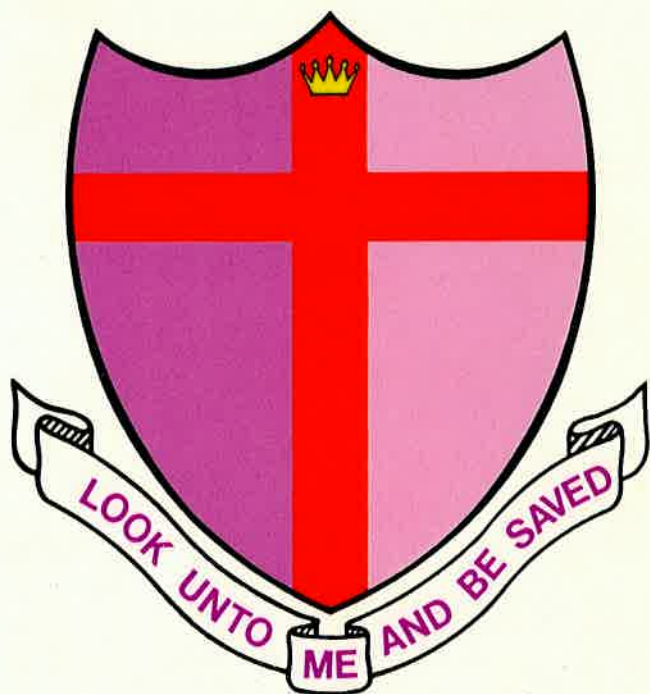


THE **GOSPEL** PROPHETS



**AN APPLIED COMMENTARY
ON ISAIAH AND MICAH**

Timothy Cow

PREFACE

This Applied Commentary on Isaiah and Micah is a follow-up of an Applied Commentary on John's Gospel and Epistles by the same author. As with John's Gospel and Epistles, it is the binding into one volume the RPG (Read, Pray and Grow) Daily Bible Reading Work-books written on Isaiah and Micah over a period of time. A more permanent record, this book is offered to the Christian public beyond the RPG reading circles.

The sixteen Prophetic Books of the Old Testament are four-fifths the length of the New Testament. Whereas the New Testament is familiar ground to many, the Prophets seem to be a closed territory. This is due to a lack of knowledge of their historical background, and of a proper perspective of what the Prophets see. By bringing both the historical background and the Prophets' vision into focus through this commentary, the Reader can now enjoy a clearer picture of God's salvation plan in the Prophetic Word what seemed before a jigsaw puzzle.

In this connection the writer must acknowledge his indebtedness to Dr. Allan A. Macrae former principal of Faith Theological Seminary, USA who taught him the principles of prophecy, particularly the Book of Isaiah.

Isaiah is known as the Evangel or Gospel Prophet. For, it is through him that a full picture of Jesus Christ in His Virgin conception, royal birth, sufferings, death and resurrection is given, insofar as the Prophets are concerned.

In view of the fact that Micah prophesied during the greater part of Isaiah's ministry speaking the same language, and it is he who identifies the birthplace of our Lord so that the Magi were led to Bethlehem, we have therefore linked him with Isaiah in this commentary. As Micah is complementary to Isaiah, we have honoured him also with the title of Gospel Prophet. The advantage of studying Micah immediately after Isaiah is obvious.

Having grasped the principles of prophecy, the Reader should be able to open up the other Prophetic Books, so that the long chapters from Isaiah to Malachi may now become familiar ground. If such an objective can be achieved, the publishing of this book will not have been made in vain. Amen!

THE GOSPEL PROPHETS

An applied commentary on
ISAIAH and MICAH

by

Rev Dr Timothy Tow



Obtainable from:
Christian Life Book Centre
9A Gilstead Road
Singapore 1130
Tel: 2541223

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

Isaiah is composed of two parts, chapters 1-39 that tell of Old Testament judgements; chapters 40-66 of New Testament restorations. Isaiah is one book, not two, as modern critics had previously imagined. The Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah is one scroll. Isaiah has one message for the ancients as well as for us today.

I Chapter 1-39

- | | |
|--|----------|
| 01. Messages against Judah and Jerusalem | Ch 1-12 |
| 02. Messages against the nations surrounding Judah | Ch 13-23 |
| 03. Isaiah Apocalypse—Universal Judgement to come | Ch 24-27 |
| 04. Messages against Judah in her intrigues with super powers, Egypt and Assyria | Ch 28-33 |
| 05. Message of doom for Edom but of hope for Israel | Ch 34-35 |
| 06. Historical appendix—the fateful days of King Hezekiah | Ch 36-39 |

II Chapter 40-60

- | | |
|--|----------|
| 07. Messages on deliverance from Babylon | Ch 41-48 |
| 08. Messages on deliverance through suffering | Ch 49-57 |
| 09. Messages on final triumph of God's people and God's universal rule | Ch 58-66 |

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH THE GOSPEL PROPHET

Do you know that of the 16 books in the Old Testament, Isaiah is first on three counts? It is first in order. It is first in length (66 chapters). It is first of the prophets in being quoted in the New Testament.

Isaiah is known by his Greek name Esaias in the King James (Authorised) Version. Esaias is quoted 60 times and alluded to 25 times. But there is another reason why Isaiah is first among the prophets. Isaiah is the Evangel Prophet or the Prophet of the Gospel. His name means "The Lord is salvation." For it is through Isaiah that the prophecy of the Messiah, the Anointed, the Christ, is given. The virgin conception of Christ (Isa 7:14), His royal birth (Isa. 9:6, 7), His death, sufferings and resurrection (Isa 53) are foretold in detail by Isaiah.

But a prophet does not merely foretell future events. a prophet is a preacher of righteousness, a forthteller of God's judgement on an unrepentant people. The book contains many a revival sermon to turn Israel and Judah from their sins. These sermons are most applicable to an apostate Church today. Isaiah is also a prophet to the nations that are involved with Israel and Judah, inasmuch as God, whom he represents, is Ruler over all.

Isaiah prophesied through a pivotal period of Judah's history. His ministry spread over the reigns of four Jewish kings, viz; Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, as the opening verse of his book tells us. This period coincided with the last days and captivity of the northern kingdom, Israel. Isaiah prophesied in the latter part of the 8th century B.C. Samaria, capital of the northern kingdom, fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. There are therefore recorded in Isaiah the vivid accounts of the Assyrian invasions to the gates of Jerusalem, and of Judah's political intrigues with Egypt, the other super power of the ancient world. Then there are the intervening invasions from the Syrian coalition which read very much like the fortunes of the Israeli nation today. Israel today remains threatened by Syria, and by today's Assyria, which is Russia, but this is counter-balanced by America.

Isaiah's mission of speaking to a renegade people was a difficult one. This was forewarned to him at the time of his call (Isa 6:9, 10). This warning is quoted five times in the New Testament to reprove the same stubbornness persisting in the Jews in Jesus' day.

Jewish tradition tells of Isaiah's martyrdom during the reign of Manasseh, Hezekiah's wicked son. Hebrews 11:37 which closes the catalogue of persecutions upon the ancient church with "they were sawn asunder" is deemed to be a reference to Isaiah's martyrdom while hiding in a hollow tree, according to Jewish tradition.

"But the word of God is not bound" (II Tim 2:9). Isaiah prophesied both advents of the coming Saviour. He looked beyond to the millennial kingdom when wars shall cease (Isa 2:1-4), and of a new heaven and new earth (Isa 66:22). Isaiah captures a panoramic view of history inasmuch as he has written volumes for this opus magnum.

INDICTMENT

Inasmuch as the opening verse of Isaiah's book declares the prophet to have prophesied through the reigns of four kings of Judah, it may be taken to be an introduction to the whole book. Strictly speaking, it introduces rather the first 12 chapters which directly bear on Judah and Jerusalem because the vision is stated to concern Judah and Jerusalem.

A prophet's message is called a "vision", because originally a prophet was called a "seer". For a preacher's message to be effective, it must come as a vision, a refreshing insight into some aspect of Truth. No vision, no message!

The prophet's message against Judah and Jerusalem in this chapter is cast in the form of a court trial. God is at once Prosecutor and Judge, while the prophet is chief witness. Heaven and earth are called upon to be supporting witnesses, for Judah's sins are known throughout the world. The charge is one of disloyalty, treason and rebellion, the first crime against any sovereign. Treason and ingratitude are most heinous sins! The sin of the spirit is ten times worse than the sin of the flesh.

In point of time, the terror of foreign invasion described in this chapter seems to point to Judah under Assyrian king Sennecherib's assault in 701 B.C. This was God's means of judgement of an ungrateful people. (Read Isaiah 10:5, 6). All the sham of a religious people, without that humble and contrite spirit of true worship, cannot cover up sin. For the sin of hypocrisy, Judah and Jerusalem must be doubly punished. Nevertheless, there is till hope of redemption when she repents.

PRAYER O Lord, deliver us today from the sin of ingratitude that leads to disloyalty and treason. Amen.

WHO'S WHO?

Isaiah is identified as the son of Amoz. Note how it is differently spelt from Amos, the name of the prophet after Hosea, by the last letter. Isaiah's father, Amoz, was thought to be a prince and by his royal lineage, Isaiah was a cousin of king Uzziah. Isaiah was a prophet who moved in the king's court.



Note also the kings in this verse are kings of Judah. In the beginning there was only one kingdom under David and Solomon. After Solomon's death, the kingdom was split into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. In Isaiah's time there was rivalry and conflict between the two kingdoms.

Kings are known by their deeds. So they are classified as either good or bad. Dr. Scroggie lists Uzziah as unstable, Jotham and Hezekiah good, and Ahaz bad. As we go through the book of Isaiah these characters will appear on the prophetic stage. Study each king's character carefully! The biography of great men can inspire us to noble deeds. Their mistakes should teach us not to commit the same. "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (I Cor 10:11).

PRAYER Lord, help the rulers of our country to govern justly that we may lead a peaceful life and be used to advance the Gospel. Amen.

THE GREAT ACCUSATION

As we have noted earlier Judah and Jerusalem are brought to trial before God who is both Judge and Prosecutor, Isaiah, the chief witness, with heaven and earth in attendance.

The charge is treason and rebellion. God's people, with all the love lavished upon them, should have done better. Their natural affections could not measure up to that of animals. "The ox knows his owner and the ass his master's crib (stall): but Israel is plain insensible." They are ungrateful, unfilial children, to say the least. In their backsliding they have grossly offended the Lord.

The sorry state of the nation after three foreign invasions in Isaiah's lifetime: (1) The Syrian-Israel Coalition (Isa 7) (2) The Assyrians under Sargon (Isa 22); (3) The Assyrians under Sennacherib (Isa 26); is vividly portrayed. Judah is like a man assaulted from head to foot, left to die without any medical attention. Jerusalem is like a lone shack in a vineyard, an abandoned hut in a field of melons. It is by God's grace that a remnant has survived the punishment. Else Judah and Jerusalem had been wiped out like Sodom, the ancient Hiroshima.

What is our attitude upon reading such an arraignment? We should not stand in judgement. We should rather look into our own wretched selves and repent. We've also been ungrateful children to God. Jesus says, "Except ye repent ye should likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

PRAYER "Out of my bondage sorrow and night, Jesus, I come to thee." Amen.

WHEN RELIGION BECOMES ABOMINATION

Israel was redeemed from Egypt to become “a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). A full code of worship and ceremonies, sacrifices and feasts are prescribed by Moses in Exodus and Leviticus. Priests are appointed out of the House of Aaron to administer these holy rites in order to instruct the people in sincere worship.

Without heart-worship Israel’s religion in Isaiah’s time had become an abomination to God. The offering of sacrifices might be done correctly in outward form, and keeping of the sacred feasts with meticulous observances, yet without a sincere and contrite heart, these were become “vain oblations” (Isa 1:13). Therefore the prayers offered by the priests for the people go unanswered! The people ascend to worship with heavy burdens on their hearts. They return home doubly laden.

Is that not a picture of the religiosity of our day? There are many who go to church, Sunday after Sunday, who offer even much money to God but, being unconverted, return home unforgiven, un-blessed. No better than those who throng Roman churches like the Novena and Chinese temples. It is possible for one to be lost though one goes to Church regularly.

Jesus tells of two who went to Church. The first was a Pharisee, a religious leader who could pray well and gave tithes. Yet he was lost. The second was a publican, a tax collector. But he was saved when he prayed the penitent’s prayer.

PRAYER “O Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner”. Amen.

REPENTANCE IS THE ANSWER

Ceremonial purifications are not enough. Many more were added by the Jews in Jesus' time, such as the washing of hands after going to market (Mark 7:4). These must be backed by tears of repentance, the washing of the heart by the Holy Spirit (Tit 3:5). The way to God's acceptance is a complete change within.

Thus Niniveh was spared when the whole city, from king to serf, repented in sack cloth and ashes. Even wicked King Ahab's sentence was postponed when, upon rebuke by the prophet Elijah, he repented in sack cloth and fasted. By analogy, baptism does not save us until there is the washing of the heart by the waters of the Holy Spirit leading to repentance. Until one has prayed the penitent's prayer, with tears!

V. 17 seems to direct this message to the leaders of the nation. For who are they who should dispense righteous judgment to the down trodden, to orphans and widows? The king, the prince, the judge, the elder, the priest! What a message to governors of our land and elders of our church! David says, "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (II Sam 23:3).

V. 18 is one of the famous verses to memorise. Here God argues His case with every accused, with the prisoner in the dock, even with the murderer who has shed blood. There is a second chance in God's tribunal not found in a human court of law. Here is offered a clean slate to the bloodily guilty if he will genuinely repent of his foul deed. Such an offer, if rejected, can only bring on severer judgment. The land will be devastated by war again, to be sure!

PRAYER O Lord, turn Thy chosen people to Thyself that they may not be faced with war after war. Amen.

BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION IS ECONOMIC HARLOTRY

There was a time when all Israel shone resplendent under the rule of a just and good king David. Justice was also dispensed in the earlier part of Solomon's reign. But good kings were few, and far in between. During the period of the Divided Kingdom, only 5 kings were accounted good from a list of twenty in the kingdom of Judah.

In the days of Isaiah, Jerusalem was no more "the faithful city". She was called a harlot. Bribery and corruption in high places of government caused judges to commit judicial murders. Malpractices in commerce led to counterfeiting of money and adulteration of wine. Beware of imitations!

Princes who ruled were in league with the underworld, with thugs and cheats. Corruption like an epidemic gripped every stratum of society, from the highest to the lowest. The weak became the prey of the strong. Those who were most downtrodden were orphans and widows, charged Isaiah again in v. 23.

All this economic harlotry of bribery and corruption, and oppression of the down and needy, were No. 1 public enemies, declared the Supreme Judge, the Great Sovereign of Israel. These state crimes must be thoroughly purged.

From this arraignment of Judah's corrupt government, let those who occupy places of authority learn to be just, honest and clean. Let those who govern the church abuse not their powers for self gain. From Confucius comes a good saying on human government: Those who rule must set an example, ruling by the power of a virtuous rule. (以身作則,以德為政)

PRAYER O Lord, as Paul has taught us to pray for kings and governors, so we pray for our leaders to fear Thee and rule justly. We thank Thee for good government that has brought us peace and prosperity. Amen.

JERUSALEM SHALL RISE AGAIN!

The prophet's message, while condemning the present, looks to blessings in the future. Because God is on the throne, there is hope for better times. What a consolation to us living in these turbulent end-times, that the Day is fast approaching.

Isaiah certainly looks to that golden age of Christ's millennial rule when Jerusalem will be thoroughly cleansed. The city now under just rule as in the day of good king David will regain her title: "The city of righteousness, the faithful city." Virtue, not brute force, right, not might, will prevail.

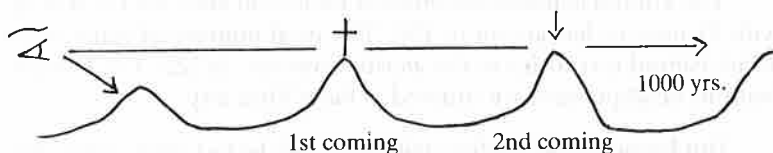
Yerushalayim, behold Messiah shall come
To save thy Land, when thou shalt cry to Him.
He comes on clouds, with awesome loud trumpet sound
To judge the earth—peace a millennium.

Yerushalayim, God is thy eternal peace.
City of Zion, David's throne rise again.
City of Truth, resplendent in His glory,
Till sun shall rise and moon no more shall wane.

But before that day comes, there must be a terrible reckoning, a consuming of transgressors and sinners together, a consuming even by fire! Is this a reference to the coming judgement by nuclear fire? With such total destruction, the strong though like the oak tree and the rich like the gardens, will perish. So they should not trust in the might and power of this world and we who know the Lord should do likewise. Our hope is in the New Jerusalem, the City of God, not this present world, no matter how peaceful or prosperous it might be.

SING "What matters where on earth we dwell,
On mountain top or in the dell?
In cottage or a mansion fair,
Where Jesus is, 'tis heaven there. Amen

THE PROPHET'S PANORAMA



Like a man looking out of his window into the distance, the seer and the prophet, insofar as prophetic history is concerned, can see a panorama of four mountain ranges, as illustrated above. This cross-section shows him looking first at the immediate situation, the times in which he lives or thereabouts. Then to the first coming of the Saviour, the second coming and new heavens and new earth, with the golden millennium in between.

In the last paragraph of Chapter 1, the prophet has had a first glimpse of that golden age to come. But it is in Chapter 2:2-4 that it becomes a bright vision of millennial blessing, viz., the total removal of the curse of war on mankind and the ushering in of universal peace. This millennial peace will reign supreme on earth from Jerusalem the capital.

After describing how all the efforts of warring nations today will be transformed into energies for agriculture, in modern language we might say, "tanks will be converted into tractors and howitzers into mowing machines," the prophet returns to the immediate scene to rebuke God's rebellious people. After rebuking the same for their misdeeds, the prophet looks again into the future. When Isaiah comes to Ch. 7:14, he challenges the hypocritical King Ahaz with the coming of the Saviour through the conception of a virgin. This prophecy was uttered out of provocation by the wicked king. In Ch. 9:1 the prophet returns to the immediate situation of an impending invasion of Galilee by the Assyrian hordes, only to glance forward to the day when the Christ shall appear in the same region with the Message of Salvation (Matt 4:15, 16).

By keeping to this pattern of vivid prophetic vision, seeing things in the foreground and then far into the future, whether in the Saviour's first or second coming, you will see such correlated passages of prophetic scripture in their perspective.

PRAYER Open my eyes that I may see, glimpses of Truth Thou hast for me. Amen.

U.N. SHIFTED TO JERUSALEM!

The United Nations, founded in 1946 soon after World War II with 51 nations has grown to 158. The total number of separately administered territories in the world, however, is 223. The United Nations headquarters are situated in New York city.

But Isaiah predicts a time will come “in the last days” when the U.N. will be shifted to Jerusalem. Israel will be the leading nation, the first nation of the world. The Lord’s House, the Temple of God, will be there instead of the U.N. Tower. “All nations shall flow to it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob.” This prediction is beginning to be fulfilled with more people going on pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem will be the U.N. headquarters, but it will not be a centre for political arguments but a religious and cultural centre, a headquarters for gospel missions to the ends of the earth. For what are “His ways” and “the law” and “the word of the Lord”—from Jerusalem?

The Jews today think they are fulfilling this part of Isaiah’s prophecy by sharing their scientific knowledge with other nations. We believe rather in Jerusalem attaining to this high status in the millennium in the realm of the spiritual. But there is the beginning of Jerusalem fast becoming the centre of the world, if you will see the city for yourself. This is the more vividly perceived if you will also visit Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom. Founded by the will of man, by Omri, Ahab’s father, and further embellished by king Herod, it is however a ruin of ruins. Jerusalem, chosen of God, is an ever growing city.

PRAYER Lord, help us remember to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, for they shall prosper that love thee (Ps. 122:6). Amen.

WAR NO MORE

The UN was founded with the avowed purpose of putting an end to all wars after the gruesome experience of the Second World War. Though she has taken for her motto from Isaiah 2:4, (and Micah 4:3): "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore," and has striven the last four decades to restrain war between nations, her achievements are far from ideal. Why? Because the UN has left out the first part of the verse, which reads, "And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people." They have left out the God of the nations, who alone can administer peace through His righteous rule. Ironically, the truncated text on the wall of the UN Building was a gift of the Russian government!

There is another reason why the ideal of universal peace cannot be realised by the UN. This universal peace, wherein all wars shall cease, is possible only when the Prince of Peace shall come to institute His golden millennial rule on earth. This universal peace cannot materialise until Jesus Christ comes the second time.

When will He come? No one knows the day nor the hour. But, from all events now shaping up, it seems His Return is at the doorstep. Our Lord will come not only to judge the nations, but also to save the earth from the ravages of a global holocaust predicted in both O.T. and N.T. "For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited; I am the Lord; and there is none else." (Isa 45:18).

Before He returns, our duty is to occupy till he comes. Our job is to keep on witnessing the Gospel message to the ends of the earth (Matt 24:14). This means a stepping up of evangelism and missions is a prior emphasis of the Church. When was the last time your church opened a new gospel station? Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER Lord, help me to set my affection on things above, not on things on the earth. Help me to do my bit each day without fail while I wait for your coming. Amen.

SUPERSTITION AND WORLDLINESS CONDEMNED

The prophet returns to the immediate situation of Jacob's sins of superstition and worldliness which have sealed her fate. "Therefore Thou has forsaken thy people (v. 6); Therefore forgive them not (v. 9)." A backsliding people, indulging in the practices and pleasures of the world, take note!

The superstitions of the East, the divinations and charms of the Philistines and of other Gentiles now invade God's House. This is the natural consequence of those who reject the true living God. "Those who slight true divinity are justly given to lying divinations" says Matthew Henry.

There is nothing wrong in having silver or gold, horses and chariots, but it is the insatiable desire to multiply them that is condemned. "The love of money is the root of all evil." A Christian who is given to money-making at the expense of his spiritual welfare comes under the same condemnation. Horses and chariots are today's flashing cars and limousines. Do you make your car serve you or do you serve your car? If you spend so much time polishing and embellishing your car, it becomes your idol. Hence the condemnation: "they worship the work of their own hands, that which their fingers have made." Or it may be a piece of antique, or work of art—when you over-treasure it. Matthew Henry says again, "And though lands called Christian are not full of idols, in the literal sense, are they not full of idolised riches? And are not men in general so occupied about their gains or indulgences that the Lord, His truths and precepts are forgotten and despised? Assuredly the Lord will not forgive those who persist in abasing themselves to the pursuit of their lusts, and refuse to humble themselves before Him."

PRAYER Lord, deliver me from superstitious practices and the worship of modern idols, keep me from anything that takes precedence over Thee. Amen.

THE DAY OF THE LORD

The day of the Lord, and other similar words, denote a time when God manifests His power in judgment. The Day of the Lord, in the context of this passage, refers rather to the end-times when God will triumph over his enemies and deliver His people. It will be a time of consummate judgment at the end of this age at His Second coming, and will include the final judgment (II Pet 3:10-13). It will remove class distinction according to this purpose for then that uppermost class of the rich and mighty will be levelled to the lowest.

How will it come to pass? We see in the introductory v. 10 that the high and mighty ones will be scrambling for their lives to the mountain caves to hide, to escape capture. (These are plentiful in the hilly regions of Israel). There the poor will also be running for their lives when war breaks out. This has happened time and again in Israel's history.

During the Japanese bombing of Singapore at the outset of the Pacific War, we had the wonderful opportunity of experiencing this truth. We were working at the Supreme Court as interpreters. Our office was on the ground floor. When the siren sounded and the bombs began to fall just across the road, 14 of them missing the Courthouse by the width of the road, the din of that bombing was frightening. We thought the house was to collapse on us.

Sure enough, in no time we found ourselves crawled under the counter, interpreters, clerks, judges, peons. There was no class distinction now. The chief justice, who looked so grave and awesome in his wig and robe now humbled himself to mingle with his almost untouchable "Asiatic" staff! His reddish face, usually filled with lordly pride, suddenly paled to a near yellow like his Chinese underlings. How true the statement: "For fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord above shall be exalted in that day" (v. 10, 11).

PRAYER O Lord, help me to seek Thee while you may be found, and to call upon Thee while Thou art near. Amen.

METAPHORS FOR THE HIGH AND MIGHTY

In China a tycoon is often likened to a mountain. In Singapore a financier is called a mountain-base. In this passage we see the rich and mighty likened also to high mountains and hills of eminence. Furthermore, they are called cedars of Lebanon and oaks of Bashan.

What are the characteristics of the oak and the cedar? The oak tree is a magnificent long-lived tree growing usually alone on high ground. Its leaves are holly like, glossy green and spiny on the edges. The oak is the religious symbol of long life and strength (Gen 35:8). The oak of Bashan is another species. It grows in forests on the hillsides above the fertile valleys. A black dye of commercial value is obtained from the acorn cups. The acorns are fed to the swine. The oak has much economic value.



The cedar of Lebanon is a magnificent evergreen which grows to a height of 120 feet and a girth of 40 feet. It exudes a fragrant gum or balsam. Its wood is therefore durable and insect-resistant. Cedar wood was used by King Solomon to build the Temple (I King 5:5-6). For a full description of the cedar of Lebanon, read Ezekiel 31 which likens both Assyria and Egypt, the ancient super powers, to its mighty growth. Lebanon today uses the cedar tree as her national emblem.

The high and mighty in Judah are further called by the palaces and fortresses they live in—high tower and fenced walls. They are also the merchants who sail the ships to Tarshish or Spain. “All pleasant pictures” is translated “every stately vessel” in NIV. Does this phrase refer to the decorations, the luxury in a rich man’s house or ships? One thing to remember about Isaiah: he uses much poetic language.

PRAYER Lord, teach me to humble myself lest in my pride, like the high and lofty ones, I shall be abased. Amen.

IDOLS BECOME IDLE, THE IDOLISED SCANDALISE!

In spite of the first and second Commandments, the Jews were an idolatrous people. They worshipped the Lord God of heaven and earth, but alongside the Temple they set up idols copied from the surrounding heathen nations. A weird picture of their syncretism at the time of the Babylonian invasion yet to come is given to Ezekiel in Ezek. 8. Sad to say, this state of affairs is reenacted in the Church today by the Ecumenical movement. When Churchmen link up with the heads of human religions to pray and worship together, idolatry takes over immediately.

With the advent of the Day of the Lord (it seems these verses refer to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem when Jewish idols began to be abolished), every form of idolatry will be put away. Idols become idle. These dumb works of man's fingers which were supposed to offer security to their worshippers could not save themselves in the tribulations to come. As the Chinese saying goes, "The clay idols when crossing the river cannot keep their bodies from dissolving!" In desperation the Jews would throw the idols away into the holes of moles and bats, while they scamper to hide in the rock caves, as our older generation did in air raid shelters during World War II. Matthew Henry says, "As God will abolish idols, so their worshippers will abandon them, finding they cannot help . . . Those who will not be rescued out of their sins, sooner or later shall be frightened out of them. Covetous men make silver and gold their idols, money their god: but the time will come when they will feel it as much their burden as ever they made it their confidence . . ."

The paradox is these who worship dead and dumb idols and the mammon of silver and gold become idolised themselves. Do not the poor cringe before the rich, even in the Church (Jas 2:1-6)? To be idolised is to be ensnared in sin! But what happens to these who make themselves, as Calvin says, demigods? In that hour of tribulation to come, they will also be cast away as their idols. Hence, the conclusion of Isaiah's sermon with this admonition, "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?"

Read Ps 115 on idols and idol-worshippers and pray! Amen.

FROM DISTANT FUTURE TO NEAR FUTURE

If you refer to the four mountain ranges in the prophet's panoramic view of events to come, you will note that his vision changes vividly as his eyes sweep the near and distant horizons. We have noted earlier that the Day of the Lord from Ch 2:12 onwards seems to refer to the final day of reckoning according to II Pet 3:10.

As we come to Ch 3 we have a close-up of Jerusalem and Judah, evidently during the siege by Nebuchadnezzar, a century to come. Isaiah's prophetic vision swings from the distant future to the near future. With this pattern of the prophet's vision in mind we will be able to analyse better who's who, what's what, when's when!

In this regard let us review the times in which Isaiah lived. Remember that the introductory verse of Isa 1:1 certifies that the prophet's ministry ran through the reigns of four Jewish kings. They are Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. These kings reigned during the last days of the northern kingdom and her captivity (Samaria fell in 722 BC to the Assyrians). Now Assyria's supremacy as the No. 1 super power of the ancient world lasted for another century until Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, rose in 606BC.

Now, whereas in Isaiah's time, Assyria was on the lips of every trembling nation, one century after, it was Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar. In Isaiah's days the Assyrians laid siege to Jerusalem and took many of Judah's cities. One century after it was the Babylonians doing the same to Jerusalem and Judah. Jerusalem was under siege for 20 years from 606—586 BC when the city was taken, the temple burnt and razed to the ground. The best of Jerusalem's inmates including the nobility, Daniel and his three friends and Ezekiel were taken to Babylon. With this war-setting, now read the woeful predictions of Isaiah on the siege of Jerusalem and Judah. And you of the older generation can easily identify similar troubles you went through!

PRAYER O Lord grant us peace yet in our time. Help us to hasten on with the Gospel ministry before it is too late. Amen.

WAR OVERTURNS SOCIETY

In this chapter, Isaiah sees a vision of Jerusalem at war, a century to come.

When the stay and the staff, the daily supply of bread and water, is taken away from Jerusalem (under the siege of Nebuchadnezzar), society is overturned. Looting for food is one ugly aspect of wartime life.

