30:26 gives added proof that this interpretation is correct.

In verses 19 and 20 we note the stress upon the everlasting character of the light which the Lord will provide. This anticipates the thought stressed in our next section.

6. The Permanence and Wide Extension of the Promised Blessing, verses 21-22

I am not completely satisfied with the title I have given this section, for it contains a number of ideas.

The first idea that impresses itself on the reader is that the promised blessings are to be continuous and everlasting. This has already been suggested in verses 15, 19 and 20. Some may think that this is an objection to the interpretation of the chapter as descriptive of the Millennium. Actually the Hebrew word which is translated "eternal" in verse 15, "everlasting" in verses 19-20, and "forever" in verse 21, is not nearly as far-reaching as these translations would suggest. It indicates very long continuance, but does not necessarily indicate endlessness. Endurance for the length of the

Millennium could adequately fulfill its meaning. Yet it should be pointed out that there is no reason to think that the blessed conditions of the Millennium will cease at the end of the thousand years.

This is a good place to call attention to one of the most important cautions needed by all who try to interpret the Bible. We should always remember that for every question the Bible answers, there could be many that it does not answer. The knowledge of God is infinite; that of every human being is extremely limited. Whatever the Bible clearly teaches can be accepted as true and dependable, but it is easy to go beyond what is taught and build theories that have no foundation. The Bible contains answers to many questions that no one has yet asked, but interpreters have assumed answers to many questions with which it does not deal. We should stand solidly on everything that the Bible clearly teaches, but we should be careful to avoid reading into any verse or section an answer to a question that that verse or section does not answer.

In verse 21 the righteousness touched upon earlier in the chapter is mentioned again: "Thy people also shall all be righteous." Verse 17 predicted that the tax collectors would be righteous. What a promise this must have been in the eyes of the Jews at the time of Christ, when the very word "publican" had become a synonym for dishonesty! In the millennial kingdom all the agencies of government will be free from graft or injustice. The promises contained in this chapter are by no means a mere hope of material prosperity apart from ethical considerations. While the material aspects are greatly stressed, much emphasis is laid upon the ethical and spiritual aspects, for every portion of the work of God's people in the Millennium is to be thoroughly righteous.

The latter part of verse 21 points once more to the purpose of it all -- "that I may be glorified." Verse 16 already showed the ultimate and here it is stressed purpose, again -- the glory of God.

In verse 22 we read the promise of great extension and increase for the nation. "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation." This is the opposite of the judgment described in Isaiah 30:17: "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 an hill."

The chapter ends with a reference to God's supreme place as the one who will bring the promised blessings to pass: "I the Lord will hasten it in his time." This statement stresses the fact that the entire chapter describes something which God will bring to pass in His own time in accordance with His gracious and sovereign plan.

Isaiah 61

We now reach the high point of the passage from Isaiah 59:15b-63:6. We have called this chapter, "The Redeemer Describes His Work." Between Isaiah 41 and 53 we often found descriptions of the wonderful character who would be the true Servant of the Lord. In those passages His work was usually described in the third person, though in chapter 49 He Himself was represented as speaking, describing what God had done for Him and how God was going to use Him.

In the present chapter the Redeemer speaks again, and describes His purposes in vivid and gripping language.

The chapter may be divided into three parts:

- (1) vv. 1-3 The Servant Declares His Message.
- (2) vv. 4-9 The Glory of the Redeemer's People.
- (3) 61:110-62:1 The Assured Completion of the Redeemer's Mission.

1. The Servant Declares His Message, 61:1-3

Some interpreters have questioned whether the Redeemer is the speaker here. The speaker is certainly not God, in the usual sense, for several times the passage speaks of Him in the third person. Some would suggest that the prophet is the speaker. Such an interpretation would be quite out of keeping with the attitude of the prophet in the book of Isaiah, for he usually keeps himself in the background, and these declarations about the great accomplishments to be performed by the speaker go far beyond anything that Isaiah ever suggests that he himself would be qualified to do. It is inconceivable that the prophet would say that he was able to give the mourners "beauty for ashes" (v. 3), or that he would

be "clothed with the robe of righteousness" (v. 10). We may rest assured that we make no mistake in saying that the speaker here, as in Isaiah 49, is the great Redeemer Himself.

It is striking to note that practically the entire content of the chapter consists of blessing for God's people. Only in one phrase does the Redeemer bring out the fact that there is a grim side to His message and that it includes the declaration of doom to the inveterate enemies of God. This phrase in verse 2 - - "the day of vengeance of our God" -- reminds us of Isaiah 11:4 and shows that the Redeemer here pictured is also the Messianic King of Isaiah 2, 7 and 11.

The chapter, which probably ought to include the first verse of the next chapter, differs from many future predictions in the general nature of its statements. Little is here specifically predicted; it is rather a general picture of the whole redeeming work of Christ, including both what He accomplished at His first coming and what will find perfection at His second coming.

In Luke 4:16-21 the section of this passage that Christ reads in the Nazareth synagogue ends with the first phrase of verse 2. Some interpreters say that this shows that everything up to that point was fulfilled at His first coming and that what follows is not to be fulfilled until the second coming, but this idea is questionable. It is probably better to say that the whole three-verse passage deals with the work of Christ in its entirety. Yet it may be noted that the previous portion deals more largely with what He preaches and proclaims, while the latter portion has greater stress on actual accomplishment. The fact that the last phrase of verse 2 introduces a universal note -- "to comfort all that mourn" -- would suggest a relevancy to the time of Christ's return, when He is to establish righteousness over the entire earth, more than to His first coming when the Word began to be disseminated as a savour of life to many but as a savour of death to many others.

It is noteworthy that except for one phrase, "the day of vengeance," these three verses stress effects upon minds and hearts rather than physical or material accomplishments.

The passage begins with the reference to the indwelling of the Redeemer by the Holy Spirit. To Him alone was the Spirit given without measure. Isaiah 11:2 states the same

truth regarding the Messianic King, and Isaiah 48:16 relates it to "the Servant of the Lord."

The Anointed One

The second phrase of the verse is the only place in the entire book where Isaiah applies to the Redeemer the verb, *masah*, "anoint", from which the noun "Messiah" (Heb., "anointed one" = Greek, "Christ") is derived: "The LORD hath anointed me to preach glad tidings unto the meek." Ordinarily the word "anointing" is applied in the Scripture to the designation of a king or of a priest for the work of ruling or for that of interceding. Here, however, it is directly connected with the prophetic work of Christ as the preacher of good tidings.

The Redeemer declares that His preaching is for "the meek." Christ Himself said: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). God's blessings are for those who confess their own unworthiness and humbly accept His Gospel ("good tidings").

Even the third statement of the verse does not involve physical healing. It is the broken hearted whom He declares that He will bind up. Again we note that the blessings described in these three verses are principally spiritual in nature.

The last two statements of the verse differ from one another in that the first is more specific and the last more general. The second of these statements proclaims "opening of the prison to them that are bound," declaring that anyone who is bound by the power of sin can receive freedom through acceptance by faith of the results of Jesus' death on Calvary. The statement which immediately precedes this one -- "to proclaim liberty to the captives" -- is more specific, for the word that is here translated "liberty" is a technical term used in the Scripture for the proclamation in the Year of Jubilee that all who were enslaved for debt were then permitted to go free (Lev. 25:10; Ezek. 46:17). The phrase does not predict the giving of freedom, one by one, to each who believes on the Lord as Savior, but must refer to something which comes at the same time for all. Clearly it points forward to that wonderful day described in Romans

8:18-24 when all the creation shall be liberated from the bondage of corruption which has come upon it as the result of sin and the consequent curse. The Redeemer is here proclaiming the coming of the day when the dreadful results of sin will be completely abolished, when all His people will receive the resurrection body and will no longer be subject to the infirmities of the present age.

The first phrase in verse 2 speaks of "the acceptable year of the LORD, and the second speaks of "the day of vengeance of our God." God pours out His favor over a long period, but His vengeance is concentrated into so brief a time that by comparison it may be spoken of as only a day.

The phrase "acceptable year" is rather hard to translate. More literally it would be "year of acceptance." The word rendered "acceptance" may mean "favor" (so American American Standard Version); it is once translated "self-will" (Gen. 49:6). It contains the note both of God's sovereign pleasure and of His favor toward those He blesses. It is a favorite word of Isaiah; he uses it many times, particularly in the latter part of the book. In Isaiah 60:7 it is translated "acceptance"; in Isaiah 60:10 it is translated "favor."

The passage is quoted by Luke as having been read by our Lord in the synagogue at Nazareth. Surely His words, "Today hath this Scripture been fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21), leave no question as to the fact that it is the Redeemer who is speaking in this passage. Everything up to this point is included in the message that He proclaimed at Nazareth, and during His earthly life He also proclaimed the matters contained in the following one and one-half verses. Thus "the day of vengeance of our God" was clearly included in Christ's preaching on numerous occasions, e.g. Matthew 11:20-24; 24:6-29.

Our Joy in Christ

Complete fulfillment of verses 2c-3 must await the return of Christ. In the present age many mourn and are weighed down with the spirit of heaviness. It is at Christ's return that He "shall wipe away all tears" (Rev. 21:4) and shall give to all His followers "the oil of joy and the garment of praise." Yet the blessings here described, although not fully realized

before the Millennium, properly belong to God's people today, and we have a right to claim them. No matter how much cause circumstances give us for mourning or for the spirit of heaviness, God has commanded us to "rejoice evermore" (1 Thess. 5:16), and to "rejoice in the Lord alway; again I say, rejoice" (Phil. 4:4). In Christ we are entitled to find complete happiness no matter what earthly privation or loss we may have to undergo. He is willing to give us "beauty for ashes, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" right here and now; even in this age it is His will that we should be partakers of this blessing.

One of the means which God has often used to cause unbelievers to see that Christians have something well worth desiring has been to let them see that a Christian can smile and be happy in the midst of such adversity as would drive a non-Christian to despair. Would that Christians today would avail themselves fully of this blessing which Christ wants each of us to possess!

This is equally true of the last third of verse 3, "that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." In the glorious time ahead this figure is properly applied to all of God's people. They are trees of righteousness, drawing their sustenance from the water of life which He provides (Rev. 22:2). Yet the figure can also be applied to the believer in this age. The First Psalm describes the true believer as a tree planted by the rivers of water whose "leaf shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." God desires Christians in this age, born again of His Spirit, to glorify Him by carrying out in full the analogy of the trees of righteousness which He has planted, which give their fruit in their season and provide leaves for the healing of the nations. In Revelation 22:2 this latter phrase describes the blessings of a time yet to come, but the analogy of Psalm 1 warrants us in believing that it also has a present application.

In these days when unbelieving nations, living in forgetfulness of God and in defiance of His righteous law, are headed for destruction, there is but one element that preserves them and temporarily improves the relationship between them. That element is the influence of true Christians. Modernists talk a great deal about social improvement

and human betterment, but it is safe to say that the great bulk of what has actually been accomplished in this direction during the past centuries has been a by-product of the work of earnest Bible-believing Christians. There is an excellent development of this theme, as illustrated in the great social reforms of the 18th century, in the book, *This Freedom Whence*, by J. W. Bready, in which he shows the direct connection between the great social reforms that changed the face of the western world and the evangelical revival under the leadership of John Wesley and those associated with him.

2. The Glory of the Redeemer's People, 61:4-9

The Redeemer continues with a picture of the blessings which are eventually to come to His people. These blessings are placed in sharp contrast with the misery His people will experience in the Babylonian captivity. In verse 4 the Redeemer promises that the areas which are laid waste will be restored and repaired after many generations.

In verses 5-6 He promises that His people, after being subject to foreign domination, will eventually be placed in such a position of leadership that those who were formerly hostile will yield them every type of material help.

Verse 6 introduces the note of spiritual leadership. The Redeemer's people are not simply those He chooses to favor; they will be favored in order that they may be His ministers in presenting His blessings to all the world. This is a note which is common in the latter part of the book of Isaiah, but which is also found in other parts of Scripture. God did not call Abraham merely in order that He might bless him; Abraham was called in order that through him all the families of the earth should be blessed (Gen. 12:3).

In verse 7 the glorious lot of the Redeemer's people in the end time is contrasted with the shame and confusion through which they must first pass. Joy is to replace sorrow.

In verse 8 the moral note is again introduced. The God of the Bible is never a mere god of whim. He is a God of righteousness Who always maintains high moral standards. He loves judgment. He hates "iniquitous grasping." (This is a better translation than "robbery for burnt offering." The word here translated "burnt offering" can also mean "iniquity")

and this rendering fits the present context far better). God will direct the work of His people in truth for He is indeed a God of Truth. The covenant that He makes with them is everlasting; He never goes back on His Word.

In verse 9 this section is climaxed with the promise that the Redeemer's people will be recognized among all nations as truly belonging to God and being the recipients of His blessing.

Thus these six verses describe blessings which are not to occur in their fullness until the Millennium. Yet the dominant note in the verses is not so much a description of the Millennium as a presentation of the outworking of redemption in the physical and national sphere. That which was lost and under the power of Satan is to be restored and established in its rightful position.

3. The Assured Completion of the Redeemer's Mission, 61:10-62:1

It is a little difficult to say whether to consider section D -- "The Redeemer Describes His Work" -- as ending with 61:11 or as continuing into 62:1. The next section (C. Millennial Blessings) is closely bound with it, since all the millennial blessings described are clearly stated to be the result of the work of the Redeemer. Nevertheless, the emphasis in this verse seems to be upon the work of the Redeemer rather than upon its results, and it is probably better to include it in our present section even though the following verses are closely related to it as its effect.

Verse 10 shows the Redeemer rejoicing in God, who bestows indescribable blessings upon Him. These blessings are compared to the joy which comes to a bridegroom on his wedding day -- a very fitting description, for Christ is often compared to a bridegroom. The blessings which bring the most rejoicing to the Redeemer are designated as the "garments of salvation," and "the robe of righteousness." He is happiest because of the completion of His redemptive work of freeing His people from the guilt and power of sin. By His resurrection God gives the earnest of our redemption and assures us of present salvation and perfected righteousness to come. Thus the garments the

Redeemer puts on are illustrative of the similar garments which His people are entitled to wear. Surely the rejoicing of the one who is redeemed by the work of Christ and united to Him through the new birth surpasses any other joy in heaven or earth save the joy of the One Who made it possible by His redemptive act.

The eleventh verse refers principally to the effects during the present age of the work of Christ at His first coming. The spread of the Gospel is compared to the growing of the plants in a garden. God causes righteousness and peace to spring forth, even as the earth brings forth her bud. The redemptive work of Christ is effective as the Holy Spirit carries the message to the very ends of the earth and the lives of redeemed individuals in every land show righteousness and peace springing forth before all the nations. There is no promise in this verse of a complete conquest of the earth by the Gospel, but a wonderful picture of its spread and of its glorious effects in the lives of those who believe in Christ.

The next verse (62:1) shows the other phase of the Redeemer's work, that which is not complete until the Millennium and which is exerted principally in the great outpouring of His power at that time. His final rest is not attained until Zion and Jerusalem become a center of righteousness and a lamp which spreads its beams over the whole earth. This verse points to the consummation of the work of the Redeemer in the Millennium.

Isaiah 62

We have noticed that the great section of the book of Isaiah which runs from Isaiah 56:9 to 63:6 ends with a long passage of blessing (59:15b-63:6). We observed that this passage has what might be called an envelope structure (or "chiastic"): its first part corresponds to its last part, its second to the second from the end, and so on. It may be outlined as follows:

- A. God's Sovereign Interposition to Overthrow His Adversaries. 59:15b-19a.

B. A Banner is Raised and a Redeemer Comes to Zion. 59:19b-21.

C. Millennial Blessing. 60:1-22.

D. The Redeemer Describes His Work. 61:1-62a.

C. Millennial Blessing. 62:1b-9.

B. A Banner is Raised and a Redeemer Comes to Zion. 62:10-12.

A. God's Sovereign Interposition to Overthrow His Adversaries. 63:1-6.

The passage from Isaiah 61:1 to 62:1a is the high point of this section. In it the Redeemer Himself speaks and points out the great work which He has come to fulfill. This passage moves into the next, where the theme of millennial blessing is again prominent, without any sharp break of thought. The change actually takes place in the middle of verse 1 of chapter 62. In the first part of this verse the Redeemer is still speaking and declaring His determination to carry His work to completion. The last half of the verse, together with the following eight verses, gives a description of the coming Millennium, which has already been described in considerable detail in chapter 60.

In verse 1b-2 the emphasis is upon the wide influence which is to go out from Jerusalem. All the world is to recognize the prominence of the city and to see the splendor of its righteousness. The fiery excellence of the salvation which proceeds from it will be apparent to all.

In verse 3 the stress is upon the royal glory which will center at Jerusalem in the time of the millennial reign of Christ.

In verse 4 we become absolutely certain that it is the Millennium which is here in mind. While the previous two and one-half verses could be thought of as describing in somewhat figurative language the extension of the message of salvation which goes forth from Jerusalem in this age, verses 4 and 5 place a stress upon the actual land, such as could have no application to the present period and must clearly point to the Millennium.

In these verses great stress is laid upon the contrast between the glorified prominence of the actual land of Israel in the time of Messiah and its forsaken condition during the

period of the exile. It is rather interesting that while the Hebrew words which mean "forsaken" and "desolate" are translated into English, those which mean "my pleasure in her" and "married" are not translated; the Hebrew words are simply transliterated, as "Hephzibah" and "Beulah." The terms which express the future joy of the land have come to be used in our language as symbols of joy in the Lord, but the Hebrew words which describe its present forsaken condition are naturally not taken over into English. The time when the land will actually be "Hephzibah" and "Beulah" is still future. Although the words may properly be used today in a figurative sense for any place which God is blessing, their precise literal fulfillment is not in this present age.

It is interesting to contrast the general tone of this millennial section with its parallel in chapter 60. There the emphasis was mostly upon the ideal picture of what is coming; here the stress is laid upon the contrast between the future conditions and the intervening period in which the results of sin and hostility to God work themselves out. It is quite in keeping with this difference that verses 6 and 7 leave the note of description of the future and devote themselves to an exhortation to God's people to devote themselves to prayer that God will fulfill His wonderful promises. God declares that He has set watchmen upon the walls of Jerusalem who will keep alive the knowledge of the wonderful promises He has given. Often large portions of the church have become worldly and thought that its destiny was related only to the present or that it could accomplish its great purpose by human means. Yet at every period of the church's history there have been individuals who, like watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem, have declared their belief in God's millennial promises and their expectation that He would indeed fulfill them.

In verse 6 the King James Version has not rendered the Hebrew very accurately in the phrase "ye that make mention of the LORD." The Hebrew literally means "that cause the Lord to remember." It could possibly be rendered "that cause to remember the Lord," but this is less likely, and hardly fits the context. The American Standard Version has a much better rendering, "Ye that are Jehovah's remembrancers."

In the King James Version verse 6 ends with the words "keep not silence," and verse 7 begins with "and give Him no rest." In the American Standard Version these phrases are rendered "take ye no rest" and "give Him no rest." The Revised margin says under "rest" in verse 7: "Heb. silence." Actually the Hebrew means "do not be quiet" and "give Him no quiet." The mention of rest is a free rendering in English which presents the idea fairly well but can easily lead to misunderstanding. Surely it is better here to translate the Hebrew literally. It is God's desire that many people keep constantly reminding Him of His glorious promises and give Him no time of silence on the matter until He shall actually fulfill them.

The Place of Prayer

This brings up the whole question of prayer. God has ordained the full progress of the world and knows the end from the beginning; yet He has ordained that prayer is to play a real part in His economy. He does things in answer to prayer -- even things which He has specifically promised, and which He has declared to be certain of accomplishment. It is His will that His people should constantly cultivate toward Him an attitude of trust and communion and should call upon Him to fulfill the great promises He has given. These two verses exhort God's people continually to remind Him of His great promises.