When war comes, there will no more be that high society called the elite. The rich and mighty, the hero and the warrior, the judge and the prophet, the soothsayer and the elder, the captain of fifty and the man of rank, etc., etc., might hold authority and command respect when power and position were in their domain. Now, with war crashing at the city gates, when the brawn is needed more than the brain, it is no wonder that young people, with greater physical strength, take over. Compared with their grandparents or parents, they are appropriately called “children” and “babes”.

During the Japanese occupation of Singapore, when most of the high and respected lost their jobs, especially judges, lawyers and professors, we saw them walking the town in shorts and T shirts, also trying to eke out a living by doing a little “back market” business. On the other hand, there were young men, some still in their teens, who swaggered around in cars provided by the Japanese military, because they were their henchmen. These youngsters literally flouted their elders as v. 5 says, “the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable.”

And the uneducated, by enterprise and daring, would suddenly mushroom into war-time millionaires, while the millionaires would be reduced to bankruptcy when their properties were commandeered by the military. The rich being thus reduced to poverty had to abdicate to those who now had become strong. The luminaries of society receded into the darkness of the misfortunes of war. This was Jerusalem when God would judge her through the Babylonians.

PRAYER “Lord God of hosts, be with us yet, Lest we forget, lest we forget.” Amen.

WAR COMES AS GOD'S JUDGMENT ON A WICKED PEOPLE

May we not call this the theology of war? Evidently, Judah in Isaiah's day was given a first instalment of God's judgment in the invasions of the Assyrians. A century later the elders and princes of the nation, especially. What a responsibility is laid on every leader!

Tables were turned upon these who oppressed the needy, who devoured their substance, "who beat up the people and grind the faces of the poor" (v. 15). Now, not only children, the youngsters, but women also (v. 12), rule over them, to repay them for their past misdeeds. This state of affairs has also become the norm of every "new" society under communist "liberation." God has used the communists to fulfil His purpose, to overturn an old and corrupt society that we might repent. "O Assyria, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets" (Isa 10:5, 6).

The sin of Jerusalem and Judah was openly identified with that of Sodom. The notorious sin of Sodom was unnatural lust of the flesh—homosexuality that is. A Christian nation and people indulging in such shame? Shameful but true. To those who live in such sin, it has become their glory rather. Today homosexuality is called gay-pride in certain parts of the United States. Homosexuals are elected elders in the Church and ordained to the ministry. Also lesbians to important positions in the church, to their greater shame.

But to the righteous in the nation, the remnants (Isa 1:9), "the men that sigh and that cry for the abominations that be done in the midst thereof" (Ezek 9:4), "it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings" (Isa 3:10). What a comforting thought. The righteous, in such a dangerous situation as Jerusalem under siege will be preserved and cared for: If we live a just and holy life, we should not fear though evil should surround us on every side. Read Ps 91.

PRAYER Lord, help me to pray each day for my family and people, that none will rebel against Thee. Amen.

FROM COQUETTES TO CINDERELLAS

In the day of the Lord's judgment on Jerusalem, not only will the high and mighty men be brought low, but also their wives and daughters. Isa 3:16-24 describes how their women folk are stripped of their expensive make-ups from head to foot to the exposure of their private parts. Our older generation who lived through World War II under the ravages of the Japanese army readily perceives the implications of this passage. How our young girls had to change into men's clothes, and crop their hair like boys. No more mini-skirts! How their movements were jealously guarded lest they be snatched by sex-hungry wolves. To warn women folk of these ravages, the chapter closes with their men being slain amidst cryings and mournings.

To put Isaiah's list of coquettries into modern language we extract herewith v. 16-26 from the New King James for your comparative study:

16. Moreover the Lord says:
"Because the daughter of Zion are haughty, And walk with outstretched necks and wanton eyes, Walking and mincing as they go, Making a jingling with their feet.
17. Therefore the Lord will strike with a scab, The crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, And the Lord will uncover their secret parts."
18. In that day the Lord will take away the finery:
The jingling anklets, the scarves, and the crescents;
19. The pendants, the bracelets, and the veils;
20. The headdresses, the leg ornaments, and the headbands; The perfume boxes, the charms, and the rings;
21. The nose jewels
22. The festal apparel, and the mantles; The outer garments, the purses,
23. And the mirrors; The fine linen, the turbans, and the robes.
24. And so it shall be:
Instead of a sweet smell there will be a stench; Instead of a sash, a rope; Instead of well-set hair, baldness; Instead of a rich robe, a girding of sackcloth; And branding instead of beauty.
25. Your men shall fall by the sword, And your mighty in the war.
26. Her gates shall lament and mourn.
And she being desolate shall sit on the ground.

PRAYER Lord, teach our young people, boys and girls, to fear Thee, to live pure and holy lives. Amen.

SPINSTERS OUTNUMBER BACHELORS SEVEN TO ONE

There were no chapter and verse divisions in the ancient Hebrew manuscripts. Therefore the opening verse of chapter 4 could well be the last verse of chapter 3. Matthew Henry agrees with our viewpoint.

Thus, if we read Isa 3:25—4:1 as a whole, we will see 4:1 in its proper perspective. As it is stated that men shall fall by the sword in the war, amidst wailing and mourning at the gates, we must conclude from 4:1 that the ratio of men to women killed in the war is 7:1. It is true of every war that the preponderance of men killed over women is overwhelming.

There is no record of how many men were killed by the Babylonians under the attacks of Nebuchadnezzar, but from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, the prophet who lived through the whole twenty years of siege and final captivity, here are some of his dirges.

How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people!

How is she become a widow!

She that was great among the nations, and princes among the provinces.

How is she become tributary (a slave) Lam 1:1

The Lord hath trodden under foot all my men in the midst of me:

He hath called an assembly against me

To crush my young men

The Lord hath trodden the virgin, the daughter

Of Judah, as in a winepress. Lam 1:15

The hands of the compassionate women

Have cooked their own children

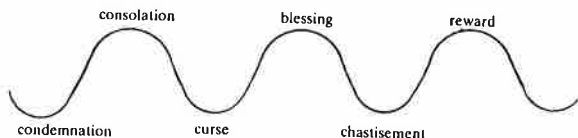
They became food for them

In the destruction of the daughters of my people Lam 4:10
(NKJV)

Now as the number of eligible bachelors are so much reduced, girls would have a hard time finding a husband. Another way of saying, war is a horrible experience.

PRAYER Lord, help me to do Thy will now before it is too late.
Amen.

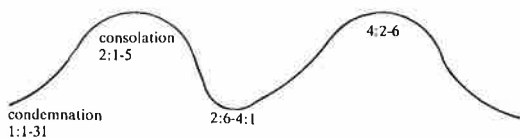
THE PATTERN OF A PROPHET'S SERMON



As in prophetic chronology we have observed the time-table of God's salvation plan for the ages spread across four mountain ranges, so in the sermonic structure of Isaiah's message, we can see a continuous up-and-down contour of God's dealing with His people. It is a wavy line of condemnation and consolation, which we may restate as curse and blessing, chastisement and reward.

For God is Judah's loving father still. He will not forsake His own children. After chastising them with the rod of His anger, He comforts them with the hope of future restoration. God's cane is a sugar-cane! David says, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, and slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger forever" (Ps 103:8, 9).

According to this up-and-down, hill-and-valley contour of God's dealing with His people, the first four chapters of Isaiah may be analysed thus:



Now, following this pattern you can easily analyse the whole book. This up-and-down, hill-and-valley contour is one ever-recurring pattern of not only Isaiah's sermons, but of every prophetic writing! It is a pattern of the dealings of a God who is both father and judge, righteous yet merciful, holy yet gracious, in whom if we will put our trust, we have love, faith and hope, despite our sins and waywardness.

PRAYER Lord, keep me from straying from the path You have mapped out for my life. Amen.

A SECOND GLIMPSE OF JERUSALEM RESTORED

After Ch 1, which is an introductory sermon of God's condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem, Isaiah consoles the righteous of a day of universal peace when all wars shall cease in Ch 2:1-5.

Then comes a second sermon of condemnation from Ch 2:6—4:1 which is followed by a second glimpse of Jerusalem restored. "In that day" of 4:2 seems to look into the distant future of Christ's millennial rule on earth.

"The Branch of the Lord" evidently points to the Lord Jesus Christ, even as He is called "a Branch out of the stem of Jesse (David's father), for Christ is "of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom 1:3). In Zech 3:8 He is "my servant the Branch". "Branch" is better understood if we read the Hebrew which means "shoot of new growth". Jesus who comes from the royal house of David is the Greater David, a "new shoot full of life".

After the final chastisement of Israel as recorded in Zech 13:8, 9 one-third will have survived the War at Christ's Second Coming. Israel will be purified by the "spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning" both in the physical and spiritual sense. For unless Israel has gone through the fire of another holocaust (after Hitler's destruction of 6 million Jews), she will not repent.

In that day of Israel's restoration, the Lord's glory will be a protection to Israel, a cloud by day and fire by night. This is reminiscent of the Exodus when God shielded Israel from the Egyptians by the pillar of cloud and fire (Ex 13:21, 22). This would be an assurance to an Israel so much persecuted and harassed these two thousand years of her exile, and even now after her return. Christ will be that Tabernacle of shelter and refuge for all the returnees to Israel.

PRAYER Lord, help me to tell the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to my Jewish friend. Amen.

WHAT "SOUR GRAPES!"

"Sour grapes" in the English language means "things despised because they cannot be attained," from Aesop's fable of the fox and the grapes. In Hebrew idiom, we have this saying in Ezek 18:2, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." The Chinese version has it like this: "the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are soured numb". "Sour grapes" in this context refer to evil particularly in the moral realm. That is to say "when a father commits sin, his son gets the punishment too." Whether such a principle is just or not, read Ezek 18.

In this chapter Isaiah gives a parable of sour grapes. Sour grapes not from a wild vine but from the choicest strain, which is given the utmost attention in cultivation. Out of a good tree that the owner has planted the fruit he gets is of the vilest. Can this be so?

This happens in every farmer's experience. It can come from various causes. Such as attack on the plant by worms and insects. Such as the encroachment on the plant by bigger plants. For example, in our College Campus, we have planted the choicest of bananas known as pisang rajah (king banana). Owing to giant ang-sana trees' encroachments from across the fence, these banana trees could barely survive. When fruit was produced, it was so skinny that almost no flesh could be found. If there was, it tasted sour like some wild banana.

This parable of Jehovah's vineyard and the choicest vine planted therein is self-explanatory. Our Lord seemed to have Isaiah's parable in mind when He gave his version in Matt 21:33-44.

With this parable of the vineyard and the choicest vine that brought fourth only wild grapes, the prophet indicts the backsliding nation on six counts.

PRAYER Lord, help me not only be a fruitful Christian, but one who brings forth sweet fruit. Amen.

THE POWER OF POETRY AND PARABLE

From Isaiah's love song, let us learn the power of poetry and parable. We need not go into the details of this Song of the Vineyard which are self-explanatory, but note rather the effects this kind of rhetoric produces.

The song brings Isaiah's long overture of four chapters to a strong climax. Like a selected hymn to the close of a sermon. A sermon can be forgotten, but not the closing hymn with its haunting music, if it is fittingly chosen. Let us cultivate the writing of verse for climactic effect, but if not, let us develop a sense of poetic appreciation and selection.

The power of parable is best demonstrated in its usage by our Lord Himself who spoke 40 parables. Divine truth is clothed in flesh and blood, in concrete and tangible forms. Parables used in the Old Testament number only ten, but each has produced a powerful effect. One of the most famous is Nathan's parable of the rich man who killed his poor neighbour's ewe lamb. By telling that story to David, hitherto floating in a rosy cloud of nuptial lust, the king was aroused to his earthly senses. He sentenced himself of a double crime he had committed, which he was wilfully ignoring. By describing God's lavish love on His people in the form of a pampered vine, and the negative returns it yielded, he got the Jews to acknowledge their own guilt.

We see how the Lord used the same rhetoric to get His opponents, the chief priests and elders, to sentence themselves. Let us therefore use parables for effective speaking. Aesop's fables are a help!

PRAYER Lord, help me to speak sincerely and effectively, to learn how best to convince those who oppose You. Amen.

THE SIN OF ENCROACHMENT

The Oxford dictionary defines encroachment as: “usurping intrusion on other’s territory, rights . . .”

This can be done by removing a landmark (Prov 23:10). By forcefully grabbing the land of the fatherless (Prov 23:10), the strong eating up the weak.

This can also be done illegally, building into neighbouring territory, or abutting public property, by bribery and corruption.

This can be legally done by overwhelming financial power, the rich buying up the poor, or buying out a competitor. For God’s people to indulge in building their own empire, never so much as looking up to heaven once to reflect on earth’s wretched state, is a sin. These who consider not God’s work but their own enrichment and pleasure will know the answer when war comes! How many a mansion of tycoons and towkays was left standing cold in the wind who fled Singapore in the face of the Japanese invasion. This was Jerusalem’s plight!

Not only the mansions, but also the estates round about. Because of neglect through war, “Ten hectares of land would not yield eight litres of wine. 180 litres of seed would produce 18 litres of corn”. God judges the sin of encroachment with desolation and leanness. Are you like the rich fool who tried to build bigger and higher, but was small and short in God’s sight?

PRAYER Lord, teach me not to set my affection on things on earth, but on things above. Teach me to number my days and to apply my heart unto wisdom. Amen.

THE SIN OF DRUNKENNESS

Once that habit grips you, you will be indulging in it from early morning to late night!

This sin is aggravated by those who are God's people, but are back-slidden from Him, who should rather "regard the work of the Lord". These are they who leave the Church for worldly pleasures, who contribute no more to His Cause. Therefore God judges them by putting them into exile, to suffer hunger and thirst in their captivity. Many die along the way. God in so judging them will awake them to His awesome majesty.

It is a grave error to quote the making of wine at Cana by our Lord for an excuse to drinking. The wine at Cana contained a very low percentage of alcohol. Besides, according to Hebrew custom, it was drunk with two parts of water. The drinks that cause a man to be drunk today, like whisky or brandy, have such high alcoholic content that it can almost be used to run a car! But says Dr. Buswell, "Our stomachs are not combustion engines."

Now read Solomon's words of wisdom:

"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?

They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.

Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright (swirls around smoothly).

At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.

Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.

Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast."

(Proverbs 23:29-34)

PRAYER Lord, keep me from any alcoholic drinks. Help me to be a teetotaler. Amen.

THE SIN OF PRESUMPTION

Matthew Henry puts it like this: Woe to those “who are set upon sin, who draw iniquity with cords of vanity: who exert themselves to gratify their base lusts.”

Those that sin through infirmity are drawn away by sin. In contrast, those that sin presumptuously, draw it to them. Thus they pull God’s judgments on their own heads. They defy God’s justice.

In v. 20, these speak like the scoffers of the last days. Like them they are daring in sin and walk after their own lusts.

The sin of the spirit is much graver than the sin of the flesh. The sin of the will is far deeper than the sin of the emotion.

Let those who know God like the Jews, who yet defy God, beware! They might commit the unpardonable sin which is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:31, 32). They might sin the sin unto death (I John 5:16).

Read Hebrew 10:26-29 on the wilful sin and its fearful consequences.

As Jesus had the Pharisees and chief priests, scribes and lawyers ganged up against Him, so there were the false prophets and haughty princes and judges who resisted the prophet. (Compare with Jeremiah). And as the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day were condemned, so were those in Isaiah’s day.

What do we have in our day who collude to defy the Lord? The Ecumenicals, the liberals and modernists, high churchmen, politicians, Romanists, communists, etc. Those who know the truth but resist the truth.

Beware of the sin of presumption, which may lead astray forever. Paul says, “An heretick after the first and second admonition, reject” (Titus 3:10).

PRAYER “Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters or in things too high for me.” (Ps 131:1) Amen.

THE SIN OF TONGUE-TWISTING

We call this tongue-twisting. And this the easier to conjure when the tongue is forked. Like the snake.

Tongue-twisting was first practised in the Garden of Eden by Satan, the father of lies. To call evil good, and good evil, putting darkness for light and light of darkness, bitter for sweet and sweet bitter. God meant it good for our first parents, but the Devil made it bad. God wanted them to walk in the light but the Wicked One plunged them into darkness. God planned for them a sweet life but the same turned bitter through that tongue-twisting.

The masters of deceit today are the communists. When the communist talks peace, he in fact means war. Peace, yes, but it is the peace of the mouse in the cat's stomach.

In an appraisal of Billy Graham in Moscow in the Bible Presbyterian Banner, Dr Tow Siang Hwa observes: "Their definition of peace is distinctly different from the Church's definition. They proceed from the conviction that a stage of war exists now. This war is between capitalism and communism and can only end in universal communist victory. Peace, therefore, is the termination of the current universal class war, or to put it bluntly, communist world conquest".

An example of how the communists have used the tactic of tongue-twisting to fool the Christian West is their exploitation of Billy Graham. By building up Billy's ego and showing him their window-dressing of the Church in Russia, they have tricked Billy into this perverted statement: Billy says of his Moscow visit, "I think there is a lot more freedom here than has been given the impression in the States because here there are hundreds or even thousands of churches open. In Great Britain they have state churches. Here the church is not a state church but a *free* church." (BP Banner Sept/Oct 1982).

Note how Billy uses the word "free" here, which has the double meaning of "not being a state church" and "not restricted". While the Russian church is not a state church, like Britain's, she is surely not free, but under the control of the KGB (secret police). This fact is confirmed by Solzhenitsyn.

Woe to them that say one thing but mean another- tongue twisters!

PRAYER Lord, help me to say yea yea, nay nay. Amen.

THE SIN OF SUPERIORITY COMPLEX

The sin of being wise in one's own eyes, of being clever in one's own sight comes from that haughty attitude known as superiority complex. Is this a national sin of the Jews who regard Gentiles as un-touchables, even as dogs?

Indeed, it is a sin of every race, each one proud of its own heritage and tradition. There was a time when white superiority looked down its nose on the coloured, but if you visit Africa you will see rising black nationalism turning their tables on the whites.

The superiority complex whereby one becomes wise in one's own eyes is rooted in that sin of sins called pride.

Do you know how sin came into the world? It originated from the heart of that anointed cherub, who, being lifted up with pride, decided to be as God (Ezek 28). But pride goeth before a fall (Prov 29:23). So the anointed cherub was cut down, to the ground and consigned to hell (Isaiah 14:12-15). The Prince of Tyrus, imbued with the same pride that brought Satan's downfall, was similarly cast down by Almighty God. Everyone who exalts himself, in spiritual or academic pride, suffers the same fate.

It is good therefore as members of Christ's body for each one of us to heed Paul's admonition, "And if a man thinks that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing as yet he ought to know" (I Cor 8:2).

"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." (Romans 12:3).

"For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself."

PRAYER Lord, give me the heart of Jesus, who was willing to humble Himself and become a servant, and do nothing but the Father's will. Amen.

CHAMPION DRINKERS AND CORRUPT JUDGES

Those who out-drink others at “Yam Seng” parties and make a name for themselves as champions are condemned. That drunkenness is condemned a second time in this sermon (re-read v. 11) shows it was a rampant social sin. A Jewish national sin! (USA today has 65 million drinkers of whom 5 million are chronic).

One sin leads to another. Drinks not only tip the scales of sanity but also of justice. Drunken judges are they who also take bribes and distort justice. Such corrupt judges are condemned by Ex 23:6-8; Deut 16:19.

Yea, they are ten-times condemned for perverting justice, who are commissioned to uphold justice. Ps 82 is one psalm written to put to shame such gross travesty of justice. Judges are God’s representatives on earth. So high are judges held in esteem that to them is given the title of *Elohim* or gods (Ps 82:6). “But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes” (Ps 82:7). You who judge corruptly will have a corrupt ending.

If you are a leader in society, a governor of men, you hold a similar high position. Then listen to what King Lemuel’s mother says to her son:

It is not for kings, O Lemuel,
It is not for kings to drink wine,
Nor for princes strong drink:
Lest they drink, and forget the law,
And pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.

(Prov 31:4)

Alexander the Great died a premature death at 33, who conquered the world but not himself. The cause of his death was excessive drinking. If you drink, take care, lest you be abruptly overtaken.

PRAYER Lord, preserve our nation from drunkenness and corruption through the witness of Thy Church. Amen.

RESULTANT JUDGMENT

A holocaust is the resultant judgment on the six sins enumerated—encroachment, drunkenness coupled with disregard for God's work, "tongue-twisting", presumption, superiority complex and drunkenness unto perversion of justice. As fire burning up stubble and chaff, as rot eating up the root, as blossom withering like dust. Such sins against society are tantamount to contempt of God's law and despising of His Word. Those who sin against God wilfully, against the light of God's Word, must suffer maximum punishment. Therefore, "His hand is stretched out still" (v. 24).

A manifestation of God's anger upon His people was the recent earthquake that took place in King Uzziah's reign (Amos 1:1; Zech 14:5). The earthquake was of disastrous proportions because dead bodies littered the streets (of Jerusalem), like piles of refuse. That earthquake is mentioned for a warning of the earthquake to take place at Christ's Second Coming on the Mt of Olives. National disasters cannot be avoided; but when they occur, they are God's warning to the wicked. But it is not necessary to wait until some disastrous event overtake us to turn us back to God. When we read of such divine warning to a wicked nation, it is enough to throw us upon our knees. Except we repent, we shall likewise perish. Read Luke 13:1-5.

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." (Isa 55:7).

PRAYER Search me O God and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts; And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Ps 139:23, 24). Amen.

GOD'S INSTRUMENT OF JUDGEMENT—THE ASSYRIANS

The Assyrians, evidently, are the subject of this prediction of things to come. Though their motives are for plunder (Isa 10:13), they fulfil God's higher purpose. God is seen in this concluding passage as the One who gathers the forces. He is seen as One raising an ensign or banner to rally the invasion armies. He is likened to one hissing or whistling, as beekeepers are known to do, when calling a swarm. At His signal the attacking forces burst into action.

V. 27 describes the punch and power of these shock-troops, their perfect harness and battle dress.

V. 28 sees them in action, a charging cavalry with bows bent, ready to discharge their volleys of arrows.

V. 29 describes the terror of their battle cry like the roar of lions, and the sureness of their catch. There will be no escape from the Assyrians, who have made a name for ferocity.

V. 30 compares them to a roaring sea. The Jews, if they were seamen trying to make for the shore in such a boisterous situation would find the land equally foreboding. For "darkness and sorrow" await them there also. A total gloomy scene, to a doomed people. The hour of total judgment, in the prophet's view, has come!

PRAYER O Lord, awaken us to a Third World War that is brewing, that can burst on us any day now. Our hope is in Thy glorious Return. Amen.

VISION & MISSION

This 6th chapter of Isaiah, like the 53rd chapter, is one we are often referred to. Particularly, in regard to God's call. It is quoted at testimony meetings, or when challenges are made at consecration services.

How does God call us into His service? He uses different methods under different circumstances. Insofar as Isaiah is concerned God calls him by a glorious vision of Himself. It is a divine audio-visual, by a vivid revelation of Himself through sight and sound. It is an awesome experience in Isaiah's life which he can never forget. The vision which God has given Isaiah reminds us of a vision He gave to Ezekiel 150 years after (Ezek 1).

When God reveals Himself to man He humbles the creature to the dust. That is the experience of every servant called of God. Isaiah feels the same miserableness, but he is cleansed by God's act of mercy, and then he is called. A change of the whole being, of will and attitude, must come over everyone who is called of God. As Stephen Hyun, former director of Pocket Testament League, has said, "He must be born the third time." A voluntary decision to answer the call is also an important factor. Unless we are completely yielded to Him, He cannot use us.

Then the mission! Here Isaiah is commissioned to a difficult task—to preach to a wilfully-ignorant, benighted, hard-hearted people. In spite of such a seemingly hopeless task, the Word shall not return unto Him void, for a "holy seed" shall remain according to Isaiah 1:9.

PRAYER Lord, raise up prophets for this darkest period of history, when the Church has become apostate. Raise up sons for a 20th Century Reformation Movement. Amen.

WHO IS KING UZZIAH?

In II Kings 15:1-7 Uzziah, also called Azariah, is passed over almost unnoticed. It is in II Chron 26 that a whole chapter is given to a detailed description of his reign.

Uzziah began to reign from the young age of 16. To him is given the accolade of being a righteous ruler, though with the qualification that "as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper." Moral strength of a nation is more important than the military and economic!



Uzziah did much to strengthen the nation militarily. He built fortresses throughout the country. He conquered the Philistines on the west and subdued the Ammonites on the east. He fortified Elath in the south which was wrested from the Edomites. His army numbered 300,000.

He excelled also in the arts of peace. He had wells dugged for the support of the cattle-industry. He cultivated vineyards in the hilly regions, for he "loved husbandry."

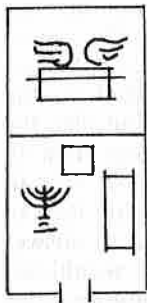
However, v 16 says, "But when he was strong his heart was lifted up to his destruction." For he intruded into the priest's office by burning incense in the Temple. 80 priests of the Temple withstood the arrogant king. When Uzziah angrily brushed them aside, he was suddenly struck with leprosy. According to Josephus, this occurred simultaneously with the Earthquake that took place in his reign. "Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov 16:18). What a gloomy ending to one who started out so brightly.

It is good to recall the three rules Calvin has prescribed for theology. The first rule is humility. The second is humility! The third is humility!

PRAYER "Lord, forgive me of the sin of self-righteousness."
Amen.

THE AWESOMENESS OF GOD UNVEILED

The Temple of Solomon was built according to the pattern God had given to his father David. "And for all the altar of incense refined gold by weight; and gold for the pattern of the chariot of the cherubims, that spread out their wings, and covered the ark of the covenant of the Lord. All this, said David, the Lord made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern" (I Chron 28:18, 19). This theology of Church architecture was not of David's invention, but was directly inspired of God. The Temple of Solomon surely reflected the awesomeness of God. Unseen to the naked eyes, however, were angelic hosts which were suddenly revealed to Isaiah.



Interpreting Isaiah's vision of God, Dean Stanley says, "The young Isaiah was, or in vision seemed to be, in the court of the Temple. He stood at the gate of the porch, and gazed straight into the Holy Place and into the Holy of Holies itself. All the intervening obstacles were removed. The great gates of cedar-wood were thrown open, the many coloured veil that hung before the innermost sanctuary was drawn aside and deep within was a throne of a King, high and lifted up, towering as if into the sky. What was the form that sat thereon, here, as elsewhere, the Scripture forbears to describe. Only by outward and inferior images, as to us by secondary causes, could the Divine Essence be expressed. The long drapery of His train filled the Temple, as His glory fills the earth."

Around the throne stood seraphims, angels of God in flaming glory, each with six wings, two converging the face, two covering the feet, and two keeping them in flight. These sang "Holy, holy, holy, the whole earth is full of His glory", in triple praise of the Triune God. As they sang antiphonally the Temple door posts trembled while the house was filled with smoke. How awesome is the sight of God when He but manifests a little of Himself to puny man.

"Cherubim and seraphim, falling down before Thee
Who wert and art and evermore shall be"

The effect of the vision upon the prophet is "Woe is me! for I am undone!" and a confession of his uncleanness before a holy God. As for John on Patmos Island: "And when I saw him I fell at his feet as dead" (Rev 1:17).

PRAYER Lord, "wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin" (Ps 51:2). Amen.

AFTER CLEANSING BY THE CHRIST, THE COMMISSIONING

We have noted how the awful vision of the Divine Majesty and the worship of the seraphims overwhelmed Isaiah with a sense of his abject sinfulness: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (v 5). Truly we are undone if there is not a Mediator between us and a holy God (I Tim 2:5).

Fortunately, the One sitting upon the throne, high and lifted, was the Lord Christ, according to John 12:41. From the Mediator one of the seraphims was sent with a live coal taken from the altar to cleanse the prophet's lips, and purge away his sins. The sacred fire from the burnt offering on the brazen altar represents the sacrifice of Christ and its effects. The live coal applied to the prophet's lips denotes not only the cleansing effects but also the pardon and acceptance in his work, through the atonement of Christ. Also the Divine grace to rekindle the first love so as to fit him for the Master's use. It is under such overwhelming love of the crucified Christ that a sinner saved is constrained to answer God's call. This is Isaiah's heart-condition, or else he would not reply, "Here I am, send me." This is Saul's heart-condition after the Damascus Road experience, or else how could he straightway preach Christ in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God? (Acts 9:20). And inasmuch as a sinner saved by grace has answered the Master's call to higher service, the same is willing to go where He wants him to go. Without such a yielded, willing heart, neither can a servant of God be commissioned.

Has God saved you from your sinful, wretched self? Have you heard Him calling you to fulltime service? And if you have rejected that call, are you not trying to run away from the constraining love of Christ? Paul says, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel!" (I Cor 9:16).

PRAYER "Have Thy own way Lord, have Thy own way, Thou art the potter, I am the clay". Amen.

MISSION TO A STUBBORN NATION

The work of a prophet is not an easy one. For truth that hurts and pierces the heart of its hearers is not readily received. See how this stubbornness of heart is reflected in Jeremiah's message to the Jews of his day:

"Hear this now O foolish people, and without understanding, which have eyes, and see not, which have ears and hear not . . . But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone" (Jer 5:21-23).

"Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have ever sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers. Therefore Thou shalt speak all these words unto them; but they will not hearken unto thee: thou shalt also call unto them; but they will not answer thee" (Jer 7:25-27).