Verse 8 lays its stress on the certainty of the answer to the prayers which God desires His people to make. He wants us to pray in accordance with His will. 1 John 5:14 tells us: "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, he heareth us." We are to ask in faith when we know that what we desire is in accordance with the will of God. He has sworn by His right hand and by the arm of His strength; nothing could make more certain the fulfillment of His promise.

In verses 8 and 9 the stress is again on the contrast between the future days of plenty in the land which God has promised to bless and those of misery and abandonment which are to continue during the exilic period and during much of the present period of dispersion. No longer will

God's people have to labor without enjoying what they produce. Those who do the work are to enjoy the fruit. It is God's will that His faithful people should always stand for justice in every relationship of life; yet they should not expect the establishment of complete or lasting justice in this age, for only in the Millennium will justice prevail universally.

It was quite a thrill to find in an editorial in Life magazine for February 9, 1948 a quotation from the second president of the United States which showed that this distinguished American founder was clearly a premillennialist in his interpretation of Scripture. The purpose of the editorial on Gandhi (p. 32) was to show that, important as love is as a means of accomplishment in the world, other means are also necessary. It quotes John Adams as follows: "Human appetites, passions, prejudices and self-love will never be conquered by benevolence and knowledge alone, introduced by human means. The millennium itself neither supposes nor implies it. All civil government is then to cease, and the Messiah is to reign." It is striking to see that this great American considered premillennialism to be the clear teaching of the Scripture.

Since verse 9 completes the second of the sections of our present passage which deal with the Millennium, we shall now examine the question: do the verses here and in chapter 60 have reference only to the time of the millennial reign of Christ, or is there any proper way in which they may be applied to the present age? In answer it should be said that while their primary meaning is undoubtedly a description of the millennial age, it is not at all out of place to point out the relevance to our present period of many of the principles involved. In the Millennium Jesus Christ will reign over every aspect of life in this world; during the present age He reigns in the hearts of those who are redeemed and He desires those whom He has redeemed to display in their lives many of the features which He will some day make universal. Therefore many of the principles set forth in these chapters find a true, though limited, exemplification wherever the true church of God is active. It is altogether proper for the church to take these principles as ideals and to endeavor to exemplify them in its life and in the relationship of its members to each other. Yet it is vital to remember that as long as

Satan is in the world they cannot be perfectly fulfilled. Their complete application awaits the time when Jesus Christ will rule on Mt. Zion and all the earth will obey His dictates.

B. A Banner is Raised and a Redeemer Comes to Zion 62:10-12.

This section is strikingly parallel to Isaiah 59:19b-21. We have seen that there the emphasis was on the raising of the standard against the enemy and the establishment of the Redeemer's covenant in the hearts of His people when He comes to Zion. That section was in a fitting place, introducing the following millennial passage, for the apostle Paul quotes Isaiah 59:20-21 in Romans 11:26f. as proof that all Israel will turn to Christ before the Millennium. Our present passage vividly describes the coming of the Messiah to His people, calls upon them to prepare the highway and lift up the standard, and shows that His salvation is certain. It stresses the relation of God to His people and the blessings He will bring them.

A. God's Sovereign Interposition to Overthrow His Adversaries 63:1-6.

The six verses which complete this section of the book are strikingly parallel to those with which it began (59:15b-19a). It is an interesting fact that the great section which tells so much about the wonderful blessings God is preparing for His people and reaches its climax in the Redeemer's own description of His work should begin and end with a description of His work of judgment against evil.

All the world desires the peace and joy which Christianity can bring. Many, however, seek to receive these blessings without any recognition of God's hatred of evil and His determination that sin must receive its just deserts. In the tabernacle the brazen altar, which represented the sacrifice of Christ for sin, stood at the very entrance, and the vessels which represented prayer and sanctification came later. It is characteristic of the false cults of our day that they attempt to secure the blessings and joys of the Christian life without passing through the experience of turning away from sin and

being associated with Christ in His crucifixion. In the wonderful description of our Lord's attitude toward His sheep in John 10 He declared the necessity of entering the sheep fold through Him Who is the door. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber" (John 10:1). God never leaves us in ignorance of the fact that the problem of sin must be dealt with, since wickedness inevitably receives its just deserts. Hence it is quite natural that the grand section which we are now studying should begin and end with the note of vengeance against the adversaries of God. The attitude of the unregenerate mind toward such a passage is well illustrated by the comment of one critic, who called the picture in Isaiah 63:1-6 "beautiful but ethically repulsive."

The passage begins with a vivid picture of the coming of the righteous judge from Edom. This is not the only case in Scripture where God is pictured as coming from Edom to bring destruction upon His enemies. Thus in Judges 5 the song of Deborah begins with a description of God as marching out of the field of Edom. In that instance there was no particular reference to the people of Edom, since the purpose of the song was to celebrate deliverance from oppressors that had come from the opposite direction.

The reference to Edom is paralleled with mention of Bozrah. Other Scriptural passages refer to Bozrah as one of the leading cities of Edom. Its name is preserved in that of the modern village of Buseira, about twenty miles southeast of the Dead Sea.

In some ways this is indeed a horrible picture. The garments of the majestic figure are stained with blood evidence of the terrible carnage. He says, "For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come" (v. 4). It often appears as if sin and injustice were in such control of human life that they could never be dislodged. Yet inevitably the time comes when terrible vengeance is poured out. Over and over in the history of the world these terrible holocausts have occurred. It would be well that we should take warning in our own country and think what terrible fate may be in store for our people if we do not again as a nation turn to God and repent of the injustice and

wickedness which has increased so greatly in recent years. At the end of the age people will say, "All things continue as they were from the beginning" (2 Pet. 3:4). Yet the Lord declares that even as they are saying, "peace and safety," sudden destruction will come upon them (1 Thess. 5:3). Although this passage pictures the greatest overthrow of wickedness in all the history of the world -- the one that is to occur at the end of the present age -- the principle is one which has occurred repeatedly in human history.

With verse 7 another main section of the book commences. This would be a far better place for a chapter division than at verse 1 of this chapter.

Isaiah 63:7-66:24

It is unfortunate that no chapter division has been made between Isaiah 63:6 and 63:7. Putting what precedes and what follows together in one chapter means that the last paragraph of the division of the book that runs from 56:9 to 63:6 and the first paragraph of the section that runs from 63:7 to the end of the book are combined into one chapter. As a result this chapter fails to have any unity, while the prayer that runs from 63:7 to the end of chapter 64 is illogically broken in two by an absurd chapter division.

This section is made up of four parts: Israel's Prayer for a Return of God's Favor (63:7-64:12); The Divine Rebuke (65:1-15); The Glorious Future (65:16-25); The Ultimate Fulfillment (66:1-24).

Israel's Prayer for a Return of God's Favor

Isaiah 63:7 to 64:12 forms a unit. Nowhere in it is God the actual speaker, as in the sections preceding and following, though in verse 12 something God had said at a much earlier time is quoted. The speaker is recalling God's goodness to Israel in the past and praying that He will help His people in the midst of a desperate situation. The greater part of this discourse consists of a plea to God to deliver His people from exile and destruction.

Of course one immediately asks, who is the speaker? Is the prophet speaking on behalf of the righteous remnant of

the people? Is he presenting the rightful petitions of the nation as a whole? Or is he, perhaps, illustrating a false attitude which is characteristic of a large portion of the nation, in order to show God's answer to such an attitude?

This third suggestion is not as improbable as it appears at first sight. Frequently in the Bible false statements are quoted in order to describe a situation or to show God's answer. As early as Genesis 3 a lying statement of Satan is recorded to show its effects upon Eve and its results in God's curse upon the serpent and upon the entire creation. In Isaiah 7 the hypocritical evasions of Ahaz were quoted, in order to show God's response to them. Isaiah 36:14-20 quotes at length the blasphemous words of the Assyrian king whom God later defeated without utilizing human effort. When such statements are quoted all that is intended is to give a true picture of the attitude of the speaker. All the Scripture is true but some of it is a true picture of the thoughts and attitudes of human beings rather than a presentation of the mind of God. Is it possible that this beautiful passage should be included in such a category? Normally such statements are labeled but this is not always the case. Sometimes the true situation has to be decided from observation of the context. In such a case it is vital that we be extremely careful to avoid mistakes and not to read into the context something that is not there.

The passage begins with the words: "I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the LORD." This is followed by a beautiful description of the close association which God established with His people, and of the sympathy with every phase of their lives which He showed in the days of old. With the exception of one verse (v. 10) the first eight verses of the passage give the impression that the entire passage is to be a poem of praise to God for His goodness to Israel in early days. This is the emphasis of most of the statements from verse 7 through verse 14. The only exception is verse 10 which reads: "But they rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit; therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them."

The next verse (v. 11) has often been misunderstood. In many translations, including the King James Version, it begins: "Then he remembered the days of old, Moses and his

people saying, "Where is he that brought them up out of the sea?" In this translation the beginning of the verse sounds as if it meant that after the people had rebelled against God, God remembered the days of old and asked the question that follows. This idea is quite at variance with the context. Besides, God would hardly be thought of as asking where He Himself was. The word "and" is not in the original (and this is indicated by italics in the Authorized Version). Many commentators feel that, in line with the entire context, "his people" should be taken as the subject of the verb "remembered," rather than to insert the word "he." Thus the first part of the verse would read: Then his people remembered the days of old, the days of Moses, saying, "Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock."

Such expressions of longing for the glorious treatment received in the days of Moses continue through verse 14. In verse 12 and verse 14 it is said that by these actions God made Himself an everlasting or glorious name. Desire to exalt the name of God is praiseworthy, but it cannot be made an excuse for avoiding the duty of penitently seeking His will and turning away from sin.

Verse 15 contains an impassioned plea to God to give material help to His people. Similar pleas are found in verse 17, and in 64:1, 9 and 12. It is the recurring refrain and purpose of the entire passage.

However, this plea is not grounded upon a desire to turn aside from all that is contrary to God's will, nor upon a plea that He should give strength and wisdom to serve Him aright. The idea seems to be that the people whom God has chosen have an undeniable claim upon Him. They feel that since He is their Father He is obligated to help them. While it is true that the one who has been born of God can never be lost, it is equally true and vital that such a one is bound to inquire what is wrong in himself when God withdraws His blessing and to pray that God will cleanse and change him, lest a worse chastening be necessary.

In verse 17 the goodness of God is questioned, and He is blamed for their plight. They ask why He has made them err from His ways and hardened their heart from His fear. In the face of a similar charge Paul said, "Nay, but, O man, who

art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" God never allows man to excuse his sinfulness (Rom. 9:20). on the ground that God caused it. James said: "Let no man when he is tempted, say, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed" (James 1:13-14).

There is an occasional touch in these two chapters of a sort of fatalism, a parody on true Calvinism. The Bible never condones denial of human responsibility. It never allows sinful man to make the excuse that he could not help himself. Calvinism recognizes that everything is in God's hands and that He controls all the events of the universe, but is very careful never to make Him the author of sin. We are punished, not because God causes us to wander astray from His paths and hardens our hearts, but because we have turned aside from doing His desire and have neglected to seek to follow His righteous way. His mercy is boundless, but it has as its necessary precursor a broken and a contrite heart.

This passage shows no trace of personal contrition for the sin that separates us from God. The latter part of verse 17 stresses the note that recurs over and over in the passage: "Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance." The makers of the prayer feel that they alone have a claim on God's blessing. He must help them because they are His. In verses 18 and 19 a sharp contrast is drawn between "the people of thy holiness" and "our adversaries." The King James Version renders verse 19: "We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name."

Isaiah 64

In 64:1-3, which should not be separated in any way from the preceding verses, the ardent plea for divine intervention is continued, and the great acts He had performed in past times are again vividly portrayed. All this is fine, if the right attitude is taken first; without such an attitude it is presumption and insolence. James said: "Thou believest that

there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" (Jas. 2:19).

Similarly verse 4 points out the indescribable nature of the blessings God has prepared for those who wait for Him. There is no other God who can do such wonders. They surpass human understanding. Paul quotes this verse in 1 Corinthians 2:9 as showing the failure of the princes of this world to see the greatness of God's power. This power must be revealed by God Himself.

The prayer contains a wonderful statement of God's goodness, but the question must be asked: For whom are the blessings intended? Does waiting for Him simply mean being born to parents who come of a line that He has blessed, or does it require a personal attitude of turning from sin and seeking truly to do His will? In this prayer we find no suggestion of promising to obey God's law more fully nor of asking Him to point out the wrong in the people's lives which keeps Him from blessing them. The whole stress is on one idea: we are God's people; God has blessed His people in the past; oh that He would pour out similar material blessings on them again.

Verse 5 begins with a statement of God's general attitude of mercy toward those who are righteous, but the following verses do not express either desire for personal righteousness or real penitence for sin. The last part of this verse is rather obscure in the King James Version. Probably the American Standard Version comes nearer to the meaning: "Behold, thou wast wroth, and we sinned: in them have we been of long time; and shall we be saved?" Verses 6 and 7 look superficially like a confession of sin and penitence, but they do not contain any promise of improvement in righteousness or plea for divine help to this end and are not followed by any such promise or plea. It is recognized that the nation is characterized by sin and iniquity, but the tendency seems to be to attribute this to God, and to emphasize the need for material benefit rather than to express a desire for spiritual or moral improvement. It is rather blandly said that "there is none that calleth upon thy name. . . for thou hast hid thy face from us." Religious indifference seems not to be regarded as calling for strong regret, but as something that can be blamed on God.

Verse 8 again presents the same idea. Why should God blame His people? He is the potter, and they are merely the clay. Why doesn't He treat them better? After all, they are His people. This is very different from the way that Paul uses the same figure in Romans 9, or Jeremiah in Jeremiah 18. Neither of them provides any warrant for the suggestion that God's sovereignty gives us an excuse for blaming on Him the results of our own sin and neglect.

Verse 9 refers to iniquity again, not as something present that needs change, but as something past which God is remembering too long. "Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity forever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people." They do not say, "We repent of our iniquities. It's all our fault. We are very sorry. We pray that we may have a changed heart and attitude." They merely say, "Behold, we are all thy people." The next two verses stress the material suffering and desolation. Written in the time of Isaiah, they represent a transference in imagination to the time when events so vividly predicted in the earlier portion of his prophecy would already have been fulfilled. The result is imagined as already present (as also in 63:18). The people know that Isaiah is God's spokesman. They realize that what he predicts is sure to occur. They see that fulfillment as if already present. Facing the situation as a reality, they pray for help. But their prayer falls far short of the attitude that God requires.

The plea, which reaches a climax in verse 12, is very impassioned. It bases itself on a fact -- God's relationship to the people whom He has chosen to be His own. All of it, if certain other elements were added, would be true and effective. As it is, however, it deserves not acquiescence but condemnation. It inevitably leads to the strong rebuke which follows. Even before the exile has begun Isaiah pictures the attitude which so large a portion of the nation will take and also the rebuke which God will give as His answer. He does this in order that His true people may be prepared and may see what their own attitude should be.

"Holier Than Thou"

Alas, there is in this whole prayer an attitude of self-righteousness. It assumes that since God is their God He must bless them regardless of what they do. There is no evidence of personal penitence and desire to be cleansed from evil so as to do good and follow God. One feels the utter absence of any such thought as the hymn-writer expressed when he said:

"And from my stricken heart with tears
Two wonders I confess
The wonders of redeeming love
And my own worthlessness."

In this prayer there is no suggestion of the need of a Redeemer to stand between them and God and to take upon Himself the punishment that should be theirs. If these chapters are correctly understood they lead directly into the following passage containing God's answer.

God detests carnality and licentiousness, but He detests spiritual pride still more. It is brought out clearly in the chapters following Isaiah 40 that God did not call Abraham or set Israel apart for Himself merely because they were to be His pets, but because they were to be His servants to accomplish His purposes in the world. If they sincerely try to do His will He will give them every blessing. If, however, they sit back and say, "I am holier than others; I am God's and He must bless me because I am His and because of the goodness that He has shown my ancestors," then His answer will be, "These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day" (cf. 65:5). It is reminiscent of the statement in Jeremiah 7:4: "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord are these." What did Jeremiah mean? Surely it was the temple of the Lord. It had been built at His express command. In it He had been worshipped and His sacrifices had been performed. Yet anyone who trusted that God would bless him simply because this was God's temple was trusting in lying words. God blesses those who follow Him, not those who put their hope upon something that their ancestors have done.

Verses 1-15 of chapter 65 contain an overwhelming denunciation of the sin of the people who have been trying to use God instead of truly following Him.

Thus Isaiah 63:7-64:12 gives us a picture, not only of an attitude which existed in Isaiah's day, but of one which was especially typical of the Pharisees at the time of Christ. Today similar attitudes are found, not only among Jews, but also among many groups of Christians. The verses which follow give just the answer which a careful reading of the prayer would lead us to expect.

A very strong presumption in favor of the idea that this is not a prayer of God's people but a picture of a false attitude held by a substantial portion of the nation, is found in the fact that it is not followed as one might expect by words of pity or forgiveness, but by sixteen verses that include as strong a denunciation as can be found anywhere in the Scripture.

The prayer recognizes that the people had turned away from God and that this was the reason for their suffering, but contains no real statement of repentance, of sorrow for sin, or of determination to live in a way that would be pleasing to God. Its primary basis for asking help is: "God did wonderful things for us in the past, why doesn't He do them now? We are His people; nobody else has as much claim on God's goodness as we have. Beautiful as some of the expressions are, the general tone of the prayer is like the Pharisee's prayer in the New Testament, thanking God that he is not like other men.

As one reads the prayer it even seems at places to blame God for the fact that the people have fallen into sin. In 63:17 they ask why He made them err from His ways and hardened their hearts! After all they are His people and His temple has been destroyed. How can He keep from feeling sorry for them and restoring them and giving them again the great blessings that had been theirs in the past?

While the factual material of the passage is true, and many of its sentiments are entirely in line with the teaching of God's Word, there is a background which displeases God. It is not so much what is said as what is left unspoken.

The severe denunciation which follows shows that in the actual situation the prayer represents a pharisaical, holier-

than-thou attitude of feeling entitled to God's blessing, rather than an attitude of true penitence or devotion to Him.

This prayer is followed by fifteen verses of as strong denunciation and rebuke as occur anywhere in the Scripture. The necessary conclusion is that 63:8-64:12 is not a godly prayer but rather the presentation of an attitude on the part of individuals who claim to be God's people -- an attitude which must receive as its first answer a declaration of rebuke and punishment!

In Romans 10:20 Paul quotes Isaiah 65:1 as showing that God had predicted the turning to the Gentiles. Even without this corroboration it would seem reasonable to consider that the passage from 63:7 to 64:12 is a picture of a wrong attitude taken by those who claim His blessing simply on the basis of ancestry or of previous relationship rather than on the basis of a penitent heart and a desire to be brought into line with God's desires.

Isaiah 65

In the passage that we have just discussed the speaker referred several times to the great difference between those who considered themselves to be "all thy people" and those outsiders who "were not called by thy name" (cf. espec. 63:19). In a startling answer, in 65:1-2, God declares that His mercy is to be poured out upon "a nation that was not called by my name," while those who have been His people must go through a period of purging and condemnation. The contrast between these two groups is stressed throughout the first 15 verses of the chapter. It reminds us vividly of the striking prediction of the turning of God's favor to the Gentiles in Isaiah 29, and of Paul's discussion in Romans 11. In Romans 10:20-21 Paul quotes these very verses to introduce his discussion of God's calling of the Gentiles. As always, he does not quote a few words out of context, but applies and explains the very matter which is under discussion in the Old Testament passage from which he quotes.

In these 15 verses God severely condemns His erring people for their sin and describes the coming change in His economy which is to occur. The rest of the chapter 65 portrays a later time of great blessing.

Israel is still God's people. Although erring, and deserving severe rebuke and chastisement, there is still a grand future in store for them. This latter part of chapter 65 shows the great blessings that are ahead for all of God's people, both Jews and Gentiles, after the end of the present age of trouble.

As we have seen, the moving prayer which runs from Isaiah 63:7 to 64:12 contains a very urgent and pathetic plea that God's favor would return to His people, but it contains no expression of true penitence for sin or of desire to put God first in the life and thought of those who are praying. It is consequently not at all surprising to find chapter 65 beginning, not with promises of blessing, but with declarations of rebuke.