When God's Word is rejected, time and again, God will give up those who reject His Word to their own delusion (II Thess 2:10, 11). This is what is meant by Isa 6:9, 10. When this wilful rejection of God's Word is carried over to New Testament times, the same condemnation is levelled against the Jews even by our Lord Jesus Christ. The same condemnation is reiterated by the apostle Paul (Matt 13:14, 15; Mk 4:12; Lk 8:10; Jn 12:40; Acts 28:26, 27; II Cor 3:14, 15).

Rejection of God by God's people results in their rejection by God. Yet it is not utter rejection for in His wrath He remembers mercy (Heb 3:2). Insofar as Isaiah's ministry was concerned, his stubborn compatriots would have to go through a devastating war after which they would go into captivity. Evidently he was looking to the Babylonian captivity a century later. Nevertheless, a tenth shall return to the land. The holy seed will survive all these ordeals like a terebinth or an oak tree. These trees might be cut down to a stump, but by their survival power, life would sprout from them again. The doctrine of a remnant persevering through is given at the very outset of Isaiah's sermon, Ch 1:9. By God's grace it was not a verdict of total hopelessness.

PRAYER "O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy" (Hab 3:2). Amen.

IMMANUEL THE ANSWER

There is a gap of two generations of kings between Ch 6 and 7. Notice that the event described in this chapter happened in the reign of Ahaz, grandson of Uzziah. The date is 735 BC.

At this time there was an alliance between Syria and Israel (split with Judah since after the reign of Solomon), often called by the name Ephraim, the chief tribe of Israel. This Syrian coalition, having failed to enlist Judah into its camp, had declared war with Judah, now under Ahaz. They had even a puppet king, Ben-Tabeal (son of Tabeal) to set over Judah in their scheme.

War having broken out, Judah became fearful "and his (Ahaz') heart was moved and the heart of his people as the trees in the wood are moved with the wind" (Isa 7:2).

Despite Ahaz being a wicked king, for the sake of His covenant with David, God was on Judah's side. So He sent Isaiah and son Shear-jashub to meet Ahaz at the aqueduct of the upper pool on the road to the Washerman's field. The prophet, given a vision of the future, was to assure the king how the threat of Syria and Israel was empty propaganda. The leaders of the two countries, Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel, were like two smoking firebrands. They were smoke, not fire! Within 65 years Israel (Ephraim) would lose her national identity.

To assure Ahaz of victory by trusting the Lord Isaiah gave the king an opportunity to ask for a sign (as he later offered to Hezekiah, Ahaz' son). Ahaz, having made up his mind to seek Assyria's help, hypocritically declined. When man thinks he is strong enough, he cares not a whit about the things of God. Are you trusting in your own plans or are you submitted to the Lord?

Snubbed by Ahaz, the prophet rose to the occasion to declare God's plan. Salvation will come in His virgin-born son Immanuel, which means "God with us". This he said not only to Judah at this time but to all ages.

PRAYER Lord, in peace or war, be Thou our Provider and Defender. Amen.

THE STORY OF KING AHAZ (II KINGS 16)

Ahaz was 20 years old when he began to reign over Judah (after Uzziah and Jotham). His counterpart in Israel, the northern kingdom, often referred to as Ephraim, the name of the chief tribe, was Pekah.

Ahaz was an apostate king. He departed from the Jewish faith in the One True God. He took to all the idolatrous practices which had gripped Israel, even the offer of human sacrifices! He did not require his subjects to worship only at God's appointed place, Jerusalem, where the Temple was. He allowed them to worship where they liked; sacrifice on the "high places" and under every green tree (which was forbidden by Moses, Deut 10:21).

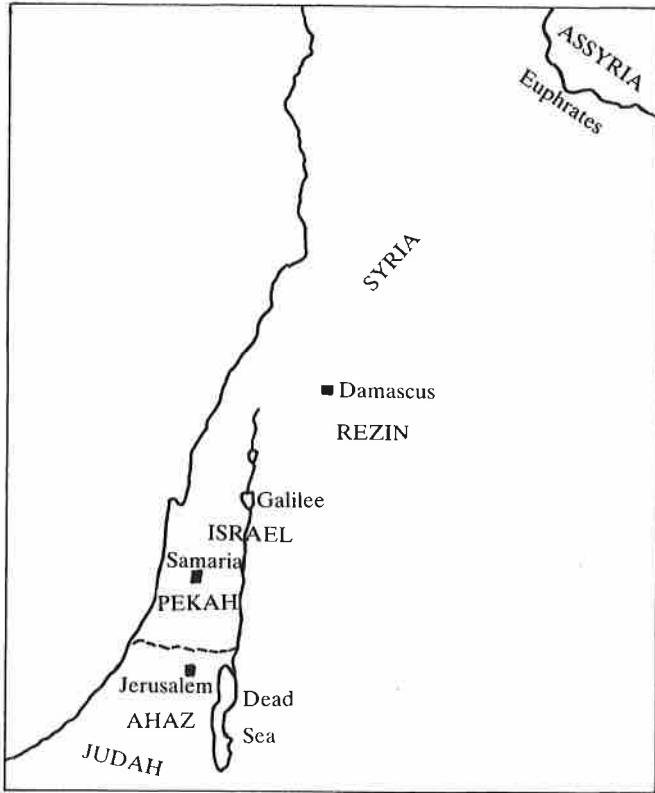
As if this was not enough, Ahaz even sent Urijah the priest to Damascus, capital of Syria to study the pattern of the Syrian altar. Urijah made a replica of it for the Temple in Jerusalem. Upon this new-fangled altar Ahaz offered sacrifices in preference to Jehovah's altar, which he pushed to the northside of the Temple. He removed also the laver from its foundations and "took away the Sabbath canopy that had been built at the Temple, and removed the royal entry way outside of the temple of the Lord, in deference to the king of Assyria" (NIV). In other words, God's House is altered to make way for new idols.

Now why did not Ahaz look to God and ask for a sign from Isaiah, according to the prophet's offer? The record in II Kings 16 tells us that Ahaz had sent envoys to Tiglathpileсар, King of Assyria. By stripping the Lord's House of its gold and silver and offering it to the Assyrian king, he paid off the Syria-Israel attack with an Assyrian invasion from the back. He did not realize, however, that with Syria and Israel swallowed by Assyria, Judah was now exposed to the devourer of nations.

"Ahaz reigned 16 years in Jerusalem and did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord his God, like David his father." What a sad commentary on the reign of one who might have become a great king had he listened to the prophet.

PRAYER Lord, save us from our preconceived plans. Help us to listen to the preaching of Your Word and obey. Amen.

“IN THE DAYS OF AHAZ”



“One picture is worth a thousand words.”

Like a chess board, this sketch map shows the three capitals of the three countries at war marked with a square. The names of kings are listed. In the distance is the super-power Assyria. Today there is one Israel united, but Syria remains her age-old enemy. There is no more Assyria today, but farther north is Russia the new super-power.

“WITHIN 65 YEARS!”

To tell someone's future 65 years hence seems remote and irrelevant. What we are interested is here and now. So did Ahaz regard Isaiah's words as idly spoken. The Syrian-Israel armies were come to the outskirts of Jerusalem. What was needed was to get rid of them now.

But the prophet's words were not idle words. He had already assured Ahaz to take the situation calmly. He had predicted that the attacks by Syria and Israel would fizzle like two smoking fire-brands. Smoke, but no fire. “Thus saith the Lord, God. It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass.”

To put on record for the next generations, Isaiah declared Israel's (Ephraim's) disintegration as a people within three score and five years. Henceforth, Israel's fortune would slide downhill!

When Isaiah foretold this fate to Ahaz, it was the year 735 BC. By 732 BC Syria was crushed by the Assyrian super power. By 722 BC Samaria, capital of Israel, also fell to the Assyrians, in logical sequence.

As the policy of Assyria towards the conquered peoples was to subjugate them, through years of deportation and intermingling of races, Israel became totally dispersed in the reign of Esarhaddon, 669 BC. The prophet's words had come true to the younger generations, who heard what was predicted to Ahaz. They need not wait till 65 years after. When Samaria, capital of Israel, fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC only a little over a decade thereafter, the lesson should have been learnt.

Do you have any warning of evil things to come? With Bible prophecy fulfilling before our very eyes, e.g., the regathering of Israel as a nation since 1948, do we not realize that 35 years have passed? The return of our Lord is nearer than we think!

PRAYER Lord, help me to be a good watchman, awake to the signs of Your coming. Amen.

“BEHOLD, A VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE”

This famous verse on the virgin birth of Christ is a battle ground between the faithful and the infidels in the Church of Jesus Christ. The Hebrew word *almah* for virgin here means a virgin plain and simple, being supported by Divine translation of the same into the Greek. Matthew, quoting Isaiah at this point, says, “Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken . . . of the Lord, by the prophet saying, Behold a *virgin* shall be with child, and bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matt 1:22, 23). The Greek word *parthenos* used by Matthew corroborated by the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT), also means *virgin*. Can Matthew and Isaiah both make the same mistake?

If the disbelieving modernist scholars should concede Matthew’s version, but argue against Isaiah, let us then ask them what is the logic of Isaiah’s challenge to Ahaz? Isaiah said this was a sign, and this sign was in the context of God’s power to reveal Himself in some earth or heaven-shaking event. That a virgin should bear a son would be in the realm of God’s power involving both heaven and earth.

Modern versions of the English Bible that try to take away the virginity in Christ’s miraculous conception do so to their own desolation. Thus, the RSV (Revised Standard Version) translates the Hebrew *almah* as “young woman”, so does the NEB (New English Bible). What young woman cannot give birth? What sign can it then be? Then there is the Good News Bible that copies with, “a young woman who is pregnant.” What young woman cannot become pregnant? What sign can it be? These modernist versions, RSV, NEB, GNB which have assailed our Lord’s Deity alienate themselves from every lover of God. “For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth” (II Cor 13:8).

REAFFIRM Late in time behold him come,
Offspring of a virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail the incarnate Deity. Amen.

THE MEANING OF ISAIAH'S CHALLENGE TO AHAZ

Ahaz having made up his mind to align with the super power Assyria against the Syria-Israel coalition, he spurned Isaiah's offer of Divine help. Turning to the House of David, even to the whole line of kings to come, Isaiah countered that a Saviour must come, not from them, but from the Virgin Mother who will name him "God with us".

Though we know that the event of the birth of Christ through Mary did not occur until 700 years afterwards, the prophet in ecstasy saw it as an accomplished fact. In vivid sequence he saw also the dissolution of the Syria-Israel coalition in a matter of a few years, the period of early infancy of a child when he should begin to know between good and bad. Within that brief period of time, Isaiah predicted "the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings." As predicted, the Syria-Israel coalition was broken. Pekah, king of Israel, died.

V 15. "Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good". This verse means that during the first three to four years of infancy the child will live not in a land "flowing with milk and honey", but rather, as v. 20ff tells us, under war-torn conditions. It is a time when cultivation of crops will be disrupted, so that the only food available comes from the milk of domestic animals (not meat but milk). Ahaz is warned of hard times ahead!

During the days of Singapore's surrender to the Japanese there was an abundance of tinned foods sold in the streets. Milk powder and condensed milk were plentiful, looted from the warehouses. But not fresh food like eggs and vegetables, because farming was disrupted by war.

PRAYER Give us this day our daily bread. Amen.

“REAP THE WHIRLWIND”

“For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind” (Hosea 8:7). This saying from Hosea applies foursquare with what Ahaz is now faced with. The Assyrians whom Ahaz had bribed to attack Syria and Israel, having crushed Judah’s enemies, came right up to the gates of Jerusalem. Never had there occurred a greater national crisis before this since Judah split with Israel (Ephraim is Israel’s chief tribe) after the death of King Solomon.

Ahaz’ scheming, however, fitted God’s higher plan not only to bring in the Assyrians, but also the Egyptians. Like swarms of bees and flies, troops from the two super powers covered the land. These overran not only Israel but Judah also. They ate of the fat of the land by pillage and plunder.

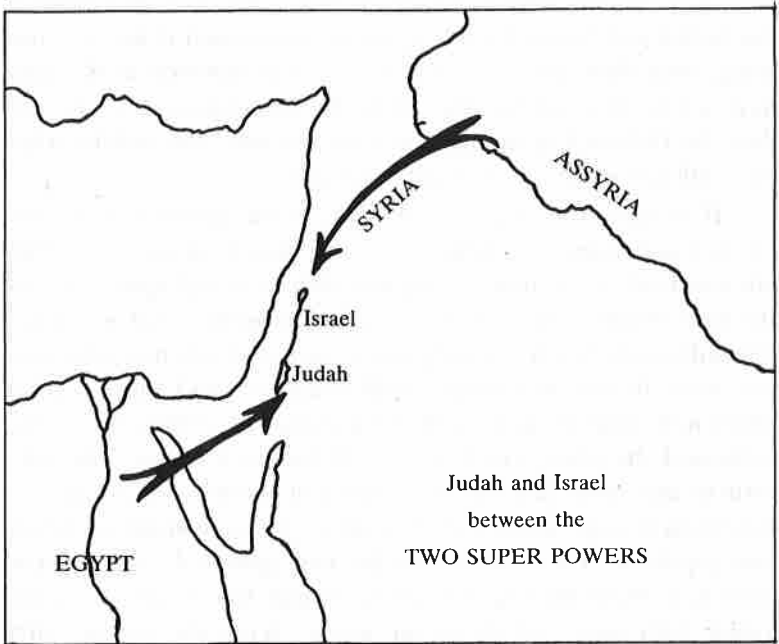
Assyria is likened to a razor. In the light of Ezekiel 5:1ff the shaving of the hair from the body of a person, from head to foot, including the beard, bespeaks a total deportation of the inhabitants of the land. Ultimately two deportations came to pass which practically achieved this result. All this came about through Ahaz’ hiring the Assyrians against Syria and Israel, but now it was the Lord who had “hired” Assyria against Judah. Ahaz sowed the wind, but now he reaped the whirlwind.

During the second World War, the Allies “hired” communist Russia to fight Germany. When Hitler lost out, the Russians drove right into Berlin. They came face to face with the British and Americans. The Allies have paid the price of a split Germany to this day. “For they have sowed the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind” (Hosea 8:7).

What do we do when faced with problems like Ahaz? Do we rely on our own prowess or do we seek the Lord first?

PRAYER Lord, save me from the sin of Ahaz. Amen.

NOW EGYPT COMES INTO VIEW!



Hitherto the super power Assyria has dominated the prophetic horizon. Now Egypt comes into view. Which is the stronger of the two?

Wisdom from Daniel: "The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth over it the basest of men." (Dan 4:17).

AFTERMATH OF WAR

We have noted that eating “butter and honey” in v 15 does not mean living in plenty, but rather the very opposite. These concluding verses of chapter 7 explain. According to C H Leupold, the butter and honey would be better understood if we say “nothing more than curds and honey. Nor will anybody in the land have access to anything other than this monotonous and meagre diet. As Delitzsch again appropriately remarks, this will be what men will eat to the point of utter disgust.”

If we skip to v 23 and read down to the end we will see the “butter and honey” situation in even clearer perspective. The aftermath of war brings a complete dislocation of agriculture in the land. Where vineyards were bringing in good money and vines fetched a shekel each (a good price in ancient days), now what one saw were thorns and briars. Wild beasts roamed these fruitful farms now gone to seed, so that for a man to venture into these wildwoods he must arm himself with bow and arrow. The only form of agriculture left was the keeping of animals, which requires much less human labour. For the bulk of the population was taken into captivity. The remnants in the land gathered what animals were left. These they sent to graze on hills that were once cultivated, both oxen and sheep and goats. Hence the people’s diet was restricted to “butter” or curds from the animals and honey collected from the wilds. Note there is no mention of eating beef or lamb, for the animals left in the land could be numbered. Instead of a hundred sheep and ten cattle, a man and his family had only a young cow and two sheep. If they ate beef and lamb, there would not be any butter or curds left!

PRAYER “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness” (Lam 3:22). Amen.

LIGHT FOR A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT

In the feverish preparations for war with the Syria-Israel coalition amidst flying rumours and counter plots, Jerusalem stood a lone citadel in a dark and stormy night. There were those who sided with the enemy against Ahaz their king, who were an ungodly crowd all the same. There was Ahaz' pact with Assyria to counter the Syria-Israel attack, which relied on the arm of flesh than on the help of God. Those of Ahaz' party for alliance with Assyria accused the prophet for conspiracy against his country. Others who knew no better were the superstitious, even among the intelligentsia. These desiring to know the outcome of the present had resorted to mediums and witchdoctors and necromancers.

Because God's mercy was still with the House of David, despite Ahaz' hypocritical decline of Jehovah's help, Isaiah was sent to assure the people of the oncoming Syria-Israel fiasco despite Judah's heavy losses.

In view of the fact that the virgin-born Saviour, Immanuel, was delayed in coming, God gave to the Jews instead one designated birth of a child from the prophet himself for a sign of victory. His name, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, the longest of any known Hebrew names, would speak to the nation God's message of the hour.

And inasmuch as Judah spurned the soft-flowing waters of Shiloah, yea, even God's daily provisions, but "rejoiced" in Rezin and Pekah, kings of Syria and Israel, the Lord would flood them with a great deluge from the Euphrates, i.e. Assyria.

This message from Isaiah's lips spelt doom to the wicked but hope to the faithful. Yes, war has two sides, a side of hope and liberation, a side of of doom and slavery. On which side will you be should war suddenly overtake you?

PRAYER "Some trust in chariots and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God" (Ps 20:7). Amen.

MAHER-SHALAL-HASH-BAZ

This prophecy was not uttered until a year, perhaps, after Isaiah's fruitless meeting with Ahaz at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool. In the meantime, the fortunes of war ran heavily against Judah. II Chron 28:5-19 relates a crushing defeat of Judah by Syria and Israel in which 120,000 were slain in one day. Besides the fallen in battle, 200,000 men, women and children with much spoil were taken captive to Samaria, until the Word of a prophet by the name of Obed moved their captors to release them. These are no exaggerated figures, for there was an overwhelming destruction of the whole country (except Jerusalem) through further invasions by Edomites and Philistines.

To Ahaz and his politicians, their hope of deliverance rested only in Assyria. But this became their greater ordeal as we shall see later. In mercy, God sent Isaiah with a terse word Maher-shalal-hash-baz which means "Speed-plunder, haste-spoil" written on a large scroll. This was witnessed by Uriah the priest, the one sent by Ahaz to Damascus to copy the pattern of its altar, and by Zechariah, son of Zeberechiah, perhaps father-in-law to Ahaz (II Chron 29:1).

Nine months later, when a son was born to Isaiah and his wife, he named this boy "Maher-shalal-hash-baz". Then the enigma of this word was revealed to be a soon routing of Judah's invaders: "For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, the riches of Damascus (capital of Syria) and the spoil of Samaria (capital of Israel) shall be taken away before the King of Assyria" (Isa 8:4).

From this message, it must be understood that although Ahaz was instrumental in bribing the Assyrian king to attack his enemies from the back, it was the Lord's sovereign grace to bring it to pass, and it was the Lord's judgement upon Ahaz to release the flood waters of Assyria upon the apostate Jewish king.

PROVERBS 21:1 "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will."

THE PROPHET IS A MAN OF PRINCIPLES

In the world of politics, principles are sacrificed for expediency. The people of Judah, under Ahaz' tyranny, would side with the invading forces of Syria and Israel. On the other hand, Ahaz sought Assyria's help as against his own subjects no less than against Syria or Israel (Ephraim). In today's politics we can see a similar situation in Kampuchean Prince Sihanouk aligning himself with China against Heng Samrin no less than against the Vietnamese masters. In such an intriguing situation where does the prophet stand?

A man of principles, Isaiah could side neither people nor king. "As it is," says Ellicott, "he sides with neither, and has a warning for each. Each is running blindly into destruction. The prophet could hardly have blamed the people of Syria and Israel for the following their own kings, but it was a strange and monstrous thing for Judah to follow their example."

"We must remember too that in spite of the weakness and wickedness of Ahaz, the prophet's hopes rested on the house of David (Ch 11:1), and that Hezekiah (Ahaz' son) was already old enough to justify that hope."

In America today we see the legacy left behind by a China-appeasing Nixon in order to counter-balance the Russians. One lone voice of a modern prophet in Carl McIntire has consistently denounced a godly America playing up to a godless China. A prophet is a man of principles.

Events that follow Ahaz' short-sighted alignment with Assyria prove the king wrong. For the Assyrians while swallowing up Syria and Israel as by an overflowing Euphrates, swept through Judah in their path. The waters reaching "even to the neck". Judah was plundered all the same, and was subject to the Assyrian tyranny, as lying under the stretched-out wings of a bird of prey.

Isaiah's hopes must rest in Immanuel (God with us).

THOUGHT: Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted for? (Isa 2:22).

“WHO IS ON THE LORD’S SIDE?”

These words are not only directed against Syria and Israel but a challenge to all the peoples of the earth, far and near. No plan against the Kingdom of God, of which the house of David was representative at this time, shall prosper. The prophet declares his trust in Immanuel once again, for “God is with us!”

Under great stirring of spirit the prophet is inspired to refute a false accusation of confederacy, the cry of the Assyrian Alliance Party against Isaiah and his followers for treason, such as was afterwards directed at Jeremiah (Jer 37:14). The prophet exhorts his followers not to be cowed by the fear of man but rather to fear the Lord of hosts whom he had seen at the time of his call.

As to God becoming at the same time a sanctuary and a stone of stumbling, Ellicott observes, “To enter into the fellowship of Jehovah, is to enter into the sanctuary. He who stands on the stone which forms the threshold of that sanctuary, has gained an asylum. But to do that requires the clear vision of faith. He who walks blindly (Ch 6:10; Jn 11:10) without faith, may stumble on that very stone of the threshold and what was safety and life for others might for him bring pain and shame”. So, St Peter says, even the head corner-stone is to those who stumble at the word, being disobedient, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence (I Pet 2:8).

From a rock of offence to the erring ones of both houses of Israel, Isaiah further describes the inhabitants of Jerusalem as animals caught in a trap. It first stumbles, falls into the pit, breaks its limbs and is fastened and powerless to escape.

Are you one standing with the prophet, or against him?

JOHN SUNG CHORUS I am standing, standing on the Word,
Though the world change and decay.
It shall never, never pass away,
I am standing on the Word of God.

SONS OF LIGHT VERSUS SONS OF DARKNESS

The message of the prophet could not be understood but by a small circle of disciples. The testimony and the law of his teaching is bound and sealed for them, because it is precious to them. These are sons of light who receive the instruction.

Isaiah the teacher himself must receive the light from the Light of lights. As the house of Jacob has rejected that Light, "He hides His face" from them. He remains as it were in the dark. But Isaiah, knowing his Lord, will wait for the light of His revelation.

Isaiah and his sons are lights in the dark Jerusalem world. They are signs and portents by the names they bear. Isaiah means "The Lord is Salvation". Will the people look to the Lord to be saved? Isaiah's first son is called Shear-jashub, which means "a remnant shall return". Do they have hope in God despite being taken into captivity? Maher-shalal-hash-baz was the special message attested by two "crown" witnesses Uriah the priest and Zechariah, father-in-law of Ahaz. By this name which means "speed-plunder-haste-spoil", a message on the routing of the Syrian and the Israel forces within a year of the birth of this second son was given to the people. But did they take courage in God's wonder-working power?

We too should be sons of light. St Paul says to the Philipians, "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Phil 2:15).

Those who rejected the prophet's message were sons of darkness. These in superstition and desperation resorted to mediums, soothsayers and necromancers. These who contacted the underworld of spirits (like Saul the witch of Endor, I Sam 28:7-25) which is forbidden by Moses in Deut 18. Christians are never to seek the advice of fortune-tellers, not in astrology or palmistry!

To the law and to the testimony means to the Law of Moses in O.T. times and to the whole Bible in N.T. times. God's Word is our supreme and only standard of faith and practice, our infallible and inerrant light.

PRAYER "Oh send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles." (Psalm 43:3). Amen.

THE PLIGHT OF SONS OF DARKNESS

Those who reject the light of the prophet but seek rather the darkness of mediums and soothsayers are likened to a band of people wandering through a burning desert, without food or drink. "Those who go away from God go out of the way of all good. They shall be very uneasy to themselves, by discontent and impatience under their trouble. Their vexation shall prey on their own spirits: for fretfulness is a sin that is its own punishment. When they find all their measures broken down they will treasonably curse their king, and blasphemously curse their God, quarrel with His providence, and reproach, that as if He had done them wrong. The foolishness of man perverts his way, then his heart frets against the Lord, Prov 19:3. They shall despair and see no probability of relief. Heaven shall frown upon them: how can it be otherwise when they curse their God? They shall look to the earth but what comfort can that yield to those whom God is at war with? Their fears will represent everything as black and frightful. Those that shut their eyes against the light of God's Word will justly be abandoned to darkness. This may predict the miseries of many during the troubles which came upon the Jewish nation, but the whole passage leads the thoughts forward to the coming of Christ, and the judgements to be inflicted on those who rejected the Divine Testimony concerning Him." (Matthew Henry).

PRAYER "Out of my bondage, sorrow and night,
Jesus, I come, Jesus, I come;
Into Thy freedom, gladness and light,
Jesus, I come to Thee.
Out of my sickness into Thy health,
Out of my want and into Thy wealth,
Out of my sin and into Thyself,
Jesus, I come to Thee." Amen.

AFTER DARKNESS LIGHT!

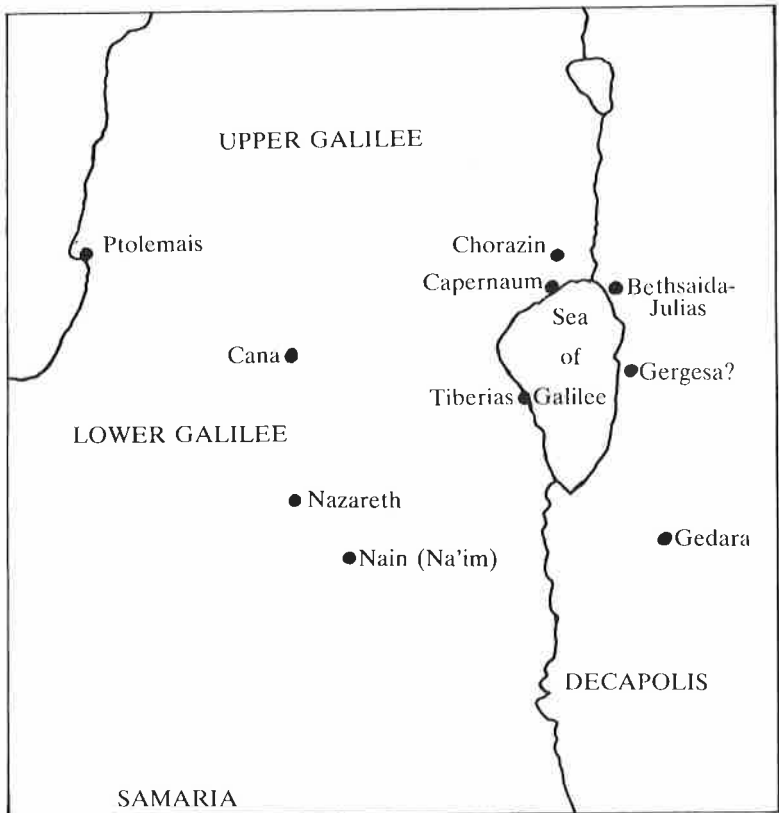


This slogan of the 16th century Reformation may well describe the coming of the Saviour to a land of darkness—the tribal districts of Zebulun and Naphtali bordering the Sea of Galilee. During Ahaz’ reign, Isaiah had seen how this northern region was the first to be invaded and devastated by the Assyrian hordes. As he looked to God for the salvation of the people who were afflicted in these regions, the Lord showed him the dawning of a bright day to come.

Seven hundred years after, when our Lord left Nazareth to dwell in Capernaum “which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim”, St Matthew observed this was the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy (Matt 4:14-16). Jesus who declares Himself the light of the world and the light of men sheds His light of salvation on a land which was once in physical darkness and now in spiritual darkness still. Every land that has not heard the Gospel is in the same darkness, until we bear the light of the Gospel to them. This Gospel light deserves to be classed with other great passages of the Bible like Genesis 1 and John 1 which also speak of the coming of the Light.

SING “There’s a call comes ringing o’er the restless wave,
 ‘Send the light! Send the light!’
 There are souls to rescue, there are souls to save,
 Send the light! Send the light!
 Send the light! The blessed Gospel light;
 Let it shine from shore to shore!
 Send the light! The blessed Gospel light;
 Let it shine forevermore.”

“THE PEOPLE WHICH SAT IN DARKNESS SAW GREAT LIGHT” (MATTHEW 4:16)



Isaiah the Gospel Prophet sees in his vision a great light on the land of Zebulun and Naphtali by the way of the sea (Via Maris) beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. Matthew identifies this prophecy with the appearance of Jesus, after He left Nazareth to make Capernaum His spiritual capital. Can you identify each town on this sketch map with some miracle our Lord had done in His earthly ministry?

LIGHT BRINGS PROSPERITY AND JOY

Inasmuch as it is the Father that sends the Son to bring light of salvation and life to a people walking in darkness, He it is who also multiplies the nation and increases the joy. (Omit "not" in KJV, since the Hebrew at this point can read "for it", which rather gives a positive sense).

Josephus reports that in Jesus' time Galilee was dotted with numerous prosperous villages. This land that once was stripped bare by the Assyrians was now teeming with life. And the Light of life that is now shed abroad over this erstwhile darkest northern region must bring an increase of joy.