Upon careful reading of the prayer one could not but be impressed with two ideas: First, that it was necessary that God should render some rebuke and punishment for the failure to assume a proper attitude toward Him. Second, that surely God would not desert His covenant people but would bring to fruition the great promises He had given them. It is natural, then, to expect to find two different emphases in the following chapter. In chapter 65, verses 1-15 are predominantly filled with declarations of punishment and rebuke against those who are disobedient to God, while verses 16-25 are almost entirely made up of great promises of blessing to His people.

In the first section of the chapter (vv. 1-15), we find repeated use of contrast. Verses 1 and 2 bring this contrast into sharp relief, and it is constantly stressed in verses 13 and 15. We cannot properly understand verse 1 unless we look back to the previous prayer, which rests upon the basis that those who were praying were God's people. In 63:19 they say: "We are thine; thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name." In 65:1 God answers: "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not; I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name." God cannot be ordered to give His favor only to certain people who have been called by His name in the past. It is His desire to extend His blessing to the whole earth.

Abraham was told that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. In our first full-length picture of the work which the Servant of God was to do, in Isaiah 42, stress was laid upon the fact that He would be a light to the Gentiles and that the distant isles would wait for His law. Here God answers the narrow exclusive prayer of those who felt themselves to be the only ones who could be called God's people by declaring that He will extend His mercy to a nation that has not been called by His name.

This phrase, "unto a nation that was not called by my name," should remind us of Amos 9:11-12, where the prophet declared that when the Lord comes to this earth to set up His kingdom of righteousness it will contain Gentiles who are called by His name. The word in Amos 9:12 which is translated "heathen" in the King James Version and "nations" in the American Standard Version can be equally well translated "Gentiles," as in the quotation in Acts 15:17, where James pointed out that this promise of Amos was being fulfilled through the calling of the Gentiles. God could very properly call believers who had not been circumcised and thus become Jews "gentiles which are called by my name." The idea that God's favor is to go to the Gentiles was nothing new. It is frequently touched upon in various sections of the Old Testament. It was in mind when Abraham was first called to follow God.

In striking contrast to the blessing promised to the Gentiles in verse 1, verse 2 shows the attitude of those who had previously been called by His name. He says, "I have spread out my hands all the day long unto a rebellious people which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts."

Thus we may be sure that the apostle Paul made no mistake when he quoted these two verses in Romans 10:20-21 as evidence that God had predicted long before that He would turn His mercy to the Gentiles. In the context in Isaiah there is no other reasonable way to explain these verses.

Verses 2-7 consist entirely of denunciation of those who, though claiming to be God's people, are actually a disgrace to His name. In these verses many types of sin are attributed to the people who have made the prayer in chapter 64. They

are a rebellious people. They are following their own thoughts instead of the will of the Lord, and this is leading them into a way that is not good. They are observing many of the wicked customs of the heathen nations around them. In spite of their own unrighteousness they feel that they are vastly superior to all others. Verse 5 points out the great fault of spiritual pride which is found among them. They say, "Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou." If any sin is worse than another in the sight of God it is surely spiritual pride. When people begin to be proud of their own righteousness and to take the attitude of the Pharisee who looked down with scorn upon other people, they are truly in danger of the terrible denunciation with which this verse closes: "These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day."

God's Blessing to Israel Not at an End

After reading verses 2-7, one might be inclined to think that God's entire favor will be turned to the Gentiles and that everything involved in the calling of Israel and in its many past blessings will come to an end. This is the impression which Paul felt might be given by these verses, if taken alone. For this reason, after quoting verses 1 and 2 at the end of Romans 10, he was impelled to declare that God had not cast away His people.

In Romans 11 he continued with a detailed statement of the many glories which have belonged to Israel and of the fact that the nation has always contained a portion which has truly sought the Lord. He described the error of the nation in seeking God's favor through works instead of through the faith that is taught to be primary in both Testaments. In verse 7, he said: "What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded." He compares God's true people to an olive tree, out of which some of the natural branches are to be broken off, and onto which some branches of a wild olive tree are to be grafted (v. 17). Then he declares that eventually the natural branches will again be grafted into their own olive tree. Thus he shows that the turning of God to the Gentiles is not something that is new and different from His

previous revelation but rather an extension of it, and that the casting aside of some of the natural branches is only a temporary phase.

The same teaching is found in Isaiah 65. In verses 8-11 the prophet shows that the line of God's blessing has not come to an end, with an entirely new tree substituted for the old one. There is, rather, a continuous progression, though important changes will occur. By the end of verse 7 one might have received the impression that He was putting an end in disgust to His previous work, but verse 8 declares that this is not the case. Grape juice (new wine) is found in the cluster; even though the grapes look bad and many of them are dried up, there is still something there that is worthwhile. There remains a blessing in Israel, and this can be developed into great blessing for all the world. He says that He will not destroy it for His servants' sakes, in order that He may not destroy them all.

This word "servants" is interesting. The chapters between Isaiah 40 and 53 often mention "the Servant of the Lord," that great character who was to do the work for which Israel had been called. Israel could not do the work of the Servant because Israel itself was in suffering and misery, blind and rebellious. However, the work must be done by Israel, so it is to be done by One who comes out of Israel and who performs the work not only for Israel but also for the Gentiles. After chapter 53 there is no longer any reference to the Servant, but there are many references to "my servants." These servants would seem to be those who are followers of "the Servant" -- those who are redeemed through Him and who are seeking to do His will. For their sakes, we are told in verse 8, the line of God's blessing is to be continued.

In verse 9 we are told that "a seed" is to come "out of Jacob" and "out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains." It is likely that this is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, that He is the seed out of Jacob and the inheritor out of Judah, the one in whom all the promises find their culmination. The language is not definite enough for us to be certain that it could not be taken in a more general sense, but in line with the rest of the verse it would seem quite reasonable to think that it is actually a prediction of the

coming of the Lord Jesus. He is truly the seed of Jacob and the inheritor of all the promises of God (cf. Gal. 5:16,29).

The latter part of the verse tells what His followers are to do: "mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there." In the most literal sense this would seem to be a prediction of the future of Palestine, and therefore to describe something that is still future. It is quite probable, however, that in this context verses 9-10 are properly considered in a somewhat figurative sense as indicating that the followers of Christ will inherit and dwell in the great blessings which God has promised.

Verse 10 designates Sharon, which is the great valley to the west of the hill country of Palestine, and the valley of Achor, which lies to the east, as places where the flocks and herds of the people of God shall find their habitation. All this is done, not for those who have been rebellious, but "for my people that have sought me."

It is not possible to rule out altogether the possibility that verses 9-10 are a prediction of the ultimate time when Christ will reign over the whole earth and when His people will have their headquarters in Palestine. Thus one might take the two verses more literally than we have done. It is certainly a mistake to consider that all the literal promises of the Old Testament are to be converted into figurative descriptions of blessing. Surely the great promises of the latter part of this chapter are to be interpreted in quite a literal way. Yet there are many clear cases where literal expressions are used as figures for spiritual blessing, and here, in the light of the context, it seems most probable that this is the case. These blessings -- the blessings which properly belong to Jacob and Judah -- are blessings which are to come to the true Israel of God, the followers of the Seed which is brought out of Jacob. This seems the more reason able here because of the stress on the turning to the Gentiles in verses 1-2 and the contrast which we find in verses 13-15. Moreover, the very next verse (v. 11) begins with the words: "But ye." The people to whom He is speaking are brought into sharp contrast with those to whom He has promised these great blessings. Though the race of Israel is for a time to pass from the center of God's blessing, there will be a seed

out of Jacob which will receive rich blessing at His hand and will truly inherit the promises that He has given.

Renewed Prediction of Punishment

Verses 11 and 12 again place great stress on God's punishment of His rebellious people. In verse 11 they are criticized for their idolatry. The words which the King James Version renders "that troop" and "that number" are better translated in the American Standard Version as "Fortune" and "Destiny" and probably indicate idols that were being worshipped. Verse 12 is a terrible description of suffering and destruction to come to those who, though called of God, have refused to answer and have been rebellious against Him.

It is sad to read these verses after hearing the wonderful promises from Isaiah 40-56 and seeing the way in which God was bringing His people back from Babylon, giving them marvelous blessing, and promising to send His Son for redemption from sin. It is indeed sad to learn that there is still a long period of suffering and misery ahead for them. Verses 11 and 12 make it very clear that the time of Jacob's trouble is not over. Severe troubles await the natural descendants of Jacob during the long centuries between Isaiah's day and the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses 13-15 are made up of a series of contrasts between the happy future of the true servants of God and the miserable fate of those who are here addressed in the second person. Quite evidently these latter represent the greater part of those who had made the prayer in the previous chapter, and are the same, of course, as those who were addressed in the second person in verses 11 and 12. God's true servants, who are following Him and who are redeemed through the Lord Jesus Christ, are given general promises of great material blessings and of superlative joy and happiness, but for those who are rebellious against Him there will be misery and trouble. Thus the great happiness to come to God's true followers, whether Jew or Gentile, is here contrasted with the fate of those who, despite their ancestral relation to Him, continue in rebellion.

A New Name

Verse 15 has a most striking statement: "And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen." The word here translated "chosen" is the same word which is translated "elect" in verses 9 and 22. It refers to those whom God has set apart to be redeemed through faith in His Son. They are told here that the name which has hitherto designated the people of God is to be to some extent a curse in the hands of His true people during the time between the tearing out of certain of the natural branches and the time when the natural branches will be grafted in again.

The latter part of the verse says that the Lord will call His servants by another name. How can we interpret this otherwise than as a prediction of the fact that during the present era those who are carrying on the testimony of God are called "Christians" from the Greek word for "Messiah." During the interval in which some of the natural branches have been grafted out, the name of the main olive tree is to be temporarily changed, even though its continuity remains. Its unity is not broken.