This joy is likened to reaping a harvest. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps 126:5, 6). Is salvation joy like this?

Secondly, this joy is likened to that of dividing the spoil, an exultant feeling of victory at war. For these people, hitherto enslaved both of a foreign conqueror and by sin, have now been released from a burdensome yoke. Were not these prisoners of war made slaves by their conquering masters? Not only the yoke, but also the staff and the rod of oppression. In this connection the ignominious past of the Israelites under Midianite domination is recalled, with Gideon as their liberator. The Psalmist says, "I rejoice at thy word as one that findeth great spoil." (Ps 119:162). Is salvation joy like this also? V 5 describes the joy of deliverance finally in terms of clearing up the debris of war. A fire is started to burn up all the bloody garments worn by the soldiers fallen in battle, and every other relic of war that contaminates the land, of course. The joy of salvation is a purifying joy!

As the Lord appeared in Galilee preaching the kingdom, healing the sick and casting out devils, did He not bring prosperity and joy to the Galileans?

Nehemiah 8:10, "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

A FULLER VIEW OF THE VIRGIN-BORN SON

Isaiah, having had a first glimpse of God's Saviour in chapter 7:14 to be One virgin-conceived, whose name is to be called Immanuel = God With Us, rises in even greater ecstasy as the Lord shows him the attributes of His Person.

From his view of the Galilean hills, of the light that shines on Zebulon and Naphtali and beyond Jordan, he is suddenly turned southwards to the throne of David in Jerusalem. So this Child to be born must come from the House of David! He will be a King of kings, ruling over the Jewish nation. He will be the hope of all Israel where Ahaz has been such a disappointment!

From the titles of His Name we see Him invested with the highest honour and power. He shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. The people must worship Him who is arrayed with such Divine titles. He is wonderful because He is both God and Man. He is wonderful in His life, death and resurrection. Great was the mystery of godliness concerning Him. He is Counsellor because He is intimately acquainted with the counsels of God from eternity. He is God Almighty too because He is able to save to the uttermost. He is the Everlasting Father to the people He has saved, in tender care of all their needs. He is the Prince of Peace because He is the author of our reconciliation to God the Giver of Peace, who commands His subjects to live in peace with each other and with all men. Under His rule, when His kingdom is fully established men shall learn war no more.

He shall bear the burden of His Government, an increasing government, whereby His kingdom is enlarged while the kingdoms of the earth will dwindle. He shall rule by love in the hearts of men. His kingdom is now established on earth through the Gospel preaching of the Church, but will be under His visible administration from Jerusalem, when He raises again the throne of David. That millennial rule of a golden age when universal peace shall reign and all wars shall cease has been foretold in chapter 2:1-5.

PRAYER Even so, come Lord Jesus! Amen.

FROM 1ST COMING TO 2ND COMING

These two verses lead us to see not only the first coming of the Messiah but also the full establishment of His kingdom in the Second Coming. "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom . . ." bespeaks the restoration of the Israelite nation under their King over the nations of the earth. In the light of Isaiah 2:1-5 let the coming Kingdom of Christ be expressed in singing to the tune of "My Ole Kentucky Home" as follows.

SONG TO THE NEW JERUSALEM

The summer sun shines o'er new Jerusalem:
Golden days of peace so divine.
Messiah has come to this war-torn earth from Heav'n,
Besto'ing rest to weary mankind.

Chorus

Weep no more, O Israel:
O weep no more today.
We will sing this song to the new Jerusalem,
To the new Jerusalem for aye.

The autumn showers freshen new Jerusalem:
Happy feasts are held o'er the land.
We worship Messiah the Prince of Peaceful Realm
Who makes roses bloom across the sand.

The spring rains drive winter's biting cold away:
Wheat and barley, olive and grain.
Ten thousand flowers in the balmy breezes sway,
While young men and maidens praise His Name.

The Sun of Righteousness shines o'er earth's Dark Night:
No more war, nor hunger, nor pain!
Christ Jesus reigns till Right triumphs over Might,
All-resplendent in Jerusalem.

Amen

FROM THE MESSIANIC FUTURE BACK TO THE MESSY PRESENT

The prophet leaves off viewing that golden future when the Messiah shall reign to focus once again on the messy present.

He rebukes the northern kingdom of Israel (Ephraim is the chief tribe, Samaria the capital) for deriding the prophet's prediction of defeat with the retort of a grander post-war reconstruction. The prophet reinforces his rebuke with the prediction of an Assyrian invasion which would include Israel's ally, the Syrians (now under Assyrian occupation) and the Philistines, like a pincer movement. This two-prong attack is God's judgment on Israel's apostate leadership, including false prophets, who make the people err. The judgement is so drastic that no mercy is left for the young, the widows and orphans.

The vision of darkness and famine mentioned in chapter 8:21, 22 returns to the prophet's scope. In times like these, wickedness will burn like a forest fire. Though Ephraim and Manasseh are brothers, being the two sons of Joseph, they will tear at each other under war-famine conditions. The only tie that binds them is their enmity towards Judah, the southern kingdom. How similar are the foibles of those Jewish parties in Jesus' time, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees, who rivalled one another but were only united against Christ.

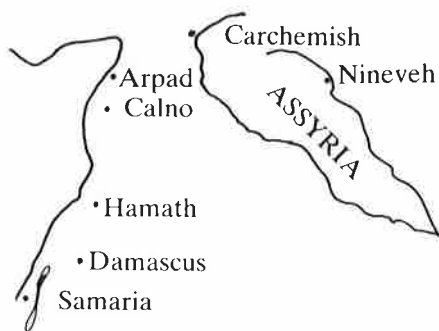
This section chapter 9:8-21 should continue into chapter 10:1-4. The formula with which this section opens reminds us of chapter 5:8, 11, 18, etc that suggests the prophet is speaking of Israel including Judah. The evils denounced here are the same as those in chapter 1:23 and 5:23. "And what will they do in the day of visitation?" Had those corrupt judges asked themselves how they would face up to the Supreme Judge? Another aspect of the theology of war! "Without me" these wicked judges were doomed to exile and death. "For all this . . ." that has tolled in chapter 9:12, 17, 21 now tolls at chapter 10:4 for the last time. Doom, doom, doom, doom!

PRAYER "Judge of the Nations, spare us yet, Lest we forget—lest we forget." Amen.

“BURDEN OF ASSYRIA”

Remember, God is in absolute control of the nations. Daniel says, “The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth to whomsoever He will, and setteth over it the basest of men” (Dan 4:17). As Isaiah’s “prophescope” is now turned into the heavens, he sees the Assyrians as God’s rod and staff of judgement against “an hypocritical nation”. Assyria is also described as God’s axe and God’s saw (v. 15).

Though God uses the Assyrians in their rapacity against the nations, He does not vitiate their will. For the Assyrian kings have no knowledge of Isaiah’s God nor of His decretive will. They conquer merely to satisfy their spirit of territorial expansion and self aggrandisement. In their imperial haughtiness they boast, “By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent . . .” (Isa 10:13). Did not Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, boast of the same: “Is not this the great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” (Dan 4:30).



This sketch map shows the super power Assyria with capital at Nineveh. The cities taken as listed in v. 9 are shown.

God used the Assyrians to strike down the idols of each conquered city and nation as He has used the Communists to overturn China so steeped in idolatry.

Howbeit, after God has used Assyria to punish even idolatrous Jerusalem, Assyria in turn will be

judged for her crimes. Jehovah like a fire will burn up the “thorns and briars” (soldiers) and the “glory of the forest” (captains and princes) of the Assyrian army, down to a “few trees”.

PSALM 96:5 “For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heavens.” Amen.

“A REMNANT SHALL RETURN”

As for Israel, the prophet is reminded by his first son's name, Shearjashub, which means “a remnant shall return”, that God's people, though heavily chastised, will be restored (Rom 9:27, 28).

“The consumption decreed will overflow with righteousness” (v. 22) means the finished work, i.e. God's judgement on Israel, is at once punitive and corrective. Since this chastisement is from God, the people are not to panic as in the days of Ahaz (7:2). Under a new Assyrian assault led now by Sargon or his successor, with the tyranny of Egypt, God's people should persevere for “a very little while” when His anger shall cease.

With chapter 9:4 still in mind, the prophet recounts how Oreb and Zeeb, the Midianite chiefs, were slain under Gideon, and applies the account to Assyria. Also they are to be reminded of God's rod that delivered them from the sea and Egypt. And Israel will grow so fat (the anointing), i.e. so prosperous, that the yoke will no longer go round his neck.

ASSYRIAN INVASION OF JUDAH UNDER SARGON

The prophescope turns now to a scene of Assyrian king Sargon's march against Jerusalem. This is to alert a terrified Jerusalem, describe the route the attackers are taking and also to comfort them that their advance will be checked. The route of attack passes from Aith, probably the ancient Ai (under Joshua). From there it goes through valleys to Migron, and to Michmash where the baggages of war are left to give the army swift movement. Geba belongs to Benjamin (I Chron 6:60). Now the Assyrians quickly advance from this halt to Ramah and Gibeah to the terror of the local inhabitants. The panic spreads rapidly to Ramah where Samuel's home was, then to Laish, near Jerusalem, to Anathoth, four miles from Jerusalem, birth-place of Jeremiah. It spreads to Madmenah, Gebim until it reaches Nob, one of the Tabernacle's resting places in Saul's time. But only so far, to threaten Jerusalem, and no more. The Lord will lob off the lofty branches of the cedars of Lebanon (figure for Assyrian chieftans) at this point. Read Isaiah 37.

Jeremiah 5:22 “Fear ye not me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?”

THE MESSIANIC KING AND KINGDOM

From the preview of the Wonder Child of chapter 9:6, 7 the prophet's vision of the same is enlarged. More specifically than before the King of the future is identified as one sprouting like a branch from the stem of Jesus (father of King David). This King to come from the House of David could not be any good king. He is the Perfect King, endued with sevenfold wisdom, best illustrated by the seven-branched candlestick. With the central stem representing the Spirit of the Lord, we can see clearly the spirit of wisdom on the innermost left branch continuing to the innermost right as the spirit of understanding. In progressive order the spirit of counsel to the spirit of might. And lastly the spirit of knowledge to the spirit of the fear of the Lord. Who can this king be but the Christ, "For God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him" (John 3:34) = "God gives the Spirit without limit" (NIV).



This King will transcend ordinary kings in judgment because He will see through every human veneer and subterfuge. What a contrast with all those corrupt princes, judges and elders Isaiah has previously denounced including wicked King Ahaz!

That He will smite the earth with rod (sceptre) of His mouth means He will speak with Authority (Rev 1:16). "With the breath of His lips shall He slay many" reveals the power of that Authority against the disobedient (Hosea 6:5). As in Ephesians 6:14 Paul talks of loins girt about with truth, Isaiah uses a similar figure of righteousness and faithfulness as girdles, symbols of complete equipment.

All these qualities the Christ manifested in His first coming. From v. 1-9, we leap across to the day of His Second Coming when He will introduce the golden millennium. This is corroborated by Peter in his second Pentecostal sermon in which he refers to "the times of restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21). This is "Paradise Regained" wherein even the creation would be restored to its former perfect condition (Rom 8:19ff). We take the literal view that "the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (v. 7) since the same statement is repeated in Isaiah 65:25. O what a Day! Under the reign of the Prince of Peace when not only man will cease warring with man (Isa 2:1-5) but the animal creation will not maul each other as well.

PRAYER Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. (Rev. 4:11), Amen.

HOW THE KINGDOM WILL BE SET UP

The root of Jesus that will become an ensign or banner for the people is Christ. The nations that believe in Him are they who will rally to Him. This is the Gospel age of the Kingdom.

To lead into the Millennial age of the Kingdom, however, wherein the Messiah will restore the throne of David (9:7) the relatives of the King must be returned to their land. That is, the dispersed tribes of Israel must be brought back from the four corners of the earth. This prediction of a "second" time (the first time was the return from Babylon) was literally fulfilled on May 14, 1948 when Israel in diaspora for 2000 years, regained her Land and independence. Today Jews in Israel number over 4 million!

V. 13 which predicts the reunion of the northern and southern kingdoms was fulfilled also on May 14, 1948 when Israel was so named for the whole nation. There is no division today as in Isaiah's day.

V. 14-15, which follows the national restoration, looks to a war between Israel and her neighbours. This was marvellously fulfilled in the Six Day war, June 1967. How Israel took the Gaza strip (Philistines) with a walkover is well known. How they mauled the Syrians (them of the East) is another epic. Jordan which today occupies the ancient territories of Edom, Moab and Ammon was sheepishly subdued. With God's almighty wind (Israel's airforce being thus helped) the Jews smashed Egypt across the tongue of the Red Sea, yea, even across its extension, the Suez Canal. "Men go over dry shod". The Israeli armoured divisions would have driven right on to Cairo, in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, as well, but they halted.

SONG OF SALVATION

Chapter 12

After referring to the Exodus (11:16) there are echoes to the song of Moses. The woes and wrath of God that overhang Israel in the "doom" verses in chapters 9 and 10 are no more as the song which begins with "Thine anger is turned away" (v. 1) shows.

Israel, even though returned to her land, has had to fight five wars ('48, '56, '67, '73, '82) for her existence. She is still under harassment from the Arab nations and will go through Armageddon's bloody ordeal. When the Lord finally returns to her that Day, when war shall be no more, Israel can certainly shout and sing of the greatness of the Holy One of Israel.

PSALM 30:5 "For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

BURDEN OF BABYLON

Although we used the word "burden" for Assyria in chapter 10, this word did not occur until chapter 13. "The burden of Babylon" means "the message of doom" to Babylon, inasmuch as the Hebrew, *massa*, means a "weighty thing".

"The burden of Babylon" is the beginning of a series of doom messages to countries, far and near, big and small, that are vitally involved with God's chosen people. God is King of kings and Lord of lords. "He removeth kings, and setteth up kings" (Dan 2:21), "and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou?" (Dan 4:35). This series of "burdens" against the nations are given not only to confirm God's Word given elsewhere, but also to console the hearts of the righteous in Judah who would be exiled to Babylon; that they might set their hope in God (Ps 42).

Who are "the mighty ones for my anger" to punish "the world for their evil"? V. 17 gives the clue—the Medes!

At the time when Isaiah uttered this message of doom against Babylon, she was a vassal of Assyria, being controlled by the kings of Nineveh. One of the more ambitious vassal rulers of Babylon, Merodach-baladan, king of Babylon, sent ambassadors to King Hezekiah after his sickness (Isa 39).

As the fortunes of Assyria began to wane by the end of the 7th century B.C. so arose Babylon to take her place as the next super power. This brings us to Nebuchadnezzar who destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

Babylon, though the greatest and first of the Gentile powers to be considered in Daniel's vision, lasted but 70 years. And though the City of Babylon occupied an area of 200 sq miles and was built on both sides of the River Euphrates, and her "Hanging Gardens" are known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the City was overthrown by Persian king Cyrus in 539 B.C. The fall of Babylon is also linked to Darius the Median (Dan 5:31). Hence the prophet's reference to the Medes in v. 17.

Babylon continued under Persian rule until 330 B.C. when she was destroyed by Alexander the Great. Although she remained an inhabited city, Babylon declined and declined. By the time our Lord was born, Babylon had become totally deserted, as predicted in chapter 13:19-22.

It is interesting to note that the Oxford dictionary defines Babylon also to mean "any great empire or vicious city; Rome, the papacy (refer to Rev 17 etc), London, etc".

REV 18:4 "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."

DIRGE TO THE KING OF BABYLON

While Babylon that took captivity of the Jews would be completely destroyed, Israel would be restored by God's mercies. The captives now become captors, a picture of Israel's final victory in the millennium.

Now Israel could sing this dirge to the defeated and deceased Babylonian king. The whole earth, big and small, rejoices because of the death of her Oppressor. The king of Babylon is seen to cause a stir as he enters the lower regions of Hell, while his body is eaten by worms. The one who trampled the nations is now further judged by being literally "trodden under feet". Even his family and relatives will suffer an ignominious death together with him in his overthrow. In modern history we see a similar, violent end to Hitler, the persecutor of nations. To confirm that God is the Omnipotent One who will so judge the wicked, Isaiah quotes the case of the dispersal, of the Assyrians, whose destruction of 185,000 in one night by the angel of death (Isa 37:36) was well-known to the Jews of his time.

V. 12-14 while being addressed to the king of Babylon seems to have a deeper reference to the spirit that energised him. Inasmuch as Paul refers to "that man of sin, the son of perdition and that Wicked would come in the end-times, after the working of Satan", it seems logical to conclude this passage of Scripture is directed to the same evil spirit. In these three verses, he who is the bright and morning star still five-fold desiring to ascend above the stars of God, to be "like the most High" (there are five "I will"), is seen brought down to the lowest Hell. This judgment of the proud one (condemnation of the devil, 1 Tim 3:6) is vividly pictured in Rev 19:20 and 20:1-3 in the casting into the lake of fire of the beast and false prophet, and the binding of Satan in the bottomless pit.

In our day we see the ruthless, anti-God spirit that energises the Communist rulers. We can safely conclude these will one day be overthrown as Satan is overthrown.

PRAYER Humble me to the dust, O Lord. Amen.

BURDEN OF PALESTINA

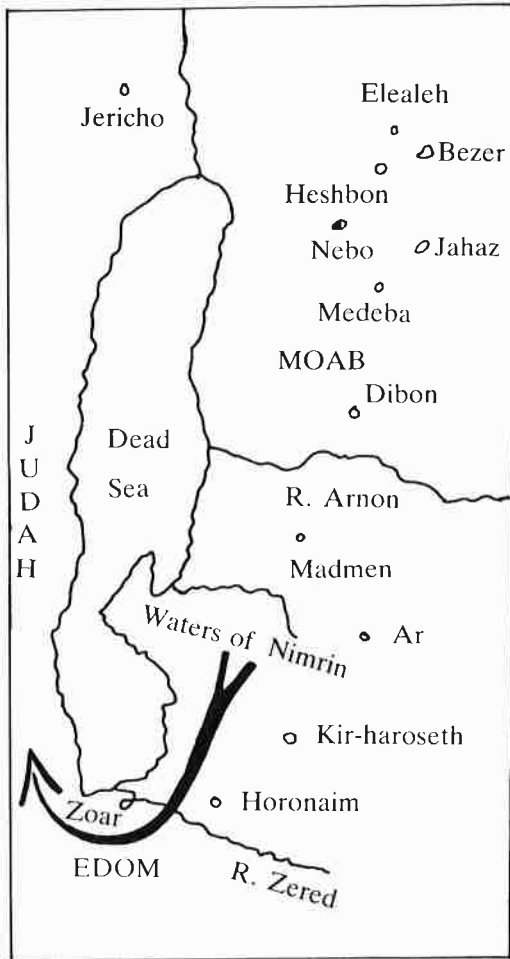
The term Palestina was first used by Herodotus (484—424 B.C.), the great Greek historian, as a designation of southern Syria. This term was used also by the Romans. Originally it applied to the territory of Israel's foes, the Philistines.

When the land of Israel came under British occupation after the First World War (1914-1918), Palestine was the official designation of that part of the Holy Land under her mandate. This embraced much more than the Philistines country. With the Jews returned to their homeland and becoming a nation, May 14, 1948, Palestine ceased to be used as a national name. It was changed to Israel. But the Arabs, now ousted by the incoming Jews, clung to the name Palestine. They claim they are Palestinians, sons of the soil. Their avowed purpose is to liberate their country from the Jews. P.L.O. stands for Palestine Liberation Organisation.

Nevertheless, the Palestina in Isaiah's prophecy is Philistines country. The Philistines dwelt on the Mediterranean coast. One of their towns known as Gaza was made famous by Samson visiting her and carrying away the city gates at night to avoid capture (Judges 16:1-3).

In the year that king Ahaz died ambassadors from Philistia came to Jerusalem to solicit help. This occasioned the prophet's warning against rejoicing over the fact that one Assyrian king was dead, for a worse one would arise. Philistia was doomed under the continuing Assyrian invasion, but Zion, by God's appointment, shall stand. What a comfort to know that nations that trust in the Lord will be saved in a war involving super powers. Thank God that He cares for His Church by a "particular providence".

THOUGHT Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. (Ps 20:7).



BURDEN OF MOAB

Of all Gentile nations surrounding Israel, there's none so closely linked to Judah as Moab. Moab is Lot's son by his first daughter (Gen 19:36ff). Ruth, the Moabitess, became David's great-grandmother (Ruth 4:17; I Sam 22:3ff). Yet Moab was hostile to God's people.

The prophet describes in detail the invasion of Moab which is further expanded by Jeremiah (Jer 48). Moab is advised to send tribute to Judah as she escapes through Edom (Sela is Petra the capital). In Judah will the throne of David be established with lasting righteousness. Sympathy is expressed by the prophet for the fleeing Moabites. The prophet declares his vision of Moab would begin to be fulfilled in three years.

PRAYER Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God. (Psalm 42:11) Amen.

BURDEN OF DAMASCUS

Damascus is the capital of Syria (even to this day). Syria, if you re-read Isaiah 7, was “confederate with Ephraim”, i.e. allied with Israel the northern kingdom against Judah, the southern kingdom, in Ahaz’ reign. Isaiah had then predicted the overthrow of Assyria (Isaiah 7:1-16). Isaiah, writing here probably early in the reign of Hezekiah, Ahaz’ son, looks forward to a further fulfilment in the future.

Since Syria will be conquered by the Assyrians, Ephraim (Israel) whose fate is bound with Syria, will also be conquered. “The cities of Aroer are forsaken” may refer to some northern cities or to those in the south (Jer 48:19; Num 32:34). Whichever these might be, being allied to the wrong party, they suffer the same fate (Read Ps 1).

The destruction of these countries and cities is given in the image of reaping in the rich valley of Rephaim. What a wholesale cutting of the crop, a picture of the mass slaughter. Yet, there will be a remnant. This is described in the gathering of grapes and of olives. The “shaking” followed on the “beating” of Deuteronomy 24:20 (compare Isa 24:13). Even then two or three berries would be left in the top branches (the doctrine of remnants with God’s people).

The groves and images (v. 8), says Ryrie, refer to wooden pillars representing the female goddess in Canaanite religion. Planting pleasant plants and setting it with strange slips, according to Ellicott, seems to refer to indulging in foreign (Syrian) character of worship, and of a strange god. The end of it all would be grief and sorrow.

“Woe to the multitude of many people . . .” probably refers to Sennecherib’s army. While the Assyrians were God’s instruments of judgement on Syria and Ephraim (Israel), they were punished at the end because of their crimes. V. 14 refers to chapter 37:36 where the Assyrians were destroyed by God’s angel in one night.

READ Psalm 46!

BURDEN OF ETHIOPIA

The word for Ethiopia here is Cush, which is the Sudan. As Isaiah talks of “beyond the rivers”, the region he refers to includes the present day Ethiopia. Ethiopia is called the land shadowing with wings or of “whirring” and “buzzing” wings, because it abounds with insects.

About the year 714 B.C. So (Sabako) managed to take the Egyptian crown (II Kings 17:4). This Ethiopian power over Egypt lasted until 633 B.C. when the crown reverted to Egyptian nationality.

As Isaiah is a prophet to the Judean court, as he meets ambassadors from Ethiopia coming by papyrus boats via the Nile River, he dissuades these who have come seeking an alliance against the Assyrian super power. Isaiah describes the Ethiopians as a tall and smooth-skinned people (NIV), a people feared far and wide, a nation treading down, whose land the rivers divide (NKJV). From this address to the Ethiopian ambassadors Isaiah calls on the whole earth to hear God's message. God has no need of political manoeuvres. He will take His time working silently and constantly as the seasons. He will wait for the enemy to come to the mountains of Judah (compare 14:25). There He will cut down the invader on the very eve of victory like the destroying of a crop before harvest. The destroyed crop will be given over to the birds and beasts, summer and winter. This is Isaiah's poetic description of the carcasses of men that will provide carrion flesh to the birds and beasts of prey for a long time. Read Isaiah 37:36.

The message concludes at v. 7 with a look into the future when Ethiopia will bring gifts to Mount Zion, to Jerusalem in submission to the Lord. Isaiah's universal view of God's kingdom is expressed in this message as in his other messages.

PRAYER “I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord” (Psalm 122). Amen.

BURDEN OF EGYPT

Egypt was one of the two super powers with Assyria in the ancient world. Whereas Assyrian power was waxing higher in Isaiah's days, Egyptian power was on the wane. This was working out according to God's plan over the nations. The time of Egypt's judgement was at hand!

God uses the wrath of men to work out His praises (Ps 76:10). He confounds Egypt, a nation steeped in idolatry, first by civil war and strife. Thus internally weakened Egypt falls prey to the overspreading Assyrian power. Egypt was conquered by Esarhaddon the Assyrian king, 671 B.C.

The Chinese saying, "Natural disasters and man-engendered tribulations", comes true in the process of judgement from on high. Not only would Egypt be overturned politically, but also physically. The River Nile, the life of Egypt, would fail to overflow its banks. This would cut off irrigation to the thirsty land. The tributaries of the Nile, the smaller rivers and streams, would also dry up. This would devour the economy of the nation, bringing it down to near-famine conditions. Agriculture, fishery and the weaving industry would be seriously curtailed.

With God against Egypt, the wisdom of her wise men will be confounded. "The Lord hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof: and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit" (Isa 19:14). When God is against a nation, He will send a spirit of gross-misjudgement in her leaders. For example: Hitler's miscalculations and wrong moves during World War II. Therefore, righteousness is a nation's strongest bulwark. A nation turned from God, or against God, is bound to lose. But the words of a righteous king are our defence—King George VI called on Britain and the empire to stand on God's side, rather than pray God to stay on her side.

V. 17-25 looks beyond the near-future to the distant-future, to the millennial kingdom of Christ, when the two super powers will serve the Lords together with Israel in the centre. A first glimpse of the golden peace prevailing on the three countries is given in Isa 11:16.

LISTEN! "He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth . . . Be still, and know that I am God!" (Ps 46:9, 10).

A PICKETING PROPHET!

Sargon was king of Assyria 722-705 B.C. In the year (711 B.C.) that Tartan, Sargon's general (II Kings 18:17) captured Ashdod, one of the principal ports and strongholds of the Philistines, in the course of widespread Assyrian conquests, God had a strange message for Isaiah: "Go and loose the sackcloth from off your loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot".

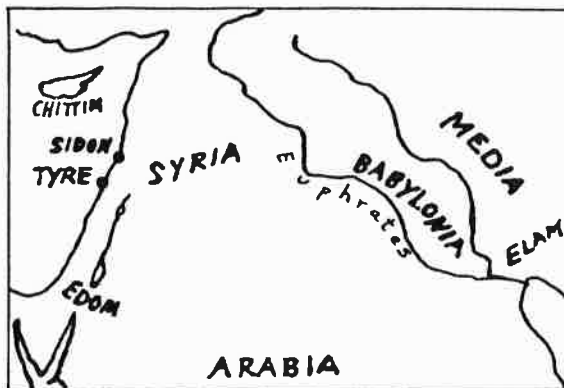
What amounted to was a stripping of one very soberly attired, moving among kings and ambassadors. And for the prophet to be seen in public in his underwear and barefoot for three years was no small sensation in Jerusalem. Isaiah was the talk of the town.

Was the prophet insane? By no means! According to the prophet's testimony, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord had given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel . . ." (Isa 8:18), he was doing exactly what God had commanded him to do. In order to get the message across to His people, God sometimes has to adopt very unusual means. Thus He told Jeremiah and Ezekiel also to be object lessons like Isaiah, whether in carrying a yoke on the shoulders (Jer 28:10) or lying down in a public place (Eze 4:4). The sign of a semi-naked prophet walking about Jerusalem, whether going to market, or on an appointment with the Palace, could not be avoided. What was that sign? God said, "Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia, so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Ethiopian captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt . . ." (Isa 20:4). The message is that those countries that were looking to Egypt and Ethiopia for protection against the invading Assyrian forces would be completely let down. Is there a message here to small nations today aligning themselves with super-power blocs? Or should they not rather call on God for protection?

A lesson we can learn from the picketing prophet is that by using such unusual means we can get a message across to the people what a hundred sermons cannot. A modern prophet in the Isaianic tradition is Carl McIntire who is not ashamed to picket single-handedly before presidents and councils. It takes men of courage to do the unusual.

HYMN "Courage brother! do not stumble,
Though thy path be dark as night;
There's a star to guide the humble:
Trust in God and do the right."

BURDEN OF BABYLON, NO. 2



Speaking of Pharaoh's doubled dream, Joseph observed, "It is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass" (Gen 41:32). That Isaiah should be burdened to speak on Babylon a second time is God's confirmation that what is determined of Babylon is determined. Hence the repetition, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen" (Isa 21:9). (What was Isaiah's first message on Babylon in chapter 13?) Revelation 18:2 takes up this cry and applies it to that end-time godless world system.

The introduction of this message is given in cryptic language, "the desert of the sea". This refers to Babylon's topography, her situation "on a great plain which was intersected by the Euphrates and canals, as well as marshes and lakes, that it floated, as it were, in the sea" (Delitzsch). Elam is ancient Persia, and Media her other powerful arm in the attack on Babylon.

The prophet in the vision enters into the visual experiences of a watchman. The figures that appear of horsemen and chariots of asses and camels, and of a lion, all speak of war.

V. 10 seems to be an expression of sympathy for Israel, God's people, who will suffer under Babylon before her overthrow. Remember, Judah was exiled to Babylon for 70 years before the Persians came to their deliverance.

THOUGHT As God's people living in this end-time Babylon, let us be aware of the evil times that might soon engulf us. Let us await Christ's coming by daily doing God's will. Amen.

BURDEN OF DUMAH

This message of Dumah is directed at Edom. Edom is also called Mount Seir. There comes a voice to the Watchman-prophet as of one in a long dark night waiting for morning. Does this question imply a time of suffering with Babylon in her overthrow? In a war of the future every country will be affected one way or another.

The answer is one of vagueness and uncertainty. Though the morning comes, night follows hard upon her heels. There's a glimpse of light, but it is soon overwhelmed by darkness. Is that not the condition of war? The chaotic conditions of war are expressed in the Chinese saying, "It is neither day or night."

The questioner is requested to ask again. If we are watchful for the coming of the Lord, we will not be wrong!

BURDEN OF ARABIA

The war that the prophet sees will affect even the isolated caravans in the Arabian deserts. This is dramatised in a warning given to caravans of Dedanites, neighbours of Edom (Ezek 25:13), wending their usual trail through the desert. The enemy are on the ambush! They are marauding and plundering everywhere! Let these caravans therefore make the thickets their camouflage. Let them spend the night under cover.

The drama is now enacted by the people of Tema. Let these relieve the refugees with water and bread, acts of mercy with which the Almighty is well-pleased.

The prophet predicts that within one year, exactly the duration of an indentured servant, Arabia will be subdued. This is sure to happen as the God of Israel, the God over all nations as well, has said. This is a review of events, insofar as Arabia is concerned. What a shock to any nation brewing in international trouble!

PRAYER Lord, help me to be prepared at all times to face any situation. Amen.

BURDEN OF JERUSALEM

“The valley of vision”, perhaps some secluded spot of Jerusalem where the prophet has received his visions, now comes under divine scrutiny (v.10). Jerusalem, where the prophet resides, is also to be judged! Jerusalem cannot escape the world-war of Isaiah’s prophecy.

What Isaiah denounces is the abandoned wallowing in sensual pleasures of Jerusalem’s rulers, like pigs fattening before their slaughter. The occasion of this senseless revelry was Assyrian king Sennecherib’s temporary departure from laying siege to Jerusalem. For this short-lived respite, Judah had to pay a tribute of 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold. (II Kings 18:14). What occasion for rejoicing was there for an army that never saw heroic action on the battlefield? These who were literally cowards? Rather, this should be a day of humiliation (v.5)

The prophet, thus provoked, was given a vision of what would happen of a succeeding invasion in which troops from Elam and Kir (an Assyrian province near Media, II Kings 16:9) would take part.

The people of Jerusalem, while striving the best they could to defend their city, in reinforcing the City Wall and in conserving water supply, nevertheless, would not look to their God.

The unconverted remained unconverted. They adopted rather an Epicurean philosophy, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die”. To such a viewpoint St Paul would subscribe if there is no hope beyond this life (I Cor 15:32). But we who are God’s people have a hope beyond the grave. According to St Paul’s classic exposition of the Christian hope (I Cor 15) we have the resurrection of the body. We have everlasting life in Jesus Christ.

A senseless and sensual Israel will be judged. So everyone who has the knowledge of God, but persists in his or her own folly of unbelief.

PRAYER Lord, deliver us from the flood-tide of today’s “enjoy yourself” philosophy. Help me to live for Your Kingdom and glory. Amen.

SHEBNA DEMOTED, ELIAKIM PROMOTED

Shebna and Eliakim were both high officers in the Jewish Government in the days of Isaiah and King Hezekiah. Both were representatives of Hezekiah to negotiate with Sennacherib the invading king of Assyria, and both were sent with Hezekiah's message to Isaiah. Read Isaiah 36-37.

At first Shebna preceded Eliakim in position and dignity. Shebna was "over the house" according to Isaiah 22:15, but in Isaiah 36 and 37 and II Kings 18, Eliakim takes over instead, while Shebna is now called "the scribe".

Isaiah 22:15-25 tells the story of how the first became last, and the last first. Shebna was denounced by the Lord for feathering his own nest. While in public office, he was making a monument for himself by hewing a rock tomb. And this at a time of national crisis. Isaiah therefore pronounced upon him the Lord's sentence that he would go into captivity in a far country (Babylon) and die there. That is the end of every selfish and vainglorious politician. Of every material and power-seeking professional churchman. Beware of "Personality Cult."

Eliakim is appointed in Shebna's place who will govern the inhabitants of Jerusalem with magnanimity. To him is committed the key of David, the highest authority over the royal household. The key of David mentioned in Revelation 3 in regard to the Church of Philadelphia is a direct reference to this key.

Eliakim will be like a peg in a firm place upon which will be hung vessels of all sorts, from cups to jars. He will be greatly honoured of his family.

V. 25, however, seems to say of Eliakim's downfall also, when he will be crowded upon by relatives for jobs and positions under his powerful patronage. When nepotism sets in, God's support is removed. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor 10:12).

PRAYER Lord, keep our government clean of nepotism and of every other abuse of power. Amen.

BURDEN OF TYRE

Tyre was the greatest maritime power of the ancient world. Her merchant seamen roamed the seas as far as the Indian Ocean and the English Channel (cf. I Kings 10:22).

During the reigns of David and Solomon, Hiram, king of Tyre, was on friendly terms with Israel. Hiram supplied Solomon the cedars of Lebanon for the building of God's House. This was the golden age of Tyre.

Because of her pride, Tyre could not escape judgment from the world-war of Isaiah's prophecy. Tyre would be subjugated not so much by Assyria as by the new world-power, Babylon. Inasmuch as the Jews were taken captive to Babylon and abode there 70 years (Jer 25:11), so Tyre was doomed to the same fate (v.15).

The message is dramatised by a lamentation uttered to ships of Tarshish (Spain) coming to Tyre via Chittim (Cyprus). Inasmuch as the Babylonian conquest of the ancient world affected even Egypt (v.5) with her great river Sihor (Nile), so Tyre would be surely taken. This judgment came from the Lord.

As a result of Tyre's conquest of Babylon, no more would her ships prosper the Mediterranean countries with her trade (v.4). Her people would be scattered to distant Tarshish (v.6) and nearby Chittim (v.12).

After Tyre's recovery at the end of 70 years of Babylonian rule, the City waxed prosperous again, like a harlot. In latter years Tyre was brought low by the Greeks, and during the Middle Ages, by Saracens and Crusaders.

Tyre and Babylon are both used in Revelation 17 and 18 for a composite picture of the world-system as seducer and oppressor against the city of God.

THOUGHT Has the burden of Tyre a message for the maritime nations of Southeast Asia, especially Singapore?

ISAIAH APOCALYPSE – GLOBAL HOLOCAUST ON THE HORIZON

The word “apocalypse” is composed of two Greek words, “apo” = from, and “kalypt-ein” = to cover. It is the name of the last book of the New Testament containing the “Revelation” granted to St John.

Inasmuch as the Apocalypse of St John the Divine is the Revelation of the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, so these four chapters which theologians call “the Isaiah Apocalypse” is the Revelation of a global holocaust before the coming of Israel’s God and Saviour. A global holocaust looming on the horizon!

Isaiah has discharged a series of “burden” messages on individual nations surrounding Israel. From chapters 24 – 27 the prophet is given an enlarged vision of the whole world in final conflagration because of sin. Yea, even the cosmic powers will be shaken (24:21) together with “kings of the earth”, i.e. with all the contending super powers.

Out of this gloom of a global holocaust under the judging hand of God, a brighter note is struck! When God comes to put under His feet all the forces of evil, death and all the sorrows of life will also be vanquished! “He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces . . .” (25:8). Even the mystery of bodily resurrection is revealed (26:19) which is mentioned but two other times in the Old Testament (Job 19:25-27; Dan. 12:2).

All the gloom and despair under the poisonous mushroom of the nuclear bomb has jolted millions in Europe to cry for disarmament, but our defence is in the Risen Saviour. Jesus says, “Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death”. Reader, what is your defence in the coming Third World War?

PRAYER Out of my bondage, sorrow and night, Jesus I come to Thee. Amen.

GOD OVER THE GLOBAL HOLOCAUST

The utter emptying and overturning of the earth by fire is described by the prophet in a crescendo at v. 6: "Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left". Does this description tell of a nuclear war in which, as predicted by military scientists, hundred-millions on either side will sear to death?

While men have invented super-weapons to kill one another, Isaiah sees the higher hand of God in operation from the very outset, "Behold, *the Lord* maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof" (v.1).

The theology of war, insofar as man is concerned, is traced always to his sin! V.5 says, "The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant". What brought the Flood? The reason was the same: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5).

When war comes, v.2 tells us, there will be no difference in social standing between priest and people, servant and master, maid and mistress, etc. All will become one class of refugees. But there will still be a remnant in the (Holy) Land (v.13), like the few olive berries and the few grapes left behind in the harvesting. These will sing for the Lord and cry for Him aloud. Yea, even from the uttermost part of the earth we heard songs to the glory of the Righteous. God has come to deliver His saints inasmuch as He has judged the wicked.

Again the prophet sees the earth reeling, this time to rise no more. The grand finale is reached when God shakes the cosmic powers and punishes the kings of the earth, and comes in glory to reign in Jerusalem.

THOUGHT To know that it is God who controls the pressing of buttons is consoling thought. "For I know whatever befalls me, Jesus doeth all things well".

SONG TO THE GOD OF LIBERATION

Inasmuch as the Crossing of the Red Sea is commemorated with a Song by Moses, so the deliverance of Israel from the global holocaust by their God is celebrated with this song of liberation to their God. This song is called by some an Old Testament Magnificat. (The Magnificat in the New Testament is Mary's song of praise in which she magnifies the Lord. Luke 1:46).

In this song the prophet extols the miraculous works of God as well as His faithfulness and truth. For He has humbled the powerful and mighty ones, and preserved the poor and needy, refugees from the blast of the mighty and terrible. Like a strong wall God keeps His people safe from the stormy blast. God silences the uproar of the Gentiles, "as heat is reduced by the shadow of a cloud" (NIV).

In victory God will prepare a sumptuous feast, even a banquet of finest wines, "in this mountain" (Jerusalem) for all peoples. On the very "mountain", "the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations" (NIV) will be destroyed. Even death itself will be swallowed up in victory . . . (I Cor 15:54). When God comes down to save Israel through the Person of His Son then will Israel's remnants cry, "Lo, this our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we shall be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (v.9). Cf. Romans 11:26. May every Jew say this even now!

In contrast, Moab, a typical enemy of God, now under the rule of Jordan's king, will be utterly trampled upon. Moab, though like a man trying to swim away, will not escape. The Lord shall bring low his pride. Moab, like a fortress, will be completely demolished to the dust – a warning to surrounding Arab nations!

PSALM 46:9 "He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire".

A SONG OF TWO CITIES

After the song of praise to the God of Liberation, the prophet follows with a Song of Two Cities, a horizontal complement to the song in the vertical. Notice this song is to be sung "in that day in Judah", which therefore has particular reference to Israel in the future.

The first City is the City of God, a spiritual and strong city. It is built with walls and bulwarks of salvation. Only the righteous nation which keeps truth can enter in.

The second city, the lofty city, God brings it down to the dust to be trodden even by the feet of the poor. Apparently the latter is the City of Man.

The just and righteous, living with the wicked in the City of Man, yearn earnestly "in the night" (v.9) for God to come to dispense justice. But the wicked will not repent though given grace by His Majesty. God will vanquish all the tyrants that have lorded over the Jews. What consolation to Israel today, hampered on all sides by hostile nations. Not only will God overpower Israel's enemies, but also will He increase His people.

Today there are over 4 million Jews in Israel and 15 million in the whole world. This, despite the extermination of 6 million by Hitler in WWII. Thus v.16-18 speaks of a time of national tribulation, but v.19 ends with the hope of bodily resurrection. Daniel 12:2 refers to a resurrection of the unjust. Scofield says, "The restoration and re-establishment of Israel as a nation is also spoken of as a resurrection" (Eze 37:1-11).

This song concludes with a reiteration of the Lord coming to punish the inhabitants of the earth. It exhorts God's people to endure yet a little while in hiding until the "indignation be overpast". "In that day" the Lord will punish leviathan the piercing serpent and leviathan the crooked serpent and slay the dragon of the sea. It is thought that these represent Assyria, Babylon and Egypt, the world powers in Old Testament times. These were all hostile to God's Kingdom. God will deal with the super powers of the end-times all the same.

ANOTHER SONG OF THE VINEYARD

In chapter 5 is the Song of the Vineyard, a parable of the House of Israel and Judah (v.7). In that Song of the Vineyard Israel and Judah are sharply admonished.

In this chapter the Vineyard no doubt is Israel again. Instead of sharp admonition, it is a loving protestation of God's gentle care for His people. God will "in that day" defend her from "briers and thorns" (v.4), i.e. from her enemies. V.6 refers to the return of the Jews to their homeland (officially proclaimed 1948) and God's assurance of good success. Israel will not only be established again, but will become a world power!

V.7 shows how God's special kindness to His own is seen in contrast with His severer judgment of Israel's oppressors.

V.8. But God had to chastise Israel for her good. NIV reads, "By warfare and exile you contend with her – with His fierce blast He drives her out, as on a day the east wind blows."

V.9. NIV reads, "By this, then, will Jacob's guilt be atoned for, and this will be the full fruitage of the removal of his sin: When He makes all the altar stones to be like chalk stones crushed to pieces, no Asherah poles or incense altars will be left standing. (Israel's sin of idolatry was purged through their captivity to Assyria and Babylon).

V. 10, 11 seems to refer to Samaria that fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. The northern Ten Tribes were the first to be carried off into exile and the land desolated, for they had rejected God, "a people of no understanding" (v.11).

After all these chastisements, God now returns to Israel, v.12 and 13 speaks of a threshing of grain after which is the gathering, a picture of God's picking up the remnants of Israel one by one. "From the channel of the river" refers to the Euphrates. Assyria and Egypt were the two superpowers of Isaiah's time, typifying the uttermost parts of the earth where the Israelites would be exiled. These "pows" (prisoners of war) will return to Jerusalem. Is this prophecy not being fulfilled today?

THOUGHT The global holocaust ends with a happy note because God, not man, is in control of international events.

WOE TO DRUNKEN GOVERNORS AND CLERGY

From Chapter 28-35 we return with the prophet from that vision of a future global holocaust to the times in which he lived. Here are a series of Woe messages to the Northern Kingdom, the leading tribe of which is Ephraim with Samaria its capital.

As drinking is the chief sin today, so it was in ancient times. This is the third time that the prophet lashes out on intoxicating drinks. Drinkers, take care!

Now Samaria, set on a 300 ft. hill above a fertile valley, was an impregnable fortress, a "crown of pride". With her rulers swaying aloft also with pride both will be cast down and trodden under feet. The Lord has "a mighty and strong one" in the Assyrians' coming invasion that brought down Samaria in 722 B.C. Therefore let the faithful rather look up to the Lord for a "crown of glory" and for judgment which was sorely missing from their judges.

Now we switch from Samaria to Jerusalem the national capital. Are the leaders of the Southern Kingdom better? Even the priest and the prophet, like the professionals in both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches today, are a noisy, stumbling crowd! O yeah? Comes a retort from the unruly clergy. Who do you think we are? Little kids just weaned from their mother's milk? Are you teaching us ABC?

Surely, replies the prophet. Inasmuch as God's invitation to "rest and refreshing" was rejected by them, He would speak so to them in a foreign language (in Assyrian, the language of the invaders). Since they contemptuously brush aside the Word of God (precept upon precept, line upon line = tsav la tsav, qav la qav), as teaching ABC to children, they will have to pay heavily for it. So it is with every self-righteous, unrepentant heart, who resists the Word of the Lord through His faithful preachers today.

PRAYER Lord, save me from making scoffing remarks, which has been called "the last degree of ungodliness". Amen.

EPHRAIM (SAMARIA) A WARNING TO JUDAH

Inasmuch as the Lord would send “a mighty and strong one” (v.2) in Assyria to conquer Israel (Ephraim the chief tribe and Samaria the capital), so will He devastate Judah with the same invader. “When the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it” (v.18). The boastings of the scornful rulers in Jerusalem that they were insured from death by a cunning, secret pact with Egypt (as hinted to the prophet) were no bulwark against the on-rushing Assyrians.

In this plight Isaiah challenged the big bosses of Jerusalem as he had challenged King Ahaz earlier with God’s deliverance. Here’s another prediction of the coming Saviour (Messiah) Who is often alluded to or quoted in the N.T. (Matt. 21:42,44; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Rom. 9:33, Eph. 2:20 and I Peter 2:4-6). Christ will dispense righteous judgment like a builder measuring with line and plummet.

The help Judah thought to obtain would be like a bed too short to stretch oneself in, like a blanket that cannot fully cover one’s body. But if they trusted the Lord He would help them as in the days of their fathers at Perazim and Gibeon (Read II Sam. 5:20; Josh. 10:10). Repent, repent! So let us in all our troubles turn to the Lord. Cease from unholy schemings and alliances.

V. 24-29 is a parable of the wisdom of the farmer in the various processes of growing and reaping. He uses all kinds of methods to farm, as God has given him the wisdom. It is God who gives the might and counsel that works wonders – even to us who ask. Read the NIV for a clearer understanding of this passage.

PSALM 20 Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.

WOE TO ARIEL (ALTAR-CITY OF GOD)

Ariel, the city where David dwelt, is evidently Jerusalem, more precisely Zion, David's palace-city. Ariel means altar of God, so in the same verse is mentioned the killing of sacrifices. By addressing Jerusalem as Ariel, the prophet hints of war to come where many, like sheep, will be slaughtered. Jerusalem will be drained so weak that she will whisper like a ghost!

Yet, the Lord will come to her deliverance when, in turn, her assailants, the Assyrians under Sennacherib, will be suddenly pulverised! (Read this miraculous deliverance in Ch. 37:36). The enemy's determined assault on Jerusalem vanishes like a frustrating dream in the night! What happened to Judah's enemy occurs again today in Israel's favour, for God is with His chosen people. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

A people that go to Church by tradition, that worship God with lip-service and not heart-service, fall into a stupor of wilful ignorance. That's the picture of Judah despite the preaching of Isaiah! Now, when we refuse the light, darkness will increasingly engulf us, like one entering into a deep sleep. Even prophets and seers who are supposed to be most enlightened, and rulers who are endowed with wisdom. Woe therefore to those who take comfort to perpetrate their works in darkness (for their deeds are evil). Reader, do you try desperately to cover up what you are secretly doing? You will be overturned like the potter's clay!

But a better day will soon come to God's people, as the prophescope turns to the future. Instead of being closed to the things of God, the people will hear and not be deaf, and see and not be blind. The meek and the poor refer to God's very own. The wicked who work wickedness like snaring a man for his word will be severely dealt with. Jacob, the progenitor of the Israelites, will not be ashamed before God of his children.

THOUGHT How do you live up to your father's good name, you with your long Christian heritage?

**“CURSED BE THE MAN THAT TRUSTETH IN MAN
AND MAKETH FLESH HIS ARM,
AND WHOSE HEART DEPARTETH FROM THE LORD”**

(Jer. 17:5).

As the Assyrian crisis mounted Judah hastened to bolster her defence with Egyptian help. The prophet denounced such a policy that completely left God out. They that trust in man lean on a shadow! Now, when we are caught in a jam, what we should do is to remain calm. Pray! Let us listen to words of rebuke by the preacher than hear sweet professional sermons that tickle our ears! God will go counter to those who walk away from Him.

In order to achieve their end, the delegation to Egypt would hazard their lives through the southern desert, a howling wilderness of lions, vipers and fiery flying serpents. They would carry on the backs of donkeys and camels treasures to the Pharaoh, to pay homage.

But, vain is the help of man without the help of God. It is a grave sin, indeed, which, like a crack in the wall, would result in its sudden collapse. The effect of such sin is like the smashing of a pot so there remains not one sherd big enough to rake fire with, or scoop water from a puddle.

THOUGHT In contrast with Judah at this time, there is our Lord's commendation on the Church of Philadelphia. This young church, though having "a little strength," has kept God's Word and has not denied His Name. Therefore God gives her an open door of success. "Self help (a little strength) with God's help is the best help."

**GOD IS OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH
A VERY PRESENT HELP IN TROUBLE (PS 46)**

There is a saying, "One with God is majority". In blessing Israel for her close walk with God, the Lord said, "One man of you shall chase a thousand . . ." (Josh. 23:10). "And five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight . . ." (Lev. 26:8).

When Judah forsook the Lord for Egypt, this blessing was reversed. "One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee . . ." (Isa. 30:17). "For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose . . ." (Isa. 30:7).

In spite of Judah's waywardness the Lord came to her help, like a father his prodigal son (v.31). The account of the annihilation of 185,000 Assyrians in one night is given in Isaiah 37:36.

Then the prophet looks to greater future deliverance when the Messiah will return to establish His glorious reign in Israel (v.26). After the Jews have gone through a pogrom (v.20) God will give them teachers (prophets) who would direct their steps. They would be cured of their sin of idolatry. There will be a revival of material wealth in the land, but this will end in a great war (v.25). Are not these predictions being fulfilled in Israel today?

This will be climaxed with the coming of the Lord in great power and indignation. He will sift the Gentile nations with a great sieve (a terrible shake up), but Israel will come to the Lord with rejoicing as their Saviour thunders down on her adversaries. The great holocaust to come will reach its grand finale in Tophet, a burning up of the dead bodies by the Lord Himself in a huge funeral pyre. (Tophet was a 'high place' in the valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem, where child sacrifices were made to Molech). Another view of Armageddon!

PSALM 46:9,10 He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth
. . . He burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still and
know that I am God.

**GOD WILL SAVE JERUSALEM DESPITE
JUDAH'S WAYWARDNESS**

This chapter is easiest to understand. It is a repetition of the previous, in synopsis. God is mightily displeased with His own people who wilfully forget Him, who put their trust in human might. Let us quote Jeremiah 17:5 again, "Thus saith the Lord; Curseth be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord". An upcountry student who joined a modernist seminary in a metropolitan city related how before he came to school, he was taught by old-fashioned missionaries to ask his pastor to pray before seeing the doctor. Now he was taught by the new-fashioned teachers to see the doctor before the pastor. But now, by the time the pastor was consulted, the patient was already dead! What is your first reaction when trouble comes? The cleverest doctor is still a man, but the Lord is God. So are super powers, like the Egyptians in Isaiah's time, men and not God. To rely on human prowess without the Lord is the surest way to destruction.

Nevertheless, for His own Names's sake, for the covenant He had made with Israel's forefathers, God would save Jerusalem anyway. Those who trusted in dumb idols would discard them when God came to their rescue. For, the miracle that God wrought in destroying 185,000 of the Assyrians in one night could not be denied. God saved Jerusalem also for the sake of those who trusted in Him. He would not destroy Sodom if there were ten righteous men.

Israel today has been victorious over every one of her foes, not because of her righteousness, but because God is working out His Purpose. He is fulfilling those promises He had made with the fathers.

Q.E.D. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom He hath chosen for His own inheritance . . . There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by mere strength . . . Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy" (Ps. 33:12-18)

UNDER A GOOD KING AND A GOOD GOVERNMENT

This chapter looks to the distant future, to the Messiah-king with a retinue of good officers. There will be safety and security under His rule. There will be enlightenment and discernment, obedience and eloquence in His subjects. Not rabble-rousers and violent demonstrators as many governments are faced today.

In that age of enlightenment, “no longer will the fool be called noble nor the scoundrel be highly respected” (NIV). In this age of confusion and distorted values, we see, for example, how the Beatles were honoured even above Jesus Christ. The rich, the “scoundrel” by cunning and subterfuge might become mushroom millionaires. They will be highly honoured until sin finds them out. In that age of enlightenment only the noble, the good will stand.

At v.9, the prophescope now swings back to the present situation. The high-brow wives of these socialites are rebuked. This harks back to 3:16-24. V.12 “They shall lament for the teats” = “they shall beat their breasts for” – the pleasant hills, the fruitful vines. For, thorns and thistles instead would come up. A prediction of war for the times in which Isaiah lived.

From v.15 we return with the prophet to better times, when by God’s outpoured Spirit Israel will be converted. Then only will revival return to the land and peace reign supreme with righteousness. Then will the people dwell safely and securely.

V.19 hints of a time of judgment that will inconvenience God’s people before true peace is obtained.

V.20 seems to depict a time of abundance in the land through agriculture, but the people must go forth to develop the land on the principle, “no venture, no gain”. Honest, hard work is a law to prosperity in God’s Kingdom.

THOUGHT Decentralise, not centralise, is God’s way of prosperous growth.

ASSYRIA DOWN, JERUSALEM UP!

The historical background of this chapter is contained in II Kings 18:14-17. One city after another in Judah had fallen to the Assyrian hordes. In order to save Jerusalem, Hezekiah negotiated for a tribute of 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold. Like a tiger with a whetted appetite after tasting human blood, Sennecharib the Assyrian king demanded more. He sent his generals now to demand surrender. Do bullies keep their word? That was how Hitler conquered by trickery and treachery the satellite countries around Germany, yea, he even broke his treaty of peace with Russia. The prophet's opening sermon was a denunciation of such truce-breaking and perjury.

In such a national crisis the prophet cried out for Divine intervention. God answered by scattering the Assyrian forces. A vast amount of war booty fell into Judah's hands. A miraculous victory to Judah without the shooting of an arrow! One lesson we must learn from this great episode is that the Lord is "the stability of our times". The fear of the Lord, is that your treasure?

Vv.7-9 leads us to see with the prophet the sad state of affairs in the land under those wartime conditions. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. God seems to rebuke at v.11 the futility of the Assyrian schemes. Not only the Assyrians but the "sinners in Zion" (v.14). War has scared some of these hypocrites to fear His judgment.

Vv.15-19 promises safety and security to the righteous and upright, for them who are afraid to sin. If we live a holy life pleasing to the Lord, we shall be kept from death and every danger, from being taken captive in war.

Vv.20-24 looks to the impregnable security of God's city in the distant future. V.21 paints a picture of God being a bulwark against any naval assault by the enemy, a picture of great cities built along the banks of rivers, like Thebes in Egypt. V.23 paints the picture of a ship-of-state lax and unready for war. This was the state of Jerusalem before the Assyrian invasion. With God coming on the scene the tables were turned, so much so "the lame take the spoil" of the routed Assyrian army.

ANOTHER VIEW OF ARMAGEDDON

Armageddon is the place where "the kings of the whole world" are gathered "to the battle of the battle of that great day of Almighty God" (Rev 16:14). Armageddon means the hill of Megiddo which is in the vicinity of the Carmel range, not far from modern Haifa. The final world battle (Third World War?) will end in a bloody holocaust of holocausts in and around Israel!

Isaiah sees this awful climax of history involving "all nations" when He will pour His fury "upon all their armies". As a result "the mountains shall be melted with their blood" (v.3). Cosmic disturbances will evidence God's power unleashed on all flesh. V.4 is restated by our Lord in Luke 21:25-27.

Idumea, whose city Bozrah is 30 miles south of the Dead Sea, is the land of Edom, the country given to Esau. Isaiah sees a terrible slaughter here, both of the common people (lambs and goats) and of their rulers (unicorns = wild oxen, bullocks and bulls). As the Lord's method of destruction will be by fire, this would include the clash of warring nations with nuclear bombs and God's E-bombs = earthquakes! The destruction of Idumea is singled out as representative of all the nations that fight against His Land. (Read Zechariah 12).

As a result of the fiery blasts upon the land, it will be totally desolated. (v.9). It will be turned into a wilderness to be inhabited by wild beasts and birds. This is determined by God. Thus all of Israel's enemies today who suffer defeat against Israel are but having a foretaste of the coming destruction. Hence Christ the Messiah must come again to save His own.

CHORUS O can we say we are ready, brother (sister),
 Ready for the soul's bright home? . . .
 Say, will He find you and me still watching,
 Waiting, waiting when the Lord shall come?

GLORIOUS REHABILITATION

One great dimension of theological truth is missed by certain Bible teachers known as amillennialists. These say there is no 1000 years of Christ's peaceful reign on earth. If we take the description of Old Testament prophets of a golden age to come to Israel as it stands, we cannot help but come to the conclusion that after Armageddon God will work a mighty work of glorious rehabilitation wherein, as Isaiah 2:1-4 tells us, all wars shall cease. In the light of other Scriptures, we believe the Messiah (Christ) shall first come before the 1000 years of peaceful reign can materialise.

Isaiah concludes his many messages of doom and woe with a glorious rehabilitation which he sees will be God's doing in Israel. It will be a restoration of the land, a physical rehabilitation; and of her people, a spiritual rehabilitation. When God "will come with vengeance, even with recompense. He will come and save you" (v.4). How?

1. The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose (v.1). The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water (v.7). This is wonderfully being fulfilled since Israel became a nation in 1948. As a result of bringing water into the deforested barren hills, 83 million trees were planted in first 16 years of the new state. With water in abundant supply, over 700 agricultural villages have also been established.

2. The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. Today's Jewish population registered in Israel is just over 4 million. V.5 and v.6 that speaks of the eyes of the blind being opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped, etc., refers certainly to a rehabilitation of the whole person, including the new birth.

God's people will return by a safe route (no lion shall be there, etc) called The way of holiness. In chapter 30:21 the prophet says, "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it . . .". Those whom God will redeem will be provided the means and the way to return to Israel, despite many hindrances. O what glorious rehabilitation and this is just beginning to be fulfilled as Israel hopes in the coming of the Messiah.