How could this verse be more reasonably interpreted than as a depiction of the fact that God is to turn His mercy away from Israel for the period between the first coming and the second coming of Christ! Although many from Israel are to be called into the church during this period, the focus of God's great blessing is to be upon those whom He calls from every nation and tongue and kindred to be followers of His great Servant. The very name "Israel" is, during this period, to be profaned by many who are among the true servants of God, who will be called by a different name. That wonderful name which meant so much during the period previous to the writing of Isaiah, and which will again mean so much in days yet to come, passes out of the center of God's blessing during this predicted period.

The phrase in the middle of verse 15 is rather peculiar: "The Lord GOD will slay thee." This does not, of course, mean entire destruction of the race, but it points to the fact that during the long interval God's rebellious nation must endure great suffering and persecution, including the slaughter of many people. The fulfillment began with Roman massacres and reached a climax in the conquest of Jerusalem by Titus, when untold thousands died a miserable death. All

the slaughter which has come to groups of God's erring people during the ages from the rebellion of Bar Cochba to the mass murders of Hitler is included in the fulfillment of this phrase, "the Lord GOD shall slay thee."

Verse 16

One possible interpretation of verse 16 would be to consider it as giving the reason for the turning of God's favor to the Gentiles. In this case it means that His inscrutable providence is intended to result in the widespread knowledge of Himself, so that throughout the earth He shall be recognized in all phases of life, since the troubles due to sin shall have passed away and been hidden from the eye of God. If that interpretation of the verse should be taken, then the first word of verse 17 should be rendered "But," rather than "For" -- a possible, though less usual rendering -- since the verses following clearly deal with a different phase of God's plan than those preceding it.

Yet there are a number of reasons for thinking that such an interpretation of verse 16 is probably wrong. In the first place, verse 17 seems to be closely connected with verse 16, and this makes the usual translation, "For," seem more natural. In the second place, verse 16 seems to describe a condition much too universal to fit our present age. In the third place, even though the Christian knows that his sins are under the blood of Christ, the words "because the former troubles are forgotten" do not seem exactly to fit this great fact but to require some other element for their explanation. In the fourth place, the Hebrew word with which the verse begins is rarely if ever used to indicate simple purpose. Normally it introduces clauses quite similar to our English relative clauses. It is thus not precisely similar to our English word "that," which is often used as a shortened form of "in order that." The beginning of the verse might possibly be rendered: "Whoever is the one blessing himself in the earth shall," or one might simply translate, "The one who blesses himself in the earth shall," as is done by the Septuagint.

Consequently, it seems better to consider verse 16 as beginning the second part of the chapter. Verses 16-25 are

almost exclusively made up of promises of blessing for God's people. The contrast which was brought out so strongly in verses 13-15 is hardly touched upon in these verses, which describe the blessings of Christ's millennial kingdom. All His true people, including the "nation born in a day" are to share in these blessings. Israel according to the flesh uttered a poignant prayer in 63:15-64:12. This prayer stressed the true argument that God has promised to bless His covenant people. When first given it was vitiated by a spirit of exclusiveness, and by a failure to show any true penitence for sin, and its shortcomings inevitably provoked the strong rebuke presented by verses 1-15. Yet there remains a true element in the prayer, deserving an answer of love and mercy, and this answer, which is found in the latter part of chapter 65, tells of the time when the natural branches shall have again been grafted into their own olive tree.

Isaiah 65:16-25

We have seen that the prayer of Isaiah 63:7-64:12 finds its answer in chapter 65 and that this answer is in two parts. In Isaiah 65:1-15 we found the condemnation of the spirit of those who made the prayer. It was pointed out that their insistence on an exclusive right to God's blessings was not justified. God condemned their sin and declared that for a time He would turn His favor to another group altogether and would pour out wrath upon those who had failed to show a true spirit of penitence.

In the last half of the chapter a positive answer to the prayer is given. The Israelites are indeed God's people and it is His will that they shall ultimately be cleansed and made fit to receive the wonderful blessings He has promised. Jerusalem is not always to remain in desolation. It is to be restored to a glory far surpassing anything previously known.

Verse 16 properly belongs to the second part of the chapter. There is no reasonable connection between verses 15 and 16 in which 16 would be a statement of the results of what is described in verse 15. The Hebrew word which begins verse 16 is not a normal introduction to a result clause. It is a particle which usually introduces a relative clause. The verse ends with the words: "because the former

troubles are forgotten, and because they are hid from mine eyes." The word which is here twice rendered "because" is exactly the same as that which is translated "for" at the beginning of verse 17, and there is no reason for a break between these two verses. Verse 17 continues the statement of the reasons why there is to come a time when the ones who bless in the earth will do it only in the name of the God of truth.

Thus the passage begins with a reference to the fact that worship of God is to become universal in the earth. No longer will great portions of the world be characterized by worship of false gods and denial of the Creator. All are to recognize Him. False religions are to be brought to an end and the religion of the God of truth is to be the sole religion of the earth.

The phrase which is translated "the God of truth" might better be rendered "the God of Amen." The Hebrew word used here, while similar to the word for "truth," is actually "amen," a word which is used to declare the certainty of that which God has promised. We may compare Revelation 3:14: "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God."

Verse 16b and 17 bring out clearly the remarkable change which is to occur in the condition of God's people. The former troubles are to be completely forgotten. The physical creation is to be altered. Whatever has caused misery in the past will not even come to mind.

As we read verses 16-25 we cannot but be struck with the remarkable similarity of verse 25 to Isaiah 11:6-9. Most of the phrases of verse 25 are taken bodily from chapter 11. The last part of the verse is a direct quotation of the first part of 11:9. The last part of 11:9 has a striking parallel in verse 16 of our present chapter, which tells us, with different words, that the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord. Thus it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the time predicted in our present passage is precisely that which has been described in 11:6-9.

Characteristics of the Promised Time of Blessing.

A survey of this passage shows that five elements stand out in it:

1. God alone is to be honored (brought out particularly in v. 16).
2. There are to be great changes in the physical creation. (This is stressed in many parts of the passage but is particularly clear in vv. 17 and 25).
3. Longevity is to be greatly increased. (Stressed particularly in vv. 19-23).
4. There is to be an end of war and trouble. (Also suggested in vv. 19-23).
5. The curse is to be removed. (Suggested in v. 17 and clearly stated in v. 25).

Verse 17 shows that there is to be a remarkable physical change, which can be described as a creation of new heavens and a new earth. The exact meaning of this phrase might perhaps be considered better after we have looked at the details of the passage.

Verse 18 seems to be a direct answer to the prayer in the previous chapter. The people have been sorrowing on account of the misery around them. They are now told to be glad and rejoice because of the fact that God is preparing something wonderful. He is going to "create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy." While the word "create" suggests the making of something that is entirely new, it is here used in connection with something which has long existed. Very evidently it does not mean that there is an introduction of something which has not existed at all before, but rather that there is such a complete change that it can be considered as being entirely new. If this is true of Jerusalem in verse 18, it is at least worthy of consideration to ask whether it is also true of the phrase "new heavens and a new earth" in verse 17.

Verse 19 continues the general thought of this rejoicing, and states clearly that weeping and misery are no longer to be found in the new Jerusalem that will be established. Verse 20 clearly presents the thought of greatly increased longevity. No more will infants die when only a few days old, nor will a man be cut off in the prime of his strength before

he has filled out his days. If one dies at the age of a hundred years it will be considered that he was only a child when he died, and one who dies at such an age will be thought of as having deserved the wrath of God that he should fail to share in the blessing which comes to the bulk of the people.

It is interesting to note that sin and death are still present in this verse, even though greatly decreased in power. Death, which is the last enemy (1 Cor. 15:26), has not yet been entirely eradicated. Delitzsch points out that it is not "the final annulling of death" that is spoken of here, but "only the limiting of its power."

In verses 21-23 longevity is still in view. The days of the people are to be like the days of a tree. Like the palm tree or the cedar, they are to live for centuries. Life is to be sturdy and strong, not cut off after a brief interval, as is so often the fact in the present age of sorrow. In these verses the removal of war and trouble are stressed. One is not to build and another inhabit, either because of premature death or because of war and turmoil. Each will enjoy the fruit of his labor and will live a long life of peace and happiness. The similarity between this passage and the wonderful descriptions of the promised millennium in Isaiah 2:24 and 11:4-9 and in Micah 4:1-4 is very striking.

The end of verse 23 seems to hark back very definitely to the prayer of 63:7-64:12. There emphasis was laid upon the claim that the people were the descendants of those whom God had promised to bless and that consequently He should not withdraw His favor from them. Although God declared that He would withdraw his favor for a time, this verse reminds us that there is still a considerable element of truth in the prayer. God has promised great blessings to those who are true to Him and these blessings are to continue upon their descendants for thousands of generations (Deut. 7:9). It is necessary that an individual personally receive Christ as his Saviour if he is to be born again and receive the divine blessing; yet there is a very real sense in which the blessing of God is continued upon the descendants of those who are His, and every parent has a right to claim God's blessing upon his children. This thought is stressed repeatedly in the Bible.

Verse 24 reminds us, by contrast, of the long delay before responding favorably to the prayer of chapter 64. The people have called to God for His mercy, but the answer seems to be long postponed. During seemingly endless centuries they wait in misery and sorrow for the reestablishment of the blessings which have been removed. In this present age of sin and misery it is often necessary that we pray for years before we see the full answer to our prayers, but in the age described in our present chapter this condition will no longer exist. There will be such communion between God and His people that a prayer will find immediate answer and God's people will always realize that they are living in His very presence. "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

This is a blessing which can be secured to quite an extent by God's people in the present day, but which can never as yet be entirely ours. There are always problems which we do not understand. There are always matters concerning which it is necessary that we pray over long periods of time before being able to see the answer to our prayers. This will no longer be true in the wonderful period described here.

We have noticed the striking similarity of verse 25 to Isaiah 11:6-9. Every phrase in this verse except one is exactly paralleled there. That one is interesting: "And dust shall be the serpent's meat." If there was any question in our minds as to whether this verse described the removal of the curse of Genesis 3, all doubts would be removed by this phrase. In Genesis 3 the serpent was cursed by being told that he should eat dust. Here we are told that the curse upon the serpent is not to be removed, as in the case of the rest of the animal creation. Not only must the serpent eat dust, but his food is to be exclusively dust. No longer will he bruise the heel of mankind. No longer will sin and wickedness reign in this earth.