AWAKE Are we "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God"? Or are we laying up treasures on earth, soon to be destroyed in a global war?

IN THE DAYS OF KING HEZEKIAH

Although Isaiah tells us that his ministry ran through the reigns of four kings of Judah, viz., Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, it is with the last king that the prophet worked the closest. The incorporation of four chapters of Jewish history revolving around king Hezekiah gives the readers the necessary background and a clearer perspective.

The several denouncing messages on seeking an Egyptian alliance find a corroboration in the defiance and derision of the Assyrian envoys (36:6). The names of Eliakim and Shebna (chapter 22) now stands out in prominence as the King's negotiators with the Assyrian generals. Notice that in these narratives Eliakim supercedes Shebna according to the Word of the Lord.

Though the Assyrians were Judah's enemies, according to Isaiah's observation in chapter 10:5, they were God's instrument of vengeance to chastise "an hypocritical nation". The sins of Judah, of apostasy and idolatry under Ahaz, Hezekiah's father, could not be atoned by his son. Nevertheless, God was touched by Hezekiah's tears and repentance. God answers every prayer that is of a sincere and contrite heart, even yours in your hour of acutest need. Thus came God's promise of deliverance through Isaiah, "Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him . . ." (chapter 37:6,7).

The Assyrians, though ruthless marauders, had played a part in God's programme also by destroying the idols of her conquered nations (chapter 36:19,20). In the light of this Scripture, we can understand why China fell to Mao and shuddered under the Red Guards. While Christians had to go underground, Buddhas and idols were uprooted and smashed. God is supreme, who uses the wrath of man to praise Him (Psalm 76:10), but the remainder of wrath shall He restrain.

In this historical interlude, a glimpse is given of Babylon which has figured so prominently twice in the prophet's "burdens". To have a more detailed picture of Isaiah's times, it is well to read up II Kings 16-20 and II Chronicles 26-32.

MEMORISE "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain" (Psalm 76:10).

SATAN'S PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE ANALYSED

Apart from historical facts, let us learn to analyse Satan's use of psychology in his hideous attacks on God's people. Psychological warfare is not new!

1. Satan uses propaganda through speech making. He uses the Jews' language to strike more widely and deeply into the hearts of his hearers (chapter 36:11-12). This is a right use of language. Paul spoke in the Hebrew tongue to his countrymen (Acts 22:2). A missionary to a foreign land should first learn the language of the people.

2. Satan uses truth, quoting the failure of the Egyptians (v.6) and the destruction of the gods of numerous countries (vv.18-20). This is most effective, because truth defies all arguments. We should always speak the truth.

3. Satan uses ridicule (vv.8,9). Satan falls again from his own pride! In this respect there's a good maxim from king Ahab, "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off" (I Kings 20:11). Or, "don't count the chickens before they are hatched".

4. Satan uses foul language. Christians should never use foul language since we are holy.

5. Satan uses cajolery (cheating by flattery). How he used this on Eve! Psalm 12:2 says, "They speak vanity everyone with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak". That is how the Maoists promised the peasants of China a bright future with many good things, but did they receive those promises? Beware of flattery!

6. Satan uses perversion. By comparing God the great God with false gods (vv. 18-20).

7. By perjury and blasphemy. Making a false claim that Assyria was commissioned of the Lord to destroy Judah. (Read Isa 10:5-7).

We who are preachers of the Gospel also use psychological warfare. But we must use only the truth and proclaim it with faith and humility. We must not stoop to Satan's nefarious tactics. We should never exaggerate any statement of fact. Let our speech be yea yea, nay nay.

MEMORISE Matthew 5:37.

MAN'S EXTREMITY, GOD'S OPPORTUNITY

What so brutally shocked King Hezekiah was that all the 30 talents of gold and 300 talents of silver he had extracted from the Temple to pay off Sennecherib didn't last but a few days. Like all the grab Hitler had from the satellite nations did not satiate the German juggernaut. No sooner had the Assyrians gone (chapter 22) than they turned around, demanding now total surrender.

In such extremity comes God's opportunity. Hezekiah cast himself utterly before the Lord in rent clothes and sackcloth. In modern times we had King George VI calling the British Empire to a day of humiliation and prayer at the outbreak of World War II.

In such extremity, when vain was the help of man, Hezekiah had the spiritual understanding to seek God with all his heart. In earnest prayer he spread the Assyrian King's letter of demand before the Lord, perhaps, in the Holy of Holies. In deep contrition he begged for clemency, and His own name's sake, the salvation of Jerusalem. "Seek ye the Lord," thus the prophet echoes thereafter, "while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isa 55:6,7). When will a complacent people prostrate before God in repentance?

God listens to every penitent's prayer. So comes the good news from the prophet that He will defend the city for His own sake, and for David's sake (v.35). The destruction of 185,000 Assyrian troops in one night, at Lachish (find this town on the map), saved the Day. All the scare to the Jerusalemites never appeared. Herodotus tells the story of an Assyrian army who found their camp at night attacked by hordes of field mice who ate up the bow-strings and shield handles. From this it is suggested that these rodents were carriers of bubonic plague which swept away the Assyrians in one night. Miracles can occur even through mice and rats, at the command of the Lord.

THOUGHT Hope in the Lord even in the darkest night!

WHAT CAN MELT THE HEART OF GOD? THE TEARS OF EVERY PENITENT

For a fuller account of this episode in the life of King Hezekiah, read II Kings 20:1-11. From v.6 we can visualise how the king became doubly burdened – the burden of saving Jerusalem from the Assyrians, and the burden of saving his own life. Hezekiah was 39 years old when he was told to prepare to die of a fatal illness.

What theological lesson can we learn from Hezekiah's sickness? In contrast with the philosophy of a static fatalism, Hezekiah's sickness and recovery teaches a dynamic theism.

From the testimony of Chew Fook Wah, an effective Bible-Presbyterian evangelist who was a staunch idol-worshipper, he was told by the medium that he would die at 54. The medium said that this was determined by his fate. There was no escape from it. Imagine the mounting agony he went through as he anticipated his date with death. But, he has survived that fate by over a decade since receiving Christ.

The ways of God are worlds above the determinism of a fateful philosophy, of whatever culture it is. God's dealings with man are dynamic. King Hezekiah had contracted a fatal disease perhaps from his overwork. In the circumstance he had to die. From the prophet's pronouncement, it seemed this was God's unalterable appointment. But Hezekiah was not a fatalist. Hezekiah believed God to be a benign Master. He cried his heart out to God. God was moved and granted him a reprieve of 15 years.

What can melt the heart of God?

The tears of every penitent.

Repentance is the key to God's favour and merciful kindness. Did not God threaten to destroy Nineveh in 40 days? He relented when the king and all his subjects repented.

To confirm His promise, God moved the shadow on the sun dial of Ahaz (Hezekiah's father) ten degrees backward, as if to reflect His pronounced prolongation of Hezekiah's days. As to the application of a fig-poultice on his boil, that would help Hezekiah's faith in the recovery.

THOUGHT A Christian must never say, "Die".

HEZEKIAH'S PSALM OF LIFE

What are the sentiments of a man given fifteen more years to live in answer to his pleading? Let us discover Hezekiah from this psalm he has written from that traumatic experience. Let us call it Hezekiah's psalm of life.

What other psalms of life are there for comparative study? Psalm 90 by Moses is the most well known, being put to English verse in "O God Our Help in Ages Past". Another psalm of life may be found in Psalm 49. As for Hezekiah's, we may gather three main points of his feelings.

1. Life is short. Like the pitching and removing of a shepherd's tent (in contrast with a permanent home). Like a weaver, how fast is his weaving!

2. The grave, the pit, even death, in contrast with the land of the living, is a negative place. Hezekiah mourns like a dove, chatters like a crane or a swallow when he considers death. He does not go deeper into judgment or reward after death.

3. Life, though short, is worth living. Hezekiah has the zest for living a God-given life. "The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth" (v.19). He praises God for saving his life and is so grateful that he overflows in a psalm to be sung to stringed instruments.

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime;
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.

– Longfellow

THOUGHT Every Christian should live a faithful life of service, and so make the profit of such a life as to render it profitably to the Lord before the judgment seat of Christ. A Christian who lives for himself is no friend of King Hezekiah.

**“A MAN’S PRIDE SHALL BRING HIM LOW
BUT HONOUR SHALL UPHOLD THE HUMBLE IN SPIRIT”**

(Prov. 29:23)

If you read further in II Chronicles 32:24-31 you will see deeper into this 39th chapter of Isaiah the lurking heart of a restored saint of God. Can such a humbled man become so conceited? Jeremiah 17:9 is one verse we must always repeat, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”

After the routing of the Assyrians by God’s miraculous intervention, whereby 185,000 troops were destroyed in one night, Judah suddenly became the super power of this part of the ancient world. So has Israel become a super power in the Middle East today by defeating the combined strength of the Arab countries in five wars. As a result Hezekiah’s “heart was lifted up . . .” (II Chron. 32:25). “God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart” (II Chron. 32:31). Dear successful Christian leader, how does your heart measure before an omniscient God?

With the defeat of the Assyrians, there was the beginning of a stirring of a small state called Babylon on the distant horizon. Its king Merodach-Baladan, with plots of rebellion against his master, sent presents to Jerusalem with more than wishing its ruler health. Whatever his sinister designs, this is evident from Isaiah’s query of his envoys’ credentials. Why didn’t King Hezekiah ask the prophet’s counsel in time of peace? Is God’s help needed only in war? Moreover, the flattered monarch, in an unguarded moment, had revealed all the state secrets to the Babylonian visitors.

The prophescope of Isaiah immediately swung into action. There and then the displeased Lord showed His servant Hezekiah how Judah would be taken into captivity to Babylon in his descendants. Hezekiah was grateful for this, the Lord’s second reprieve.

PRAYER Forgive me for not seeking Thee in time of peace. Amen.

PROLOGUE TO MANY MESSAGES OF CONSOLATION

Inasmuch as chapter 39 closes with Judah's coming captivity to Babylon, the culmination of God's judgment on His wayward children, chapter 40 leads us into their restoration. Whereas the first part of Isaiah, chapters 1 – 39 tells of Old Testament judgments, chapters 40 – 66 opens a vista to New Testament times of consolation and liberation.

Such restoration of God's people has a two-fold aspect: 1) The gathering of Israel and the raising again of David's throne in a golden millennial rule on earth. 2) The spiritual blessings that will come to the whole world through Israel by the sufferings of Christ, the greater David.

Jerusalem is the capital city of Israel. Zion, where King David's palace was, is situated in Jerusalem itself. Jerusalem, often used interchangeably with Zion, will be the centre from which good tidings, the Gospel, will radiate to other cities of Judah, even to the uttermost parts of the earth.

V.3 which talks of preparing the way of the Lord, by making it straight in the desert, etc., is claimed by John the Baptist to be his ministry of heralding the Christ (Matt 3:3).

V.6 which contrasts the frailty of mankind with the durability of the Word of God is elaborated by the Apostle Peter as that which is preached by the Gospel (I Peter 1:25).

It is important for us to see in the writings of Isaiah a two-fold picture in the things to come, viz., Israel and the Church, the Law and the Gospel, the physical and the spiritual.

The first eleven verses of chapter 40 constitute a prologue to this remaining portion of Isaiah. It is a message of "comfort" or "consolation" to God's own children. This is what the Gospel brings to every sin-oppressed soul, to every struggling heart in a world beset with strife and fear, violence and war.

CHORUS "The Comforter has come, the Comforter has come . . .
O spread the tidings round, wherever man is found,
The Comforter has come."

HOW BIG IS GOD OUR DELIVERER?

Surely He is not like one of the myriads of graven images they would be confronted with in Babylonia. Not like the Buddhas, gold-plated or silver-plated, you would discover in the hundreds of temples in Bangkok (v.18-20).

God, our Deliverer, first, of Israel His chosen race, is the Creator of heaven and earth (vv.26-28), its Governor and Supervisor (vv.22,23). The greatness of God in power and wisdom is particularly emphasised. Our God is the Omnipotent, All-powerful One, the Omniscient, All-knowing One; the Omnipresent, the One Who is everywhere. What verses in this portion of Scripture could list under these three headings? The Hebrew in v.22 has the connotation of the earth being a sphere. Isaiah might not know modern geography and the significance of the particular word used, but God who inspired him to write does.

Though God is so great, so big in kindergarten language, the complacent Israelites did not know Him. God was yet to be experienced in all His power and greatness (v.27). Therefore the prophet challenges them, and us today in our spiritual lethargy, with the last three verses, vv.27-31. God is ever near to revive us and quicken us who wait upon Him. Did you ever stop to pray when confronted with a problem? These three verses are condensed further into one verse according to chapter 57:15, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him that is of a contrite (broken) and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

SHORTER CATECHISM Q4. What is God?

A. God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

GOD WILL JUDGE THE NATIONS BY A NEW EASTERN SUPER POWER

In order to redeem His people from Babylonian captivity, which was predicted to Hezekiah in chapter 39, God will raise up a new super power from the east. V.25 reiterates that "he", the leader of this new eastern power, will also come from the north. This indicates the encircling movement the emerging power will make in its attack on the Babylonian empire (v.25).

Who is this man "from the east", and "from the rising of the sun"? He is not some Japanese conqueror, for the object of conquest is principally Babylonia (Japan had no dealings with Babylonia). The great leader of this new super power is Cyrus, king of Persia. His name is mentioned for the first time in chapter 44: 28.

V.1 is a summons from the Lord God Almighty, Ruler of nations, to the uttermost parts of the ancient world, even to the islands afar off, to judgment! Following this verse is the prophet's prediction of Cyrus' imminent conquest (vv.2-5).

Vv.6,7 describes the threatened nations resorting to new idols for protection. "How foolish!" said the prophet in an earlier sermon, "They worship the work of their own hands" (2:8). By way of application, there are Roman Catholic soldiers who wear crucifixes and Mary medallions for protection, while misguided Protestant soldiers are known to carry "bullet-proof" Testaments in their shirt pockets.

Let those who are God's own hear what Isaiah says to Israel in vv.8-14. Because the Jews are Abraham's seed, God promises to keep them from evil when tribulations come. God gave this guarantee to Abraham, "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee" (Gen. 12:3).

Vv.15, 16. God will make Israel like "a new sharp instrument having teeth", an all-victorious weapon over her enemies. The present events in the Middle-east which show Israel scoring victory after victory over her enemies are a fulfilling of this prophecy.

God being favourable to Israel, they will be preserved intact in the war between Persia and Babylon.

THOUGHT "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee" (Ps. 122:6).

THE KING OF JACOB (GOD) VERSUS THE GOD OF NATIONS

Not only will Israel be preserved intact in the Persian invasion of the nations, her land will blossom again with the opening up of water resources. This is being fulfilled today as Israel irrigates her land with water from Galilee and from the subterranean springs in the Southern desert.

War brings destruction not only to the people of the land but also to the land itself. Trees are cut down at random by an impoverished people for livelihood. During the rule of the Turks, a tax was levied on every sizeable tree. The poor who could not pay the tree-tax had theirs removed. When Israel regained her land again in 1948 it was a brown rocky wilderness.

In order to rehabilitate their land they immediately embarked on a programme of tree-planting (Revise chapter 35). The orange which is not mentioned in v.19 is a transplanted species. Jaffa oranges are a chief dollar earner. Every year \$75 million worth of citrus fruit is exported. All these endeavours cannot succeed unless God sends them the seasonal rains (Zech. 10:1). The transformation of a deforested country into a fruitful field cannot be achieved but by God's help.

In contrast with the power of the living and true God, the gods of nations are a dumb lot, much less capable of predicting the future. Can they foretell the events of good or evil to come? By no means, for they are less than nothing.

But God has predicted the one to come from the east, who will invade from the north (vv.2, 25), identified as Cyprus (44:28). God is the One who first told it to Zion, who gave to Jerusalem a message of good tidings. But from the false gods, He found no word or answer, for they, these molten images, are wind and confusion.

READ Psalm 115 for a classic statement on idolatry.

PRAYER Lord, help me always to worship only Thee.

THE SPIRIT OF THE SERVANT OF JEHOVAH

The title “servant” is given in Isaiah first to David (37:35), then to Israel as a nation (41:8, 9) and finally to the Messiah (42:1-7). Henceforth, this Servant of Jehovah is described with an ever-increasing suffering in 49:1-13, 50:4-9, 52:13 - 53:12. Let those who enter the Lord’s Service learn this first lesson – servanthood and suffering!

This Servant is endued with the Holy Spirit (cf. 11:1, 2). His mission is to the Gentiles, “to bring forth judgment” (justice). His spirit is one of gentleness and compassion. He is identified by Matthew in Matt. 12:15-21 to be none other than our Lord. He will not break a bruised reed (a tall grass-stalk much used as a yardstick), nor will He snuff out the flickering wick of an oil lamp about to smoke out. Is that not the way our Saviour deals with us, miserable, poor, lost sinners?

Because He is the One, the God of the whole creation has called and upheld, He will carry out His mission of dispensing justice to the uttermost parts of the earth with unwavering confidence. His gentleness and compassion are a manifestation of His strength.

“A light of the Gentiles” speaks of the world-wide mission of the Gospel. The Gospel has a two-fold purpose. First the spiritual opening of blind eyes and the setting free of prisoners of sin. Second, the physical, such as are seen in the miracles our Lord has performed in the days of His earthly life. So does the Church continue in this ministry after Him in an unobtrusive way. But those who go forth in Christ’s name, making a lot of noise in the strength of the flesh and drawing attention unto themselves, have not the Spirit of Christ. Paul, a true servant of the Lord, says, “For we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Christ’s sake” (II Cor. 4:5). Paul has the Spirit of Christ, an example for us to follow.

MEMORISE II Cor. 4:5

PRAYER Open my eyes that I may see
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me.

“TO GOD BE THE GLORY GREAT THINGS HE HATH DONE”

The ultimate purpose in the far-reaching mission of the Lord's Servant is to bring glory to God (idols are condemned again). The prophet therefore calls on the whole world from the wilderness to the cities, to the islands of the sea, to praise His Name.

Now, instead of dwelling on the gentleness and meekness of His Servant, the Lord is seen by the prophet as a warrior charging vociferously into the battlefield. He is seen as a woman moaning in childbirth. He lets loose His pent-up feelings against evil. The evil and sin that is uppermost in the mind of the Lord is idolatry (v.17).

In v.19 is also the mention of a servant. This is not the Servant who is identified as the Christ. This servant is a blind servant and a deaf one – the personification of the backsliding nation of Israel. Israel has been a servant and messenger sent by the Lord to the world. But she is now blind and deaf to her charge. She has become blind and deaf by her idolatry (v.17). Read Psalm 135:15-18. In Matthew 15:14 Jesus rebukes the Jewish leaders of His day as blind leaders of the blind. Because Israel's God had done many mighty miracles before Israel, but she was blind to them all. Therefore she is left to be robbed, as a caravan is attacked by marauders in the desert and cruelly imprisoned. Israel has come under such a heavy punishment as being burnt in battle. Yet she does not realise what the cause of her misfortune is. How this applies to present predicaments facing Israel in all the hostilities surrounding her. Does Israel today know the Lord God and His Servant Jesus Christ whom He has sent for 2000 years?

THOUGHT How do you react to troubles and misfortunes that come your way, one after the other?

CHORUS Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
 Let the earth hear His voice!
 Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
 Let the people rejoice!
 O come to the Father thro' Jesus the Son,
 And give Him the glory; great things He hath done.

A COVENANT GOD RETURNS TO HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE

In spite of her sins, God who has made a covenant with Israel as His chosen people, returns to her. Like a husband to his wayward wife, because he loves her (54:1-8). The prophet assures the people whom He loves a safe passage of return from many quarters to their homeland under the new regime of the Persians. Though Egypt, Ethiopia and Seba will greatly suffer in the invasion, Israel will be kept intact through “deep water and flaming fire”, as the Chinese saying goes.

As the nations have no knowledge of the future, but God is the living and true God who knows the end from the beginning, and Israel whom he had chosen are His witnesses, therefore let all know He is the Lord and only Saviour. No one can resist what God will do.

In saving Israel, God will bring down Babylon and the Chaldeans, as He has defeated the Egyptians in the Red Sea (vv. 16, 17). God will do another miracle, a new thing, by leading His people (out of Babylon) safely through the desert.

But though God is so gracious to His people they remain so clumsily inert. They do not show their gratitude in offerings that were expected of them. God nevertheless forgives Israel not for any merit of theirs but rather for His own sake. As for their captivity they were all to blame. From their first father Jacob they have been a wayward, sinning people.

In this long sermon the prophet has preached to Israel, do we not see a clear reflection of the sins of the Church and of ourselves in our complacency and hardened ingratitude?

CHORUS Some thru' the waters, some thru' the flood,
 Some thru' the fire, but all thru' the blood;
 Some through great sorrow, but God gives a song
 In the night season and all the day long.
 – from “God Leads Us Along”

THE REDEEMER OF ISRAEL VERSUS IDOLS AND THEIR MAKERS

Continuing with the message of deliverance of Israel (Jacob is the old name and Jeshurun, which means “upright”, another name for Israel), the prophet foresees God’s Spirit pouring upon His people, which restores them to life, like water the dry ground. The revival blessings upon Israel will flow to the Gentiles who will confess allegiance to the Lord. These are Gentile converts who will be engrafted to Israel (v.5).

Once again the omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence of the God of Israel is declared to His people, to strengthen them as God’s witnesses to a heathen world. As Israel (more strictly Judah) will be carried to Babylon, a land filled with idols, and many would be bewitched thereby, the prophet makes satire of idols and idol-makers as a means of opening their eyes.

Idol-makers vary between those who work in metal and those who work in wood. The blacksmith who shapes an idol with hammer soon gets tired and hungry. If that is the limited strength of the idol-maker, how much less the idol that is made. As for the idol-maker in wood, how ridiculous these idols are when it is observed that from the same chunk of wood, part of it is made into a god while the rest is used for fuel to bake bread, etc!

When men reject the truth, God gives them up to spiritual blindness. Jacob, or Israel, are once again reminded they are the people of God, His servant whom He had chosen. Despite their transgressions and sins God the Almighty will cleanse them and redeem them.

God’s power is manifest not only against dumb idols, but it “foils the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners”, etc. (v.25).

LOGIC! “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands . . . They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.” (Ps. 115:4, 8).

CYRUS, THE NEW EASTERN SUPER POWER, FORETOLD

One of the arguments the prophet presents against dumb idols and false prophets is their inability to foretell future events (42:8, 9; 44:6-8). But God confirms the words of His prophets and fulfils the predictions of His messengers.

A specific instance of God's foreknowledge is Isaiah's prophecy of Cyrus, founder of the Persian Empire that overthrew Babylon. He calls Cyrus "my shepherd", who will govern His subjects, especially the Jews, with the benign virtue. This Cyrus will "perform all my pleasure" in decreeing the rebuilding of the Temple and City of Jerusalem. He is to be helped by One who made Israel to go through the Red Sea on dry ground, and caused the River Jordan to divide.

Cyrus, a heathen king is called "anointed", because he was "appointed". In the words of Daniel, "... the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will..." (Dan. 4:17).

How did Cyrus capture Babylon that was such a mighty city and redoubtable fortress? According to Herodotus, Babylon's walls rose 300 feet. On the top of the walls was a military highway that provided speedy movement for soldiers and chariots. As hinted in v. 27 Cyrus had the waters of the Euphrates diverted so that its riverbed became dry ground for his advance soldiers to smuggle into the City. The two-leaved gates that forbade entry above the water-line were then opened from inside to receive the invading hordes.

The gates of brass and bars of iron that guarded the National treasuries were the next to be broken. "And I will give thee the treasures of darkness and hidden riches in secret places". A specimen of these treasures are the sacred vessels of the Jews used by Belshazzar for the feast on the night of Babylon's destruction (Dan. 5).

Why did God raise up Cyrus? To carry out His salvation plan of the Jews, exiled for 70 years in Babylon. Does not God use another Cyrus in President Reagan to side with Israel in these last days?

PROVERB The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it withersoever he will. (21:1).



MAP OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE AFTER CYRUS

Note that Persia succeeds Babylonia as the new world-power extends the empire into Europe.

Isaiah predicted the rise of Cyrus over 150 years before the event. He foretold how Cyrus would liberate the Jews from Babylon and help them rebuild their temple and city. What historical books of the Old Testament are written in the Persian setting? Read II Chronicles 36:22, 23 and the three books following!

Prophecy is history written in advance. God sees the end from the beginning.

CHART SHOWING THE 3 STAGES OF THE JEWS' RETURN

I. 536 - 516 BC	II. 458 BC	III. 445 BC
Rebuilding of the Temple under ZERUBBABEL	Restoration of the Law under EZRA	Repair of the Wall under NEHEMIAH

WHAT ISRAEL (WE) SHOULD KNOW OF THE LIVING AND TRUE GOD

Knowledge of “the living and true God” (I Thess. 1:9) increases faith.

1. God is One and there is none else. Monotheism, not polytheism. He alone is to be worshipped (v.6)
2. God is the Creator of the Universe, of man and the earth. He forms both light and darkness. He creates good and evil, evil not in the moral realm (sin), but rather in the physical, such as judgements on the wicked. We see herein the theology of war (vv. 7, 8, 11, 12).
3. God is the Maker of mankind, but Israel has He specially chosen. He is not only the Omniscient but Sovereign One. He is the potter, we are the clay (vv.9, 10).
4. God is He who will ‘raise up him in righteousness’, Cyrus, the great Persian conquerer as mentioned in 44:28; 45:1. He will liberate God’s people and command that the Temple and the City of Jerusalem be rebuilt. Egypt, Ethiopia and the Sabeans will be subdued before Israel by God’s determination (vv.13, 14).
5. God is a God of righteousness and salvation, especially to His scattered people in Babylon. He is against idol-makers (vv. 15, 16, 20).
6. God knows the end from the beginning (v.21). Salvation is of the Lord. It is given to the whole world, to as many as will turn to Him (vv.22-25).
7. The earth that God has created will not be so destroyed that no man can live in it. God has decreed it to be inhabited. V.18 is of particular consolation to us who live in these end-times of threatening nuclear holocaust. Thus, Jesus at His Second Coming will not only save His own, but preserve civilisation on earth as well. Dr Carl McIntire in his 1983 Christmas message says of Jesus, “‘I am Alpha and Omega’, He insisted, assuring the survival of mankind and of His creation”.

THOUGHT “It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers ...”(Isa.40:22).

WHEN BABYLONIAN GODS TUMBLE!

In prophesying the fall of Babylon to the Persians, Isaiah captures a full-lens picture of tumbling Babylonian gods! Those who were the awesome objects of worship, e.g. the great image erected by Nebuchadnezzar. These who were the guardian spirits of the nation!

Bel is another form for Baal, which reminds of Elijah's contest on Mt Carmel with the 450 prophets of Baal. Bel is the principal god of Babylon. Nebo or Nabu was his son. The kings of Babylon were sur-named by him like *Nebuchadnezzar* and *Nabonidus*.

Isaiah sees the chief gods of the Babylonians at the fall of Babylon going into captivity, like the subjects that were under their protection. Isaiah satires of these gods, standing so rigidly erect in the temples, who are now laid low, piled up (on carts probably), and drawn away by beasts of burden. These idols not only cannot save themselves but are also a heavy burden to those assigned to carry them away. These fallen from their lofty heights where they were for ages worshipped. As the Chinese saying goes, "The clay idols when crossing a stream can hardly keep body and limb together."

In contrast there is the living and true God of Israel who has protected Israel all the days of their life. How ridiculous it is therefore for Israel to make gods of gold and silver and fall down in worship before them? Israel is called again to return to the One True God. Do Christians need to be called out of idolatry? Is not the mighty \$ our god today? "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24)

"Jesus calls us from our worship
Of the vain world's golden store,
From each idol that would keep us,
Saying Christian, love Me more."

God who knows the end from the beginning, as proven from His prediction of Cyrus (a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth of counsel from a far country) to be the Salvation of Israel. (Cyrus is here described as a ravenous bird to denote the swiftness of his blitzkrieg).

READ Psalm 135:15-18.

FROM MISTRESS TO SLAVE GIRL

The fall of Babylon is described by the prophet in poetic language. In a song of derision Babylon is likened to a gentle lady now stripped of her fine clothes and made to sit in the dust. A mistress so high and mighty, she is now become a slave girl. Clad only in her underwear with her "shame" exposed, she is made to grind in the mill. This is God's judgment on her haughtiness and self-deification (v.8), upon her cruelty to His chosen people, the Jews. Though God had delivered Judah to Babylon in chastisement, Babylon showed little mercy to her prisoners of war. "Upon the ancient (the old people) hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke" (v.6).

Babylon is further described as a widow deprived also of her children. Her destruction came in a moment, in one day, when she least expected. This was literally fulfilled on Nov. 3, 538 B.C., as attested by the Cylinder of Cyrus, which records his conquest of Babylon: "Without battle and without fighting Marduk (the chief god) made him enter in his city Babylon."

V.12 taunts Babylon if all her sorceries and enchantments she had practised from the days of her youth, i.e. since the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9), would save her from the sudden destruction. Babylon, the city of merchants, cannot escape being burned.

"Though this chapter focuses on the Babylonian Empire that was crushed by Persia," says Ryrie, "Babylon in the Bible is also a symbol of organised humanity in rebellion against God." Read Revelation 17 and 18 in the light of Isaiah's prophecy.

DICTIONARY DEFINITION The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines Babylon as Capital of Chaldean empire; any great empire or vicious city; Rome, the papacy (ref. to Rev. XVII etc.), London, etc.(!)

THOUGHT Men's kingdoms come and men's kingdoms go.
Only God's Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom.

JEHOVAH'S UNILATERAL LOVE FOR A WAYWARD PEOPLE

The destruction of Babylon was determined 70 years before, so Jeremiah prophesied (Jer. 25:11-14; 29:10). On one hand Babylon was to be destroyed for her own sake in retribution for her sins. On the other hand, the destruction of Babylon was in order that the Jews might be returned to their homeland. But not because the Jews deserved it. Rather, the reverse.

This chapter is Jehovah's declaration of unilateral love for His wayward children. For though they were called the people of God, and they called on the name of the Lord, at heart they were idol-worshippers (v.5). They were a treacherous lot (v.8), willing to give honour to their idols than to the Holy One of Israel, who saved them. Matthew Henry says, "The calamities they should groan under in Babylon, God from the beginning declared by Moses, as the certain consequences of apostasy from God (Lev. 26:31, etc., Deut. 28:36, 29:28). He also declared their return to God, and to their own land (Deut. 30:4; Lev. 26:44). Thus they were shown how God would deal with them long before it came to pass. Being averse from the truth, they would foolishly and wickedly ascribed their deliverance to idols, had not Jehovah, by His prophesies, excluded such a pretence."

God also showed by the prophets new things of their own day. Surely, Jeremiah's prediction of the Jews' 70 years' exile and of Cyrus their Liberator (vv.14, 15) are new predictions only God Himself could give. Had the Jews obeyed God and kept His commandments then their peace would flow like a river. Nevertheless, though now they were an isolated people in captivity, the Lord had come to redeem them out of Babylon and the Lord would provide for all their needs as they took their long journey home through desert lands. But those who remained unconverted would find no peace.

What a picture of God's wayward children in any age! Read Jeremiah 44 to get a close-up of the waywardness of the Jews who persisted to worship the queen of heaven despite the prophet's rebuke.

MEMORISE "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." (Lam. 3:22).

PRAYER Thank Thee, Lord, for loving me with an everlasting love, amen.

THE SERVANT OF JEHOVAH TESTIFIES OF HIS CALL AND MISSION

We had a first glimpse of the Servant-Messiah in 42:1-7. Here we see Him testifying of His call and mission.

The servant here is called Israel (v.3) and yet He is "to raise the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel." This means He is one outstanding member of the Israelite nation who will revive Israel. Who is He? From such references as His being named while in His mother's womb (v.1) and His being made a light to the Gentiles, we can identify this Servant of Jehovah to be none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. Can you find N.T. references to His "mouth like a sharp sword"? V.4 seems to speak of the Servant's discouragement. Where in the Gospels can you find our Lord labouring alone against great odds? But in v.7 we are assured of a day when kings and princes will worship before Him. Has not the Gospel conquered the hearts of kings and governors since the coming of the Saviour? "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." (Ps.126:5)

V.8-12 speaks of His mission. The Servant will restore the land to the Jews. These Jews are they who will be exiled to Babylon, but now they are to be set free like prisoners. God will provide for them and make their return journey smooth-sailing. While it is true that some 50,000 Jews were the first to return to Jerusalem after the fall of Babylon to Cyrus, the prophet sees a greater deliverance of Gentile believers far beyond this context.

The prophet sees them coming from the north and west (where no Jews were taken in exile) and from the land of Sinim. Dr MacRae, the writer's teacher, identifies Sinim to be China in his book "The Gospel of Isaiah" against modern critics who equate Sinim with Syene, the modern Aswan of Egypt. The Chinese translation of Sinim is "the kingdom of Qin", and what can it be but China? The mission of Christ is worldwide.

STATISTICS One China report estimates Chinese Christians now number between 30 and 50 million!

PRAYER O Lord, grant me understanding to discern the signs of the times.

THREE ARGUMENTS AGAINST DESPONDENCY

Despite the wonderful promises to Israel in 49:1-12 followed by the doxology in v.13, she mourns in despair (v.14). This is characteristic of humanity. God answers Zion's despondency with three arguments:

1. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" (49:15). Ans: God's love for His people is greater.
2. "Can prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of a tyrant be rescued?" (49:24). Ans: God who is greater will overcome.
3. "Thus says the Lord, where is the certificate of divorce of which I have sent your mother away?" (50:1). Ans: God has not forsaken Israel. Though He punishes her for her transgressions, His relationship with her, which is compared to that of a husband to a wife, will never be broken.

In addition to these answers, the Lord gives a beautiful glimpse of blessings to Israel in the more distant future (vv.17-23). The children of Zion will be far more numerous than ever before. They are not necessarily natural children. These are new branches grafted into the olive tree (Rom.11:24). This looks to the extension of the knowledge of the true God throughout the world (MacRae).

As to God's superior power to man's (v.25) this verse should give great comfort to Christians living in Communist dominated lands, where meetings for prayer and worship are brutally disrupted, further observes Dr Allan A. MacRae my teacher.

He observes also that chapter and verse divisions are not in the original. Chapter 49 should conclude at 50:3 whereby the three arguments are grouped together.

PSALM 103:8, 9. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger forever.

PRAYER Lift me up when I am down, O Lord my God.

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD SPEAKS OF HIS DOCILITY AND HUMILIATION

The Servant of the Lord was first introduced in chapter 42:1-7. We saw Him again in 49:1-12. This is the third time He comes into view. He speaks again.

He speaks of His prophetic ministry. He is “learned”, which being a passive participle in Hebrew, shows he is well-trained. He has been trained to hear God’s Word. Dr MacRae sees in this word “learned” His very close relationship with His Father: “I can do nothing, but as the Father has taught me, I speak these things” (Jn 8:28). Do preachers speak what they have been taught of the Lord through His Word? Or do they “steal my words every one from His neighbour”? (Jere. 23:30).

Vv.5, 6 reminds us of His trial before the crucifixion.

V.7 is enacted in Luke 9:51, where we see the Lord “steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

V.8 sees Him encouraging Himself in the Lord though opposition stood in His way.

V.9 shows His confidence of victory in the Lord, but His adversaries would decay like a worm eaten garment.

The Servant concludes His soliloquy with an invitation to the godly who are going through a dark situation in their life to look to the Lord. Hasn’t He shown them the example?

But the ungodly who struggle vainly to find the light by lighting their own fire have so much of light as sparks coming out of their own efforts. They can only end up tired out. They will lie down in sorrow. Their end is death.

Having heard the Servant’s testimony of His humble learning from God and of His humiliation, have you put your trust in Him or are you striving fruitlessly on your own?

MEMORISE “. . . for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” (I Pet. 5:5).

PRAYER Keep me always humble and obedient to Thee, O Lord my Redeemer and King.

A MESSAGE OF COMFORT TO THE FAITHFUL

No matter how dark the apostasy of God's people, there is always a remnant of the faithful. To them is sent this message of comfort. In as much as God had called Abraham and Sarah their ancestors and blessed them, so will He continue to bless His own. Zion, the holy city of the land they love, will see a restoration from the barrenness of a desert to the greenness of Eden. Yea, the blessings will flow beyond the nation of Israel "to the isles", i.e. to the ends of the earth. Light will shine on those afar off from His law and judgement.

The faithful are reassured of God's everlasting mercies upon them, that though the universe that He has created will pass away and all who dwell therein, His salvation shall be forever. When they look upwards to God they will not be afraid of men and their reproach. For who are these who oppose the faithful of Zion? They will surely perish, and when they die they will be eaten of worms. What a comforting message is Isaiah's for the faithful remnant of God's people today. Where is Stalin? Where is Hitler? Where is Mao? These arch-enemies of God's people are perished forever, but God's kingdom marches on.

V. 9 introduces us to a responsive prayer by God's faithful ones calling on Him to save as He had done in ages past. God's arm had cut Rahab, a poetic synonym for Egypt (Ps 87:4), and the dragon is in reference to Pharaoh (cf. Ezek 29:3). V. 10 describes how God had delivered Israel through the Red Sea when He executed judgment on Egypt.

V. 11. With assurance from God's mighty acts of salvation in the past, the Lord's redeemed will surely return to Zion with joy.

THOUGHT So will God deliver us who trust in Him from every danger and despair. A Christian will never say "Die!"

PRAYER Keep me ever faithful through every trial and tribulation.

GOD'S THREEFOLD ANSWER TO THE FAITHFULS' PRAYER

In answer to the faithfuls' prayer, "O arm of the Lord, awake" (v.9), there comes a threefold reply from God.

The first answer is from v.12 to v.16. "I, even I, am he that comforts you." When we draw near to God, we will not be afraid of man. Knowledge is power, knowledge of God gives overcoming power. Let us remember He is the Creator of heaven and earth, the Worker of miracles even over natural forces, such as the dividing of the sea. He is the God of revelation, and the God of providence. What is it for Him to set them free from captivity and to provide them bread to eat?

The second answer is from v.17 to v.23. Hitherto Jerusalem has suffered like a mother whose sons are brought low by warfare and famine. Her sons are like an antelope caught in a net, Jerusalem is made to drink the cup of God's fury to the last dregs. But the time will come when God will remove this cup of fury and trembling of her punishment and give it to her oppressors.

The third answer is from 52:1-6. Here God exhorts His people to be strong, to clothe herself in beauty and holiness. She will not only be freed from captivity but also from uncleanness. Recalling 50:1 when they were sold for their iniquities and God received nothing from that sale, so will they be redeemed without money. Salvation comes as a free gift, it cannot be bought. V. 4 looks back to the hard days of Egypt and the oppression under Assyria. Under subjugation God's people passed their days in agony while they heard the Name of their God blasphemed. But now God has come to put an end to all this. They will hear God's voice again, and not the threats of their enemy.

MEMORISE "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam 3:26)

PRAYER As for me, I will call upon God; and the Lord shall save me.

THE RETURNEES COME HOME!

This is a poem in exaltation of The Second Exodus. These who have been cooped up in Babylon are now set free. These first of the returnees to Jerusalem, bringing good tidings of the Lord's salvation, received a chorus of joyful singing from the watchmen, those faithful ones who have been looking for the redemption. St. Paul applies v.7 to the itineration of preachers of the Gospel.

As the returnees arrive back in Jerusalem more song will break out because she is now being restored. Like the joy a captive city like Singapore experienced when the Japanese masters were overthrown and the Allied forces landed to liberate the people.

The return of the Jews from Babylon will not be a stealing away but as a great and honourable event to all nations. Those who see this will recognise that God is with His people, yea, even through Cyrus the new power that topples Babylon.

V.11 contains a command to the returnees to purify themselves: "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord". The sacred vessels and utensils that Nebuchadnezzar had captured from Solomon's Temple as trophies of war would now be returned by new royal decree. Hence the need to cleanse themselves. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully." (Ps 24:3,4).

V.12 reaffirms their honourable return under the decree of Cyrus. Moreover the Lord promised to lead them in front and protect them at the back. The returnees were promised journeying mercies for their Second Exodus.

SONG Anywhere with Jesus I can safely go,
 Anywhere He leads me in the world below.
 Anywhere without Him dearest joy would fade,
 Anywhere with Jesus I am not afraid.
 Anywhere, anywhere! Fear I cannot know!
 Anywhere with Jesus I can safely go.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SUFFERING SERVANT

It is unfortunate that 52:13-15 should be detached from chapter 53, which is the heart of the Gospel Prophet's message and one of the most famous chapters of the Bible. As a result these introducing verses to chapter 53 are left out in the reading. But in the original manuscripts there were no such chapter and verse divisions.

These few verses are an introduction and summary of the life and work of the Suffering Servant. Here is God's endorsement of the Servant's work that it will "prosper" (MacRae). It reminds of David, His ancestor according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3), that "he went on, and grew great, and the Lord of hosts was with him" (II Sam. 5:10). Not only "prosper", but also highly exalted, as God Himself is "high and lifted up". What name today is as great and honourable as Jesus?

But the Servant must stoop to conquer. Before exaltation, He must go through humiliation. Previous passages on the Servant have given us glimpses of His humiliation (49: 4,7; 50:6). V. 14 describes the cruel lashings He underwent in His sufferings (Matt 26:67,68; 27:27-30) so much so His facial features were distorted. He was spat upon to take away our loss of face, and the crimson of our shame!

V. 15 concludes this introductory paragraph by summarising the results of His humiliation. He will "sprinkle", i.e. "cleanse" by His precious blood many nationalities. This "sprinkling" is an O.T. ceremonial practice, such as the sprinkling of blood and water for purification which Peter had in mind when he wrote of "the elect . . . unto the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 1:2). By His death whereby His precious blood was shed, many people from many lands will be saved, Kings will marvel at this "new and living way" (Heb. 10:20).

READ AND MEDITATE The New Testament counterpart in Philip-
pians 2:5-11.

THE LOWLINESS OF THE SERVANT DESPISED

Let Matthew Henry expound this section for us:

“The prophet here foretells, with wonder, the belief of the Jews, notwithstanding the notices they had of the Messiah. Observe here, 1. The contempt put upon the Gospel of Christ, v.1. To this day, of the many who profess to believe this report, few cordially embrace it and submit to its power. They do not discern, nor will acknowledge that Divine power which goes with the Word. While unimportant reports are eagerly received, the authentic and most important report, of salvation for sinners through the Son of God, is disregarded. 2. The contempt they put upon the person of Christ, because of the meanness of His appearance, v.2, 3. The low condition He submitted to, and His appearance in the world, were not agreeable to the idea the Jews had formed of the Messiah. He was the Son of David, but He sprang out of this royal and illustrious family when reduced and sunk. This is meant by His being a root out of dry ground.”

“It was expected that He should come in pomp. Instead of that, He grew up as a tender plant, silently and insensibly. He had no form nor comeliness, nothing extraordinary which one might have thought to meet in an incarnate Deity. The manner of His appearing in the world had nothing of outward glory. His gospel is preached, not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but with plainness. He was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. His whole life was not only mean but miserable. Being made sin for us, He underwent the sentence sin had subjected us to. His condition was, upon many accounts, sorrowful. He was unsettled, had not where to lay His head, lived upon alms, was opposed and endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself . . . We never read that He laughed, but often that He wept.”

“. . . Carnal hearts see no excellency in the Lord Jesus, nothing that should induce them to desire an interest in Him . . . Men whom He came to save rejected Him, and His sufferings mean nothing to them. Christ, having undertaken to satisfy the justice of God for man’s sin, did it, not by divesting Himself of the glories due to an incarnate Deity, but by submitting to the disgrace due to worst of men and malefactors. Thus He glorified His Father . . . But alas, by how many is He still despised in His people, and rejected of men as to his doctrine and authority.”

SING “The way of the Cross leads home.”

THE SERVANT SUFFERED IN OUR STEAD

Modernist and liberal theologians teach that when Christ suffered, He was merely setting us an example. While it is true we should follow Him in His sufferings, it must be emphasised that His sufferings were in our stead, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us unto God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (I Pet. 3:18). His sufferings were substitutionary and vicarious, i.e. in our room and in our stead. But do we understand this? Surely He suffered not for His own sake, but for our sakes. "Christ died for our sins", not for any sin on His part. Yes, it is by His substitutionary sufferings that we are exempted from suffering the penalty of our sins. By the pains He bore on the cruel tree, we are spared the punishment of hell justly due to us. "The chastisement of our peace" = "The punishment that brought us peace" (NIV) is another re-statement of His substitutionary sufferings. "With His stripes we are healed" does not teach an automatic healing power through His sufferings, though, if it pleases God, we are healed in the Name of Jesus Christ

Christ suffers our punishment not only for our wilful sins, but also for many careless transgressions we commit, like sheep going astray. He saves us to the uttermost. Thus, if we are saved, there is no merit that we can claim. The merit is all His, by His saving act through suffering in our stead. "And all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6).

In these verses we have a perspicuous picture of the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. The substitutionary atonement, which is attacked by modernist and liberal theologians as a "denominational" doctrine, is being refuted. It is a universal doctrine, a cardinal doctrine, of the whole Church. Any denomination denying the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ is cut off from His saving grace!

CHORUS For me, for me,
 He shed His blood for me;
 He bore my sins at Calvary.
 'Twas for me Jesus died –
 For me, for me.
 (to the tune of the chorus "Alone, alone.")

STEP BY STEP TO HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Here is a marvellous description of how the Suffering Servant will be led to His death step by step. V.8 is translated "By oppression and judgment, he was taken away" (NIV). Dr MacRae renders it "an oppressive judgment" which gives the sense he was the victim of judicial murder. We have Pilate's triple declaration, "I find no fault in Him" (Jn. 18:38; 19:4; 19:6). It is by such unjust judgment that we are released from condemnation. In order to achieve our release, He allowed Himself to be accused without a murmur (V.7).

"Who shall declare His generation?" is a rhetorical question on His having no prosperity, for wasn't He cut off at such a young age? For our sakes, He was cut out of the land of the living. For our transgression He was stricken. His substitutionary atonement!

While he was made to die with the wicked, the thieves on the Cross, because He was innocent, he was given a rich man's grave. How did Isaiah know of Joseph of Arimathea's laying the body of our Lord in His own sepulchre? Read John 19:38-42.

V.10 reveals that the Servant's suffering in the above manner is according to God's plan. This truth is expressed in the New Testament "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev 13:8, MacRae). His sacrifice was a sin (guilt) offering for our sakes, which once again emphasises the sinfulness of sin. No one can cure this spiritual cancer except this Suffering Servant by the shedding of His precious blood.

From his death, not for His guilt but for ours, He is assured of life again. "He will see His seed" is a joyful answer to the earlier question, "who shall declare His generation?" The generations and generations of His spiritual descendants are here declared of all who will come to trust in Him. The seed of the Christ are the Christians!

"He will prolong His days" surely refers to continuing life in Him, that He would not die like men, but will rise from the dead – the Resurrection! This was given infallible proof by His appearances to the disciples for forty days before He ascended on high

HOLY LAND SONG Hallelujah, Christ's ascended,
Seated now on God's right hand:
Salvation by Him perfected,
From the dead He rose in triumph!
– Chia Yu Ming

WHAT SATISFACTION? WHAT KNOWLEDGE?

Let Matthew Henry expound these two verses:

“He shall Himself have abundant satisfaction in it, v.11. He shall, with prospect of His sufferings, have a prospect of the fruit. He shall see it accomplished in the conversion and salvation of sinners . . .”

“Faith is knowledge of Christ, without knowledge there can be no faith. Knowledge of Christ and that faith in Him, by which we are justified, have reference to Him, both as Servant to God and Surety for us. He that is Himself righteous, for He could not have made atonement for our sin if He had sin of His own to answer for, is made of God to us Righteousness, the Lord our Righteousness (*Jehovah Tsidkenu*, Jer. 33:16). We must know Him, and believe in Him, as one that bore our iniquities – saved us from sinking under the load by taking it upon Himself.

“He shall have the glory of obtaining victory and universal dominion, v.12. Sin and Satan, death and hell, the world and the flesh, are the strong foes He has vanquished. Much of the glory with which Christ is recompensed, consists in the vast multitudes of willing, faithful subjects that shall be wrought on by the grace of God, to give themselves to Him, to be ruled, taught, and saved by Him; hereby He shall reckon Himself abundantly recompensed for all He did and all He suffered. What God designed for the Redeemer He shall certainly possess. I will divide it to Him: the spoil the Father divided to the Son, He divides among the followers; when He led captivity captive, he received gifts *for* men, that He might give gifts *to* men. Through Him we are more than conquerors; He has divided the spoils, the fruits of His conquest, to all that are His: let us then cast in our lot among them.”

SING When free grace awoke me
 By light from on high
 Then legal fears shook me,
 I trembled to die;
 No refuge, no safety,
 In self could I see,
 Jehovah Tsidkenu
 Is all things to me.

– R.M. McCheyne

FROM HUMILIATION TO JUBILATION

If humiliation is the word for chapter 53, jubilation then fits chapter 54. As a result of the suffering unto death of the Servant Messiah, exuberant life breaks forth in His forlorn spouse. Israel in exile is likened to a barren woman, a wife of youth forsaken by her husband, Maker and God of the whole earth (v.5). "The shame of thy youth" which commentators think refers to Israel's bondage in Egypt and "the reproach of thy widowhood" to captivity in Babylon, will be forgotten when the Holy One of Israel, emerging from His momentary anger (because of Israel's sin) pities to take her back. This is due to His ever-abiding love more lasting than the mountains, and to His ever-constant faithfulness in keeping His promises, e.g. His Word to Noah to send a flood no more.

When God who expresses His love to Israel as a loving Husband to an estranged wife, then Israel will become a fruitful mother again with many children. These children comprise both the physical and spiritual. They are the increased numbers of the Israelite nation in her future restoration (today they number over 4 million in Israel alone) and the greater multitudes of the engrafted from the Gentiles, evidently Gentile Christian believers. What does St Paul say of this in Galatians 4:27?

In the circumstances Israel is instructed to increase her habitat, to extend the canvass of her tent. Did not Noah earlier predict thus: "God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem" (Gen. 9:27)? God's saving plan working out of Israel will bring in many spiritual children from the Gentile nations.

William Carey, father of modern missions (1792) quoting v.2, 3 stirred a slumbering England to foreign missions with these words:

"Expect great things from God,
Attempt great things for God."

Does this passage from Isaiah challenge us to greater endeavours for the Lord? What is your vision in the work of the Lord? Too many Church leaders today are confined in the ivory towers of their profession. Too many churchgoers see no further than the four walls of their sanctuary. We need the vision of Wesley who said the world was his parish. We need the spirit of Carey to do greater exploits for God. Instead of mourning like a forsaken wife, let there be singing and jubilation like merry music from a home full of lively children – a picture of revival, indeed.

MEMORISE Carey's famous words.

FROM TENT TO TEMPLE

In the first part of this chapter the prophet uses the figure of a tent for a dwelling place of the restored wife and her children. In the same vein he now advances from the tent to a temple, from a mobile to a more permanent abode. What further comfort is given to the estranged wife of the Holy One of Israel! "Now she (the Jewish Church) is in disgrace, but God promises that which will be her beauty and honour . . . Also that the glory of the New Testament Church shall far exceed that of the Jewish Church; not in external pomp and splendour, but in those gifts and graces of the Spirit which are infinitely more valuable? Things which the children of this world lay up in their treasuries, and often in their hearts, the children of God make pavements of, put under their feet, the fittest place for them" (Matthew Henry).

Do not the precious stones mentioned by Isaiah here find a counterpart in Paul's instruction to the Church in Corinth, "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest . . ." (I Cor. 3:12, 13)? And do we not see them reappear in Revelation 21?

"But its meaning is translated into non-pictorial terms in vv.13ff where the "righteousness" of v.14 and the impregnability of vv.15-17 are rooted in the fact of universal personal discipleship (v.13; cf.8:16; Jer. 31:34) which is one of the marks of the new covenant. This is the true strength of God's city, which is promised not immunity from attack, but the unanswerable weapon of truth (v.17; cf. Lk 21:15). [New Bible Commentary, Revised].

MEMORISE "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (I Cor. 3:16).

PRAYER My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise.

FROM ONE TO ALL

Here the prophet looks beyond Israel to the whole world, from one to all! This is the Gospel invitation to everyone who despairs of the futility of life without God, who begins to thirst and yearn after Him.

The Gospel is good news of the Saviour Jesus Christ. He is water, living water that gives everlasting life (Jn. 4:14). From Him comes "the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby" (I Pet. 2:2). He is the Bread of life, "which cometh from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die" (Jn. 6:50). Wine, the fruit of the vine, was used at the Last Supper as His blood, for as He gave the cup to His disciples, He said, "Drink ye all of it. For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for the remission of sins". Wine, which was used by the Good Samaritan with oil to bind up the wounds of the victim of robbers bespeaks the healing from the ravages of sin by our Saviour Jesus Christ. The Lord is given to us freely (being priceless, it cannot be bought with money). He is offered to us by the means of grace, through the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper - to everyone that thirsts, that imbibes of His love.

How do we eat of Him? Not so much with our mouth, but, as John Sung says, by our ears. "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live" (55:3). "So then, faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). In this regard, we see how important preaching as a means of Grace is! ". . . and how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14).

This Gospel invitation is to be broadcast to all inasmuch as it is reiterated by our Lord before He left this earth, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15). In the work of extending the Gospel let us pray that God will raise up more preachers, for "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (I Cor. 1:21). The most effective way of giving out the Gospel invitation to everyone is from mouth to ear.

RESOLVE "Preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Tim. 4:2).

HE WHO INCURS WILL ALSO SECURE!

God not only spreads the Gospel feast at a great price paid by Himself, but He also promises to secure it for us. The Gospel invitation is assured with “an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David” (55:3). God promises, on His own initiative to bestow us, miserable lost ones, the mercies of David’s Greater Son, Jesus Christ. All His mercies are covenant mercies. They are dispensed to us by His death (Acts 13:34). They are very sure because in Christ the promises are yea and amen (II Cor. 1:20).

Now, we know not how to find our way to the waters, but Christ is given to be a Leader. We know not what to do that we may partake therein, but He is given as a Commander to show us what to do, and enable us to do it. We have spiritual enemies but we have a good Captain: a Leader and Commander to put us in possession of the land of promise. Christ is a Commander by His precept, and a Leader by His example: Our business is to obey Him and follow Him (Matthew Henry).

The feast shall be furnished with guests. Who are these guests? The Gentiles, hitherto seen afar off in the distant horizon. Today the Gospel has been received by many nations. Gentile nations that have received Christ are accepted as Israel, God’s chosen nation. Has not God promised His Son, “Ask of me, and I shall give the heathen (nations) for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts for thy possession” (Ps. 2:8). What message do we derive from this promise? We are commissioned to go and teach all nations (Matt. 28:19). How many nations has your Church evangelised thus far?

THOUGHT If we go forth with these covenant mercies of Christ, He will be with us always to the end of the world.

PRAYER Indeed, Lord, woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel.

**“WE COME TO THEE WITH EMPTY HANDS,
WITH CONTRITE AND LOVING HEARTS”**

As it has been stated by the prophet in the introduction of this sermon, the salvation offered in the Gospel feast cannot be obtained by payment of a fee – “without money and without price” (v.1). Hence the abomination of indulgences as practised by the Roman Catholic Church. These indulgences, translated “forgiveness tickets” in Chinese, were a means whereby the Pope had used to enrich the Church. This sparked off Luther’s protest and the nailing of his famous 95 theses on the door of the Church at Wittenburg. Says Professor Philip Schaff in his *History of the Christian Church*, “The idea of selling and buying by money the remission of punishment and release from purgatory was acceptable to ignorant and superstitious people, but revolting to sound moral feeling. It roused long before Luther the indignant protest of earnest minds . . .” (Vol. VII, p. 148). When rich members of the Church persisted in their immorality by giving money to the Church, Luther denounced them to perish with their money in hell. Have you also given to the Church with the idea of buying your way into heaven?

Our coming to terms with God is not cash, but contrition – broken hearts in repentance. The salvation offer, freely without price, is to everybody, to every sinner, to the Christian backslider, to the unconverted. Christians need to repent when they fall into sin. The unconverted can never enter God’s Kingdom without a turning away from their wicked ways and a forsaking of their evil thoughts. Have you ever knelt down to God to pray the penitent’s prayer, “God, be merciful to me a lost sinner”?

MEMORISE Isaiah 55:6, 7

SING We come to Thee with empty hands,
No merit of our own we bring,
Simply to Jesus’ cross we cling,
Our cries attend.
With contrite and with loving hearts,
We seek Thy pardon and Thy grace;
Joy of salvation and of praise
To us impart!

– Holy Land Songs

“O THE HEIGHT AND DEPTH OF MERCY”

This first line of Fanny J Crosby’s refrain to “Give Me Jesus”, which we borrow for the title of this passage of Isaiah, is incomplete without the remaining:

*“Oh, the length and breadth of love!
Oh, the fullness of redemption,
Pledge of endless life above!”*

The height of God’s salvation plan can never be reached by man’s puny reasonings. Nor can the fullness of His redemption be measured or fathomed.

God’s salvation plan is made known to a lost world by the preaching of His Word. His Word when it was declared first by His holy prophets and apostles in times past, and expounded by preachers today, is bound to yield lasting results. It works on the hearts of men as rain and snow on the earth. It is powerful to cause parched lives to spring to life, as rain and snow will make the ground sprout and bear fruit. Preachers of the Word must have this assurance of a bountiful crop before they can declare God’s Word in power. Unless the preacher has faith in the Word he preaches, how can he find faith in whom the Word is preached? As it is written, “from faith to faith” (Rom 1:17).

Like the Jews, being liberated from Babylon to return to their homeland will be greeted with fanfare by sons of the soil, so that hills and mountains will echo to their singing and the trees also to their clapping, so will messengers of the Gospel be resoundingly welcomed by those to whom they bring the good news. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good” (Isa 52:7; Rom 10:15).

The Gospel transforms lives. The earth now well watered brings forth fir trees and myrtle trees, instead of thorns and briars. From dwarfish meanness to towering benevolence, “that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified” (Isa 61:3). Is your life a thorn bush that causes wayfarers hurt and annoyance or a tree that gives shade and shelter, even to birds and animals? (Matt 13:31-32)

*“Oh, the fullness of redemption,
Pledge of endless life above!”*

PRAYER: Lord, grant me to “comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length, and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge ...” (Eph 3:18,19)

 "WHEN JESUS COMES"

There is a song titled "When Jesus Comes". What must we do when the Saviour comes? Those who are His own are expected to "double our guard against sin" (Matthew Henry). We are to be honest and just in all our dealings. Observance of the Sabbath Day (Lord's Day in New Testament times) is a test of our communion with Him. The blessing of keeping the Lord's Day holy is strength and direction to do our work during the week. Those who are not blessed by the Lord on His Holy Day become restless and desultory during the week.