In our consideration of Isaiah 11 we noticed that Romans 8:18-23 declares that the curse is to be removed from the earth -- that the whole creation groans and travails waiting for that glorious time. Here we have another prediction of the physical removal of the curse. It parallels the statement in Revelation 20:1-6 that Satan will be bound for a thousand years.

When Will These Things Be?

It would be impossible to consider 65:16-25 as a description of heaven. It has too many allusions to earthly activities, and even death is contained within the description. It must refer to a situation that is to exist upon this earth.

When will these things take place? There are only three possible answers to this question. Either (1) it is a figurative description of the church during the present age, (2) it is a description of conditions during the earthly reign of Christ after His return, or (3) it describes an eternal condition which is to exist after the final judgment and condemnation of the wicked.

Let us first examine the question whether this is a description of the church of the present age. While there are many passages in Isaiah which do indeed describe the present church, including parts of the first half of this chapter, this is certainly not true of our present passage. To take the specific, literal statements of this passage as a description of the church today in the midst of a world of sin and wickedness is to carry figurative language to the point where one can no longer be certain of the significance of any sentence. We have here definite promises of changes in the physical sphere, and the passage cannot be satisfactorily interpreted as a picture of the present age.

As to the second possibility, the most natural interpretation of the passage is to take it in connection with the descriptions of Isaiah 2 and Isaiah 11, and to recognize it as a picture of the period when Christ is to reign in righteousness upon this earth, immediately after His return. This millennial interpretation fits every aspect of the passage, though some of its aspects may seem surprising to those who have had a false idea of the Millennium. Thus we find described here the presence of death and of sin upon the earth, even though in a very limited degree. The Millennium is not a time when death no longer exists. Death is the last enemy that is to be destroyed. It is a time, indeed, when the glorified saints are to have glorified bodies and be free from death, but upon the earth there will still remain a certain amount of death and a certain amount of sin, even though greatly cut down. While God will reign unchallenged and

external righteousness will prevail upon the earth, Revelation 20 teaches clearly that there will be those whose hearts are not right before God and who do not avail themselves of the wonderful offer of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, for at the end of the Millennium these will join in the uprising against Christ which will be led by Satan when he is released for a little season. Even in that glorious millennial period no one will be saved simply by his environment. Since the fall of man there has not been and will not be a time when anyone can be saved apart from a personal relation of his heart to Christ, or on any other ground than the merits of Christ's atoning death.

The only real objection to considering this passage to be a description of the Millennium is based on the words "new heavens and a new earth" in verse 17. This leads to consideration of the third possible interpretation. We note at once that it is impossible to take the entire passage as a description of an eternal state, after death has been completely eradicated, in view of the declaration in verse 20 that there will still remain a very small amount of sin and death in the world. The idea that this might be a picture of an eternal condition after sin is entirely eradicated would surely never have been suggested if it were not for the phrase "new heavens and a new earth" in verse 17.

There are various possibilities for the interpretation of this phrase. To take it simply as a figurative picture of the renewed heart of the believer would surely be carrying figurative language too far. The passage has too much stress on the condition of the physical creation for that to be a possible view. On the other hand, to take it as a technical phrase which always describes a time after the judgment of the wicked is to introduce a very dangerous principle into the interpretation of Scripture. We must never assume that a phrase is a technical phrase referring always to one particular time or event, unless we have absolute proof that this is the case. Before being sure of the exact meaning of a phrase we must see what is involved in each passage in which it is used.

We have already seen that "new heavens and a new earth" does not have to mean something entirely new and different from anything that had previously existed. In verse

18 the word "create" is used of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is to be created a rejoicing, and her people a joy. Jerusalem is to be renewed and restored and made so different from its previous condition that it can be considered as something entirely new, though it is a continuation of something that already existed. Verse 17, therefore, may describe a substitution of an entirely new heaven and new earth for that which exists at present or it may describe a cleansing and changing of the condition of the present heaven and earth so that they can be considered as something entirely new, even though there is a continuation.

From every viewpoint, the most satisfactory interpretation of Isaiah 65:16-25 is to consider it in its entirety as a description, not of the present church, nor of an eternal age, but of the Millennium.

Isaiah 66

Chapter 66 is the concluding portion of the section which starts at Isaiah 63:7. As we have noticed, this section begins with a prayer (63:7 to 64:12). The spirit and attitude of this prayer rightly merited God's rebuke, yet many of the petitions contained in the prayer are ultimately to be granted in view of God's relation to Israel and His many promises to that nation. In chapter 65 both of these aspects were considered. The first part of the chapter presents God's condemnation of the spirit of the prayer, and declares that for a time He will turn His favor to another people. The latter part of the chapter shows that God's covenant promises to Israel were not cast aside, but that Israel will receive great blessings in the period in which the earth is to be wonderfully renewed, when Christ will reign in righteousness.

In chapter 66 both of these notes are found again. Condemnation of a wrong attitude is strongly expressed in the first few verses of the chapter; most of the rest of the chapter is devoted to declaring the ultimate fulfillment of His promises to the nation.

In the prayer considerable stress was laid upon the fact that the sanctuary had been trodden down. This was mentioned in 63:18, and again in the last two verses of the prayer, which read as follows: "Our holy and beautiful house,

where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O LORD? Wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?" In this prayer the prophet presented the attitude of a large portion of the people. They could not see how God could permit His temple thus to be destroyed and felt that surely He would be greatly moved by the importance of rebuilding it very soon.

The first three verses of the chapter take this as their starting point. Important as the temple may be as a center of worship, the attitude of heart of the one who comes before God is far more important. God declares that He cannot be confined to an earthly temple. Heaven is His throne and earth is His footstool. A temple is useful as a place where people may gather to serve Him, but an earthly house is nothing in comparison with the far more fundamental matter of the personal relation of the believer to God. In the first two verses the attitude of the one who seeks to win God's favor by building Him a temple is contrasted with that of the one who "is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at my word." Humility and obedience mean far more to the Lord than any material gift that we may undertake to give Him.

Thus in verses 1 to 3 great emphasis is placed on the inadequacy of mere form or ceremony to bring one into true relationship with God. Verses 1 and 2 stress the inadequacy of any temple apart from a right heart attitude toward the Creator. In verse 3 the sacrifices and religious services are singled out, and it is shown that, if one performed the best of these religious services with a wrong heart attitude, it would be no better than if he had blessed an idol or offered swine's blood to the Lord.

Formalism Rebuked

This emphasis upon the spiritual attitude required of the true worshiper is nothing new in the Bible. From beginning to end of the Scripture, constant emphasis is placed upon the necessity of a personal relation to the Lord. Mere form and ceremony can never save a man. Only those who truly desire to follow God and who have received the blessing of regeneration and renewal of heart can do anything that is worthwhile

in His sight. For an unregenerate human being to think that he can win God's favor by building Him a temple is absurd. The same applies to the various types of sacrifice described in verse 3. Under the Old Testament ceremonies killing an ox was a very worthy method of serving the Lord, since it prefigured the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary's cross. Yet when this is performed apart from true worship of God and from a heart anxious to do His will, it is not a good deed in His sight, but is in fact actually harmful. It is almost as if one murdered a man. To sacrifice a lamb is one of the glorious symbols of the Old Testament. Yet apart from sincere worship of God it has no more meaning than if one were to cut off a dog's neck. Offering oblation and burning of incense were important parts of Old Testament ceremony, but apart from the proper heart attitude they were of no more value than to have offered swine's flesh or to have blessed an idol.

This principle also applies to members of the church in our own day. Attendance at church services, partaking of communion, and performance of our present means of glorifying God and showing forth His grace are excellent in themselves, but they are absolutely worthless if they are not accompanied by a heart that is filled with desire to serve the Lord and that recognizes that these are merely symbols of something far greater, of the grace of God mediated directly by His Spirit to the believing soul.

Thus these three verses condemn all formalism in worship and all attempts to gain God's favor by external acts alone. By way of contrast, they include a brief word of blessing: at the end of verse 2 it is pointed out that one who has a poor and contrite spirit and trembles at the Word of God will receive God's favor.

Verse 4 concludes this section of the chapter by indicating that God will not merely rebuke formalism in words; he is going to bring real punishment upon those who substitute a building or a ceremony for true obedience to God. The very things that they fear will be the instruments of punishment. The delusions and imaginary worries that bother them will become real, for God will pour out His anger against them.

In verse 5 the attention turns to the remnant of grace. Men who have suffered for the name of God at the hands of those who should have been His followers are given words of

consolation. The Lord will bring them joy but will bring shame to those who falsely claim to be His.

Here the Lord is looking to His true followers among the Israelites. Doubtless there were a great many who listened gladly to the words of Isaiah and sought to do the will of God as it was presented to them. They were in misery because of the sin of the people and the refusal of the nation to turn away from its wickedness and to come back to whole-hearted obedience to God. They knew that the exile was a certainty. They could see it as if it were already present, because of their belief in the predictions that God had made through Isaiah and other prophets. In the reign of Manasseh, while Isaiah was probably still living, many of them suffered persecution for their faith. At various times in later ages true believers have endured affliction for the Word of God. Sometimes they have even been cast out of synagogues and churches. In verse 5 the Lord declares that He will give great blessings to those who suffer for His truth. His coming will bring joy to them, but great shame to those who have oppressed and persecuted them instead of standing with them, as they should have done.

Verse 6 connects closely with verse 5. Its final words, "a voice of the Lord that rendereth recompense to his enemies," tie up with the predictions of destruction which have preceded it. In graphic fashion the verse describes the tumult in the city - - "a voice of noise from the city" -- and then points to its cause -- the voice of the Lord speaking from His temple. God speaks and the nations are moved. At His Word, coming forth from His temple, vengeance is poured out upon the workers of iniquity. There has been much discussion as to whether "the temple" here refers to the temple of Zerubbabel or to that of Herod, or to a temple to be built in the future, but at this point such discussions are quite unnecessary. It describes a voice which God sends forth from His own abode, a voice decreeing tumult upon all who oppose His will. There is no need to tie it to a specific earthly temple.

The Rebirth of Israel

In verse 7 there seems at first to be a rather sharp change from the note of vengeance to that of joy and blessing. Actually, however, it is merely turning the attention to another phase of the same subject. The voice of the Lord speaks doom to His enemies, but to the remnant of grace it means hope and joy. Surely the greatest consolation that could be given them would be the assurance that their numbers would be greatly increased and that God's mercy would again be poured out upon the nation. Verses 7 to 9 begin to explain the great joy that is to come to the remnant at the return of Christ. They will cease to be a mere remnant and will become a nation born in a day.

These verses are given in such rhetorical language that there might be difficulty at first in determining exactly what they mean. This is particularly true of verse 8 in which rhetorical questions are asked. "Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once?" If these two questions stood alone it would be possible to answer, "Why, no, of course not! Before a nation can be born there must be a long period of travail and misery leading up to so glorious a result." Yet the thought of the three verses seems to be quite different from this.

Verse 7 says in unmistakable language that the change is to be accomplished with startling rapidity, and the end of verse 8 fits with this teaching. "Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child ... for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children."

The translation "as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth" is not a literal rendering of the Hebrew, but seems to express its meaning quite accurately. The sentence has been rendered in this form by most modern interpreters. The stress is upon a wonderful promise that a great sudden change will occur -- something that one could hardly believe would occur. Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? A nation is to be born in a day!

In verse 9 the Lord declares that He is able to accomplish this great thing. He says that His purposes are yet going to be fulfilled. One may see no sign of them in Isaiah's day or

in many a period since. The nation seems to be sunk in unbelief and to have turned away from God. In many quarters mere formalism displaces any true carrying out of God's commands. The outward acts pretend to do God's will while the heart is at enmity toward Him. Is it possible that a nation will be born in a day? "Yes," the Lord says. What He has begun, He will complete. What He has promised, He will fulfill. This wonderful thing is going to come to pass. As soon as Zion travails she will bring forth her children.

This mention of bringing forth children refers, of course, to the spiritual rather than the physical realm. It does not mean that a great number of people who did not previously exist will suddenly come into being. It refers to spiritual birth rather than physical birth. It describes the sudden entrance of a great number of people into the family of God. A similar figure was used in chapter 54:1 which says, "more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife." No one would think of interpreting that statement as a blessing upon immorality. It is a figure expressing the idea that those who had seemed to be outside the center of God's favor would become for a time the source of a great number of spiritual births. That passage, like Isaiah 65:1, foretold the event which Paul described in Romans 11:17 as the grafting in of wild branches into an olive tree, and the breaking off of some of its natural branches. Our present passage describes the event which Paul predicts in the succeeding verses of Romans 11. God will graft the natural branches into their own olive tree again (v. 23). "And so all Israel shall be saved" (v. 25). The spiritual rebirth of all Israel is here in view. A nation will be born into Christ's kingdom in a day.

Kingdom Joys

Verses 10-14 tell of God's great blessings to His people in the wonderful day that is yet to come. Jerusalem will be a source of wonderful joy; the glory of the Gentiles will come in; a people will be comforted in Jerusalem. This is a picture of what will follow the conversion of the Jews, a picture of the wonderful time when Christ will reign in glory in Jerusalem and peace and joy will cover the whole earth.

The Lord calls upon all His true followers, particularly those of the nation of Israel, to rejoice with Jerusalem because of the wonderful things that He will bring to pass. For many centuries the Jews have been wanderers upon the face of the earth, having no secure home and no certainty of continuing in the enjoyment of such material blessings as they may acquire for a time. Now they are told that they will have security and peace in the wonderful period God has promised. Those who were like orphans, cast out from the presence of their parents, are to be like children upon the knee of their mother, enjoying absolute security and peace while receiving great blessings from her. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

Verse 14 ends this wonderful passage of blessing with a suggestion of destruction. A contrast is drawn between the joy which is to come to God's true people in Jerusalem and the indignation which He will pour out upon His enemies. Here the emphasis is not upon those who should belong to the family of God but have turned away from Him, as in the earlier part of the chapter. It is upon those outside, who are opposing God's control. The Lord will execute judgment upon all flesh: and the slain of the Lord will be many (cf. American Standard Version here). In verse 17 the emphasis is again on false worship and may include those who are departing into the abominations of the heathen instead of following God in truth.

The fact that verses 15-17 follow verses 10-14 does not mean that the outpouring of wrath described in verses 15-17 comes after the blessings of the previous verses. It is described here in connection with the time of blessing and possibly as a reason why we can look forward to that period as certain to be accomplished. Before it begins God will pour out fire and the sword upon the nations that are hostile to Him and will bring destruction upon all their abominations.

The first section of verse 18 should be taken with what precedes. Those involved in these various forms of evil will come to an end together, "for I know their works and their thoughts." The word "know" is italicized in the English versions, for it is not expressed in the Hebrew. Literally the Hebrew reads: "And as for me, their works and their

thoughts." Some commentators think the verb "I shall punish" is understood. Both our English versions insert "know." The previous three verses have described punishment. If this simply means, "I shall punish their works and their thoughts," it adds neither idea nor emphasis to what has just been stated. The specific mention of thoughts suggests that the fairness of God's justice and the penetration of His insight is what is meant, and this fits excellently into the preceding context. In any event, the phrase undoubtedly connects with what precedes rather than with what follows.

God has said that He will punish, not only those who are openly hostile to Him, but also those who falsely claim to be religious. No hypocrisy will escape His piercing eye. He stresses the fact that He knows the thoughts of the heart. No one can hide anything from Him. When the Lord Jesus Christ was on earth people were astonished because He knew their innermost thoughts. Everything that is hidden from others was fully apparent to Him. In John 1:47 He described the character of Nathanael, and Nathanael was so amazed at His knowledge that he cried out: "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel."

There is no mistake in the judgments of God. In this age it sometimes appears as if the fate of the righteous is to suffer, while the unrighteous seem to have everything their own way. But God declares that this age is not the end. In His economy all unrighteousness will receive its just reward. There can be no miscarriage of justice with Him, for He knows the works of all men and even their thoughts.

God knows which individuals are using religious forms to express their love of Him, and which are using them simply as a means of expressing their own vainglory. He knows which are seeking their own desires instead of presenting before God the offering of a pure and contrite heart. Some times even the best of forms may represent an utterly false attitude. Here is the God who is omniscient, who sees the very center of man's being. Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. God's judgment is not based upon what people think of us or upon our external attitude, but upon our true heart attitude toward Him. God alone knows His own. He knows those who have been born again through the Lord Jesus Christ and regenerated through

His blood, and those who are really following their own sinful desires. The phrase, "for I know their works and their thoughts," forms a reasonable conclusion to the declarations of judgment in verse 17 and has little relevance to what follows in verse 18. The period should not come at the end of verse 17 but after this phrase in verse 18.

It should not be thought that it is false to the Word of God to recognize sentence endings as sometimes different from the ends of verses. The verse divisions were put in long after the Bible was written and are in no sense inspired. Occasionally, as here, the end of one sentence and the beginning of another are joined in one verse. Sometimes we even find the ending of one paragraph and the beginning of the next combined into a single verse, as in Psalm 19:4. Verse divisions, like chapter divisions, are extremely convenient for finding places in the Bible but are by no means to be taken as a guide in working out the thought of a passage. From this viewpoint they are often a hindrance. The rest of verse 18 presents a thought which is touched upon again in verse 20 and stressed in verse 23. The time is coming when all nations shall go up to Jerusalem at frequent intervals to worship the Lord and to see His glory. "From one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD." This corresponds with the pictures in Isaiah 2 and elsewhere of people coming from all the parts of the earth to Jerusalem, which is to be the center of God's government and of His worship during that great time of blessing. Great increase in transportation facilities is promised in order that representatives of all nations shall come up to Jerusalem.

Verse 19 promises a time of great Jewish missionary activity, taking the news of God's glory to all the nations. This would seem to follow the outpouring of God's wrath upon His enemies, and to precede the coming of the nations to Jerusalem. Verse 21 tells of the selection of new priests and Levites. God's services will continue, though their exact form is not stated.

Verse 22 points to the lasting quality of the new heavens and the new earth which God will establish, a sign of the continuation of the nation He selected. Surely this indicates the permanence of God's blessing upon Israel. Many of its

people have turned away from Him, and it has been necessary for Him to rebuke them and to punish many of them; yet they remain a people whom He has selected for a particular purpose and to whom He has promised to show great and lasting blessing.

While chapter 66 keeps the nation of Israel in the foreground, it has many revealing touches regarding the rest of the world. The prophet's vision takes in the entire universe. The destruction of all the enemies of God, regardless of race or distance, is seen in verses 15 to 17. The entrance of all nations into the presence of God is stated in verses 18 to 23. All flesh is to worship before Him in that glorious time of universal joy and peace.

The book of Isaiah ends on a practical note. After the marvelous blessings of its latter verses, verse 24 reminds us of the fate of those who turn against the Lord and are punished in the great judgment at the end of the age. God is not only a god of love. He is also a God of justice.

"Their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched" (v. 24). This last verse of the Book of Isaiah is a vivid reminder of the fact that the torment of the finally impenitent will endure forever. It is one of the clearest indications of the eternal punishment of the wicked.

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Studies in ISALAH

Allan A. MacRae

Long out of print and appearing for the first time in book form, this survey of Isaiah has been acclaimed by many as especially helpful for understanding the flow and connection of the prophet's message.

Dr. MacRae studied under R. A. Torrey at Biola, Robert Dick Wilson and J. Gresham Machen at Princeton Seminary, William F. Albright at the American Schools of Oriental Research, and E. A. Speiser at the University of Pennsylvania. He taught Old Testament for over fifty years at Westminster, Faith and Biblical Seminaries, and was founding president of the latter two. His students included Joseph T. Bayly, Arthur F. Glasser, Vernon C. Grounds, R. Laird Harris, Kenneth S. Kantzer, Gordon R. Lewis, Francis A. Schaeffer and G. Douglas Young. He is author of *Nuzi Personal Names*, *The Gospel of Isaiah*, *The Prophecies of Daniel*, and *Biblical Christianity*.

ISBN 0-944788-88-2



Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute
Hatfield, Pennsylvania