As for those who are strangers, "aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel", Gentiles such as we once were, the Lord extends a cordial welcome. Similarly to the eunuch. Every eunuch was barred from joining the Israelite congregation (Deut 23:1), but now he is given a permanent place and a good status in God's house with absolute guarantee, if he takes hold of God's covenant and obeys Him, keeping His Sabbath. Is this not a picture of the degraded of mankind being given a place in God's family when they turn to Him in repentance?

Both strangers, sons of strangers, Gentiles, and the most dejected ones are given joyful participation in worship in God's house because of their humble reception of the Gospel message. Their sacrifices will be accepted upon His altar inasmuch as our love-offerings today are a sweet-savour sacrifice before his throne through Jesus' Name.

The Temple in Jerusalem, while being confined to the Jews, but abused in Jesus's time so that it became "a den of thieves", in fact, was a forerunner to the Christian Church, where all people, of every nation and tongue, might worship. Today, there is not the restriction as in olden days to worship only at one place appointed by the Lord (Deut. 12:5-14), but everywhere, so long as they come through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

*"But the hour cometh, and now is
When true worshippers shall worship the Father,
In Spirit and in truth,
For the Father seeketh such to worship Him."*

— Jesus to the woman of Samaria

MEMORISE: "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else' (Isa. 45:22).

JUDGEMENT ON PROFESSIONAL PASTORS

While the Lord is ever merciful to the repentant and conscientious, He cannot condone those servants who forget their commission and neglect their duties. He is against the shepherds of Israel, the priests and the prophets turned professional. Micah, who lived in the time of Isaiah, thundered, "The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money ..." (Micah 3:11).

These shepherds were worse than the sheep dogs they reared to help watch over the flock. Hence they were called blind, ignorant, dumb dogs that cannot bark. They took their job for a sinecure, so that during working hours they would be lounging around, falling into siesta. And when they woke up they would acquire a good appetite. They are called greedy dogs, never satiated. They are called shepherds that cannot understand, but they knew how to enrich themselves. They got drunk and got others drunk together with them. A devil-may-care attitude pervaded this frivolous fraternity of blind professional watchmen over the house of Israel. Ezekiel 34:1-9 has a scathing indictment against the shepherds, yea the pastors, of his day. Bishop J.C. Ryle noted that the great majority of the clergy of his day knew little beyond the Name of the Christ they preached. They were a similar, accursed race, who occupied a holy office but made it thrice unholy by their professionalism. So it is with our day. The churches abound with false pastors.

As a result, the sheep without proper care or nurture are scattered. In judgement God sends them wild beasts to devour them. So, as the Church provides little to feed the flock, the flock scatters into the world. They are eaten up by the wolves of temptation and lust, no more to darken the door of the Church. And who is to blame? The blind shepherds, the Dumb Dogs, (D.D.), notwithstanding their titles by the same initials! Leaders of the Church, pastors, session members, beware!

PRAYER: Teach me not to labour for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give ..." (John 6:27) Amen.

“IT IS OF THE LORD’S MERCIES THAT WE ARE NOT CONSUMED” (Lam 3:22)

Further to the indictment of professional pastors this chapter now takes on the people. “And there shall be, like people, like priest: and I will punish them for their ways” (Hosea 4:9). The emphasis is shifted from the shepherds to the flock (though there is always a remnant of the faithful).

The “righteous” ones will not meet with calamitous death that overtakes the wicked, such as war and pestilence. The “righteous” will be relieved of such torment by dying a natural and peaceful death (vv.1,2).

Who then are the wicked in this context that deserve punishment? These are catalogued, vv. 3-13. The abominations listed here fit into the reign of Manasseh, Hezekiah’s wicked son. Read II Chron 33:1-10. The chief sins catalogued here are sorcery, falsehood, idolatry, child-sacrifice, “stone worship”. Involved in all these heathen cults is the Canaanite fertility cult. The allusion to “bed” (v.7) hints at the connection between idolatry and adultery (temple-prostitution). “Behind the doors” suggests the setting up of some idol in private, house worship, as against the sacrifices made “upon a lofty and high mountain” (v.7). In v.9 “the king” in Hebrew could mean Molech, the chief of the Ammonite gods (I Kings 11:7). Costly perfumes were used by those who undertook long “pilgrimages” and were willing to debase themselves unto hell or “make obeisance to Sheol.” These deluded idolatrous children of Israel would wear themselves out in their pursuit of idols, which they thought would help them, so in this they persisted. Read Jeremiah 44:15-19 for an understanding of v.11. For all these idolatrous and adulterous practices the wayward ones will be scattered, but the faithful shall be established. Verse 15 expresses a wonderful condescension from the everlasting, Holy One to every humble spirit. It was so in old times, it is so today.

The concluding verse of this chapter is that because the Lord is still gracious He will restore His wayward people, but those who persist in their wickedness will be like the troublous sea.

PRAYER: Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23,24). Amen.

RELIGIOSITY IS A DIFFERENT KIND OF RELIGION

From idolatry the prophet now turns to a more deadly sin that plagues God's people – the hypocrisy of religiosity. What religiosity? That of feint-fasting (vv. 1-12) and sabbath desecrating (vv. 13,14).

Fasting was practised in the O.T. One Fast was held alongside Feasts prescribed by the Law of Moses. The Day of Atonement was a Fast Day in which “ye shall afflict your souls” (Lev 22:27). Occasions when Israel fasted as a nation before the Exile of Babylon are recorded in Judges 20:26; I Sam 7:6; I Ki 21:12; Jer 36:9. After the Fall of Jerusalem those who were taken to Babylon began to observe certain Fast Days to commemorate the disasters the nation went through (Zech 7:3-5; 8:19). These Fasts were instituted by man, not by God.

Whatever Fast the Prophet is now denouncing in this Chapter, it is the insincerity of their observance that was denounced – the hypocrisy of their religiosity. If a fast is to be kept pleasing to the Lord, that vertical line of devotion must be complemented by the horizontal line of caring for the poor and needy. As the apostle James puts it, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (Jas 1:27). Or as Shakespeare has it: “My words fly up, my thoughts remain below; Words without thoughts never to heaven go” (Hamlet, Act III, Scene 3). Religiosity is a different kind of religion.

The Sabbath is here mentioned a second time, which shows how much this Day of Holy Rest has been desecrated. Resting from our work and pleasure to go to Church on the Lord's Day, which is the Christian Sabbath, cheerfully and not wearily, is a good test of our love for God. If we love Him indeed, we will love His day. Let it be emphasised that the whole of the Lord's Day, from 6 am to 6 pm by Jewish reckoning, should be spent for Him and His Cause alone. We should refrain from “all needless works, words, and thoughts, about our worldly enjoyments and recreations.”

THOUGHT: “Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.” (Heb 10:25).

WHY OUR PRAYERS GO UNANSWERED

The apostle James says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). Conversely, Isaiah says, "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God ... that He will not hear" (Isa 59:2). Is there anything in your life that shortcircuits the line of communication between you and the Lord?

The catalogue of evil deeds the prophet now publishes before a rebellious people reads like St. Paul's arraignment against a guilty mankind before God's Tribunal, concluding with that final sentence, "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom 3:10-18).

The wicked plots conceived and carried out by these desperadoes of the Jews are likened to the hatching of cockatrice' eggs and the weaving of spider's web. Those who eat these snake eggs, who succumb to their nefarious schemings, end in death. Take the case of wicked king Ahaz. His plan of bribing the Assyrian king against the northern kingdom of Israel backfires. The Assyrians who brought temporary relief to Jerusalem by invading Samaria suddenly overflowed to the gates of the Holy City. This also is vividly illustrated by Isaiah in metaphor, "that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper" (Isa 59:5).

Spiders' web, that is cunningly woven to catch flies, portrays the lies uttered by the unscrupulous to snare the unwary. But these who prey on others are caught under the searchlight of truth.

When wicked men who are likened to snakes and spiders rule, judgement and justice are thrown to the winds. Instead of the light of truth that should be shining bright from the City of Truth (Zech 8:3) their wicked reign brings a pall of darkness over the whole nation. No wonder Jerusalem had to be given over to the Babylonians for destruction in the days of the prophet Jeremiah. So shall God destroy every holy institution that has turned to wickedness and falsehood. Yea, even the end-time Ecumenical church of Rev 17. Why do our prayers go unanswered?

PRAYER: "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." (Isa. 56:6). Amen.

**“WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS ARE IN AUTHORITY THE PEOPLE
REJOICE:
BUT WHEN THE WICKED BEARETH RULE, THE PEOPLE
MOURN.” (Proverbs 29:2)**

In v. 9 it is stated that judgment and justice are cast away from the people. In the verses following, complaints are heard from an oppressed people against a bad government. Now, Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, more openly declares, “Hear this I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment and pervert all equity. They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money ...” (Micah 3:9-11). Out of such a situation has derived a word of wisdom from Solomon, “When the righteous are in authority the people rejoice: But when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn” (Prov 29:2).

As a result of an avaricious, oppressive government the people become like the blind who grope for the wall, who stumble at the height of the noonday sun. What a picture of imposed hardship against the common people. These have no way out of their predicament. Their lot is desolation. Is this not a picture of communist rule today? Or a picture of the plight of Lebanon torn by many factions in the land. O that a good and honest government might continue to prevail over us!

The wicked perpetrators, whether in government or out, do not realise that what they scheme are exposed by the Lord as lies and plain rebellion against God. “The Lord saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no judgment” (Isa 59:15). Do evil rulers realise that sooner or later God the Ruler of nations will catch up with them? This principle is clearly taught in the ups and downs of the kings of Israel and of Judah. It can also be demonstrated from a study of secular history.

One reason why governments go astray from their original good intentions is unbridled power. As the saying goes, “Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely”. If we should substitute the word *power* for *wine*, then let us recite Solomon’s words to King Lemuel for the benefit of rulers: “It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princess strong drink: Lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted: (Prov 31:4,5).

MEMORISE: “The king by judgment established the land, but he that receiveth gifts overthroweth it” (Prov 29:4)

IN TIMES LIKE THESE

“In times like these”, when “the wicked beareth rule and the people mourn” (Prov 29:2), “he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey” (v. 15), i.e. the righteous will suffer persecution. So it is said that the prophet had sealed his testimony with a martyr’s death, being “sawn asunder” according to Jewish tradition (Heb 11:37). Faithful Korean Christians who refused to bow before the Shinto shrine were put into prison by their Japanese masters. Such persecution displeases the Lord.

“In times like these” the Lord expects someone to rise up and speak out. But He is disappointed that no man of such calibre can be found. Prophets are few and far between. How true it is even in our own day. Popular evangelists like Billy Graham, yes, but where can we find another like John Sung?

If there is to be another, God Himself must raise him up. “When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him” (59:19). Isaiah is one the Lord had raised up. Whom will the Lord raise for our age? One like Isaiah who saw God and heard His voice saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” One like Isaiah who answered, “Here am I, send me”. No matter what the situation, no matter where the arena, it is important that the one entering God’s service must experience Isaiah’s call. One-term missionaries are no missionaries. Pastors who leave the sheepfold easily for another should examine themselves if they are hirelings. Preachers who interpret Scripture with grammatical precision but bear no burden for the crying needs of the people can speak only like the scribes.

The Lord will judge His adversaries, enemies of the Gospel, by manifesting His power from east to west. Therefore we shall not despair even when the darkness of an apostate church covers the earth, for darkness must yield to dawning light. Hence in the thickest darkness of the 16th Century God burst on the scene like the noonday sun by raising the Reformers, and the Reformers’ watchword was “Post tenebras lux” = “After darkness light”.

KEYNOTE: When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.

PRAYER: Lord, use me also to lift up a standard against the foe. Amen.

THE REDEEMER SHALL COME TO ZION

Hebrews 1:1,2 in substance says Christ the Son is the final One to speak after the prophets had variously prophesied in times past. Isaiah 59:20, spoken through Isaiah an O.T. Prophet, confirms. Isaiah looks forward to the end-times when the Redeemer-Christ shall appear. The 'prophescope' is turned on the far-distant horizon.

In the last days Christ the Redeemer of Israel shall come and save His people. Christ, truly, qualifies to be the Redeemer, inasmuch as He being the son of David according to the flesh, is a near-Kinsman. Therefore He has the honour to redeem Israel according to Levitical law (Lev 25:48; Ruth 4:4-6; Jer 50:34).

Now, as to the timing of the Redeemer's advent, this is revealed by St. Paul to be conditional upon the completion of the redemption of the Gentiles. He says, "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written. There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins." (Rom 11:25-27).

Although Israel has now returned to her Land after 2,000 years' exile, and she has won many a victory against her enemies, the Redeemer of Israel has not yet revealed Himself. This Event will not take place until His visible Second Coming to save the Church and to judge the world. The climax of that Event is given in detail according to Zechariah 14. Let us neglect not to pray for the salvation of the Jews nor forget Israel in our missionary outreach.

Hear the Apostle Paul's instruction: "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved." (Rom 11:25.26).

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob shall yet save Israel His firstborn.

PRAYER: Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee (Ps. 122:6).

HOW SHALL THE PEOPLE BELIEVE THE PROPHET?

As the prophet tells the people to look to the day when “the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob”, how does he know his hearers will believe? Has he not been warned at the beginning of his ministry that the Jews would not take him at his word (6:9,10)? They will be so dull of hearing and blinded and their hearts so weighed down with fat that God would give them up. Of course this refers to the unconverted and doubly hard-hearted, to the lost and the reprobate.

“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”, says our Lord in Jn 3:3. For the Jews to see, they need to be converted and illuminated by the Holy Spirit. The prophecies of Isaiah, and for that matter the whole Word of God, cannot be believed until the Holy Spirit has worked a work of grace in the hearers (or readers).

Calvin says therefore that the same Spirit who spoke by the mouths of the prophets should penetrate our hearts, to convince us that they faithfully delivered the oracles which were divinely entrusted to them. And this connection is very suitably expressed in these words, as He has covenanted with them, “My Spirit that is upon thee, and my word which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed ... forever” (Isa 59:21). As the Holy Spirit has moved the prophet to speak and remains with the prophet, so He will cause His spiritual descendants to communicate in the same spiritual language. As Isaiah tells us by his prophecy under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so will we read it with illumination by the Holy Spirit.

It is an undeniable truth, concludes Calvin, that they who have been inwardly taught by the Spirit feel an entire acquiescence in the Scripture. Only those illuminated by Him can believe in the divine origin of the Scripture. How shall the people believe the prophet? By the same Spirit who caused the prophet to speak and caused the people to hear. If you are led by the same Spirit you have no doubt in what Isaiah has foretold.

MEMORISE: “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (II Pet 1:21).

“AFTER DARKNESS LIGHT”

In this chapter, the prophet gives a detailed description of that glorious time that shall come to Israel, which he has earlier seen, on and off, such as at 2:1-4, when wars shall cease, and 11:6-9 when the world of animals will be restored to its original bliss in Eden.

When the Redeemer of Zion comes, Israel will be fully regathered from the Gentile nations among whom she had lived in exile. They will return in plenty with tributes from these Gentile nations. They will come not only in ships but literally fly in (v. 8), a prophetic glimpse of the jet-age? The Gentile nations will contribute to rebuild Jerusalem which will become capital of the world. Men come to Jerusalem without any hindrance or visa barriers. Indeed, they who come will come to pay homage to the King, who aforesometimes were persecutors of the Jews.

Jerusalem will be enriched with all the mineral resources of the world. Her mansions will be embellished with cedar-wood of Lebanon and of hard-wood firs. There will be no more war nor outbreak of riots and uprisings. The glory of the Lord who rules over Zion will outshine the sun and the moon. The prophet is here looking beyond the golden millennium to the eternal state. For a thousand years of Messianic rule, Israel will be a land inviolate, belonging to God's ancient chosen people. Israel will be ruler of nations instead of being ruled because the Lord has returned to her. How the world now under an increasing pall of nuclear threat must long for that day! But the world cannot enjoy this peace until it comes in full submission to the Christ.

To all the world, the Gospel message proclaims: “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.

“And he shall send Jesus Christ which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things...” (Acts 3:19-21).

THOUGHT: For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning (Ps.30:5).

THE PREACHER BEFORE THE PRINCE

In chapter 60 we see how the Lord, the Prince of Peace, is come to Israel in His Second Advent, the nations of the world will pay homage to Him in Jerusalem. In the beginning verses of chapter 61 the prophet returns to the Messiah in His First Advent, when His mission is that of a Preacher.

In Luke 4:17-21 Jesus applied this passage to Himself. His preaching is energised by the Lord God by the unlimited anointing of the Holy Spirit. The word *anointing* is *Messiah* in Hebrew and *Christ* in Greek. As the Messiah, the Christ, He is sent by God to announce the good news of salvation to the meek, the humble. His message is one of the gracious healing to the broken-hearted, one of liberation to the bound-ones, yea, even from the prison of sin. His message is not for the self-righteous but for those who confess their guilt, to the poor and downtrodden who earnestly look up to Him. Matthew Henry says: "Though the gospel is proposed for all, yet it will not appear glad tidings to any but the convinced, humble sinner."

"He was to be a Deliverer: He was sent as a Prophet to preach, as a Priest to heal, and as a King to proclaim: 1) Peace to his friends ... This is the Gospel proclamation, it is like proclaiming the great year of release, (Lev, 25:9-40), 2) War against His enemies. Christ proclaims the vengeance He takes on sin and Satan, death and hell ... Christ triumphed over all these on the cross. (Scofield rightly observes that "the day of vengeance precedes the regathering of Israel and synchronises with the day of the Lord" i.e. the Second Coming. Isa 63:1-6.

"Christ was to be a Comforter, and so He is, as Preacher, Healer and Deliverer, He is sent to comfort all that mourn, who seek to Him and not to the world for comfort ... The holy cheerfulness of Christians is their beauty ... comforts which come from God, dispose the heart to thanksgivings, and enlarge it in them ..." He will do all these for His people, that they may be as the branches of God's planting. Herein is our Father glorified that we bring forth much fruit; and that others also may, from God's favour shining in them, praise Him".

THOUGHT: What an example of a preacher is Christ. Is our preaching accompanied by all the graces of a loving Saviour, as enumerated in these few verses? Do we practise what we preach?

ISRAEL THE PREMIER NATION OF THE NEW WORLD

The 'prophescope', after a brief focus on the Messiah's first advent, which our Lord has claimed was directed at His preaching ministry, now turns again to His Second Advent and Millennial rule.

Under the Messiah's earthly reign the Jews will restore not only "the cities that had fallen into ruins" during the exile, but also those that had been lying waste for generations. Gentiles will be employed in subordinate positions on the land, as herdsmen and farmhands, but Israel will be priests and ministers of God. Israel, having suffered much in her checkered history, will be doubly compensated. God will deal justly, and honour those who seek Him in sincerity and in truth. For His covenant's sake He will exalt Israel again so that she will be acknowledged by the whole world as God's chosen people.

In the concluding two verses of this chapter, the ideal Servant of Jehovah speaks again. He identifies Himself with the people and slaves in being also clothed with the garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness, an imagery which is the same as given in 59:17 and v. 3 of this chapter.

While the earth will be physically and economically restored, we must not forget the spiritual dimension, without which the physical will not last. That is the same principle that will sustain Israel as the premier nation.

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

SING: The summer sun shines o'er new Jerusalem,
Golden days of peace so divine:
Messiah has come to this wartorn earth from heaven
Bestowing rest to weary mankind.

— from "Song to the New Jerusalem"

ANOTHER ASSURANCE OF ISRAEL'S RESTORATION

This chapter reads like chapter 54. The Messiah here seems to be the speaker. He reassures Israel, the forsaken land and people, a day of restoration. In that day when Jerusalem will become the holy city indeed, shining forth in righteousness and dispensing salvation to the nations, she shall be called by the new name Hephzi-bah (My delight is in her) and Beulah (married). No more will she be desolate as in days past, no more forsaken like a widow.

As the Jews regard marital bliss the highest blessing on earth, so the prophet here uses this figure of speech to describe the joyful rehabilitation of the land when her sons will be regathered to her. The land is the bride, the people the bridegroom. Notice the same metaphor is used in chapter 54 of God the Husband and His people "a wife of youth".

To doubly emphasise the certainty of that Day of Restoration, watchmen, i.e. prophets, will be raised up, which could include those of the Christian Church, who should herald the Gospel incessantly until Jerusalem becomes "a praise in the earth". This is finally sealed by an oath from the Lord Himself who swears by His right hand that Israel in that Day shall be secure from all harassment by her enemies. A picture of millennial peace is expressed in Micah 4:4 as: "But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it."

The conclusion of this prophecy is dramatised by a calling to the heralds to go forth and summon the exiles to return to the restored City. The call is extended with the lifting of a standard to the people or peoples, even the Gentile nations, "unto the end of the world".

THOUGHT: As we see Israel regathered today and becoming a powerful nation, we can sense that the coming of the Lord is just around the corner. Are you prepared to meet your God?

KEYNOTE: Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

ISAIAH'S VIEW OF THE DAY OF VENGEANCE

“The Day of Vengeance”, first introduced in 61:2, is here seen by the prophet in the figure of the lone Messiah-Avenger emerging triumphantly out of Edom after a great struggle.

Edom, the country given to Esau, is traditionally Israel's enemy (Bozrah, a city of Edom). The Edomites had carried off Jewish prisoners as slaves (Obadiah 10,11). They had allied themselves with the Assyrian invaders and had attacked Judah in the days of King Ahaz (II Chron 28:17). The prophet, with such a background of a hostile neighbour is taking Edom as the representative of Israel's surrounding enemies. As he meditates on this state of affairs, he passes into an ecstasy of exultation as he beholds Israel's Saviour return victorious in His battles with the enemy.

The prophet sees Him as one coming out of a winepress, His garment all stained with the red of the vine. Yes, He has done his job trampling on the grapes, a picture rather of His wreaking judgment in righteous anger upon Israel's enemies. For this was the Day of Vengeance upon Israel's enemies but the Year of Redemption of God's people.

A preview of God's judgement and day of vengeance is given in 2:10-22. A postview of this Edom slaughter is revealed by John in Rev. 19:11-21. This will be the climax of the welter of earth-shaking events that must come to pass before that Day of Golden Millennial Rule can dawn on this war-torn earth.

SING: *Yerusahalayim, behold Messiah shall come
To save thy land, when thou shalt cry to Him.
He comes on clouds, with awesome loud trumpet sound
To judge the earth – peace a millennium.*

(Tune: “How Great Thou Art”)

PRAYER: Lord, keep me faithful till the very end. Amen.

A PSALM OF THANKSGIVING FOR DELIVERANCE

As the Crossing of the Red Sea is commemorated with the Song of Moses (Ex 15) it is appropriate that the triumph of the Messiah-Avenger is extolled with a psalm of thanksgiving for deliverance.

The psalm begins with acknowledgement of God's lovingkindness as from a father to his children (v. 16). How wonderful to know that God to the redeemed ones (are you one?) is a loving Father. God saved them by "the angel of his presence" (Ex 34:14). What an assurance as we are also promised by our Lord, "And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt 28:20).

After praise comes confession of sin. When we come before God, measured in His righteousness, we are totally undone! God cannot condone sin.

As Israel remembers God's past acts of deliverance by Moses, she prays for renewed mercies. She claims God to be her Father. Though Abraham and Israel were their fathers they could not answer their supplication, for they were men.

In v. 17 there is a plaintive cry of being judicially cast aside, like Pharaoh whose heart being hardened there was no hope for him. But Israel does not lose hope. They argue that they are God's inheritance, so God must save them against Israel's enemies who are never called by His Name, i.e. they are aliens.

This psalm surely fits with Israel of the end times. How ignorant Israel still is of God, not knowing Jesus Christ to be His Son. They will have to acknowledge their sin of waywardness and rebellion before God can save them. This psalm befits every Christian who has backslided and needs repentance, and having been saved, let him praise God for the same lovingkindness He has shown to Israel.

PRAYER: "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?

"I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people". (Ps. 116:12,14).

 FROM THANKSGIVING TO SUPPLICATION

The division of chapters in the English Bible at this point blurs the connection between 63:15-19 and 64:1. The prophet asks Jehovah not only to "look down" from heaven (63:15) but rather "to rend the heavens and come down". And how all the mountains would melt as He comes in consuming fire (Comp. Ps 68:8; Ex 19:18).

On v. 4 Elicott comments, "The sense is not that God alone knows what He hath prepared, but that no man knows (sight and hearing being used as including all forms of spiritual apprehension) any god who does such great things as He does. St Paul in I Cor 2:9 applies the words freely after his manner, to the eternal blessings which God prepares for his people".

In contrast with God's wrath as manifested in His coming to judge the world, God's people who humble themselves and acknowledge their unworthiness and their sins, are spared. As Israel comes to God as her Father and Maker, and acknowledges she is but the work of His hands, she expects mercy and pardon.

v. 10-12 is a prophetic view of the coming destruction of Jerusalem in the days of a latter prophet, viz., Jeremiah. This is cited in support of Israel's supplication to God for mercy.

THOUGHT: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away". (Isa 64:6).

SING: *"Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Thou art the Potter; I am the clay.
Mould me and make me after Thy will,
While I am waiting, yielded and still".*

GOD ANSWERS HIS PEOPLE

As the prophet is moved to supplicate on Israel's behalf, so he is now inspired to answer on God's behalf. Yes, Jehovah condescends to answer His people though they do not care to seek Him in their daily walk. They seek Him only when trouble comes, while God is seeking them everyday, all the way!

The first seven verses tell of the complete departure of a people from their God, e.g. they sacrifice not to the Lord God, but in gardens, under trees after Canaanite rites. They burn incense on "altars of brick", literally "on the bricks", possibly on the roofs of houses (Jer 19:13). They go to the graves and monuments, most probably to pray to their dead ancestors, which can be seen today, if you visit Rachel's Tomb at Bethlehem or the Tomb of Abraham and the Patriarchs at Hebron. They eat pork and unclean food in sacrifice, which is prohibited by Mosaic law. They adopt a Pharisaical attitude over the common people, with their initiation into heathen mysteries. As they regard themselves more highly than others, they become a people already consumed in the fire of Divine wrath.

But in the impending judgment the faithful will be preserved, as one cluster of grapes of an otherwise fruitless vine would induce the farmer to spare the tree (which could have been hewn down). For the faithfuls' sake the land would be inhabited from Sharon the coastal plain to Achor, the Jordan valley. But the faithless will be utterly cut off (vv. 11-15). What a picture also of two types of people in the Church. There are the humble and meek who tremble to hear God's Word and there are the wayward and rebellious, whose end is destruction.

The rebellious will leave behind a cursed name (Num 5:21; Jer 29:22,23). What does the mention of your name bring to mind of the hearers? Association with good or association with evil? "A man's name is his second life", says a Chinese proverb. As to the faithful or obedient they will acquire a new name, e.g. Jacob's was changed to Israel. These will speak the truth by calling on the God of the Amen.

MEMORISE: "A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth". (Eccles. 7:1).

A GLIMPSE OF THE GOLDEN AGE TO COME

The new heavens and the new earth which God will create will come in consummation of the Millennial Kingdom. The old order of creation must pass away because it has been corrupted by sin. The new heavens and new earth will revolve forever in eternal resplendence because it is untainted by sin. The capital of the eternal kingdom of God will be the New Jerusalem. Read Rev 21:1-5. Here is Isaiah's prophecy confirmed.

During the Millennium, how will the human race go on propagating itself? As the curse is lifted, life expectancy will be immensely lengthened, perhaps to a thousand years, like the years of a tree (v. 23). For to live up to 100 years would still be an infant. To die for one's sin at 100 would be considered a curse. The sinful state seems to remain but greatly subdued. As peace will reign supreme, the people will live in full security. Not only in security but also in happiness and prosperity, many generations together. One's prayer would be quickly answered.

There would be a restoration of the animal kingdom as well, when lions that were herbivorous in the beginning but turned carnivorous will return to its former state. Literally wolves and lambs will live together in peace, because if the lion shall eat straw like the bullock, much more the wolf will revert to its herbivorous state. Even the serpent shall find food in the dust in which he crawls, so he will not strike death, being harmless. In St Paul's language, "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Rom 8:22), but then travail and pain will be a thing of the past. Compare v. 25 with 11:6-9.

My dear Reader, are you hoping for that day to come? Then, "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". (Isa. 11:9).

THOUGHT: And they (the redeemed of the Lord) shall reign with Him a thousand years. (Rev 20:6).

**WHO SHALL ASCEND INTO THE HILL OF THE LORD? ...
HE THAT HATH CLEAN HANDS, AND A PURE HEART**
(Ps 24:3,4)

Worship is the mother of all virtues, says St Augustine. When worship is formalistic and hypocritical it makes a mockery of God and His House. Does God who inhabits heaven and earth need man's house to dwell in? God is pleased rather to make His abode with the humble, who fear Him and obey His commandments.

Therefore, it is to no avail for those come to the temple to sacrifice a bullock when in their heart they are plotting murder. To sacrifice a lamb as if they would brutally kill a dog. To offer a grain offering, but it is as abominable as offering pig's blood. To burn incense, but they are no better than praying to idols. Isaiah put it earlier this way, "For I the Lord love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt-offering ..." (61:8). One way of measuring our devotion to God is how we treat our fellowmen, especially the poor and downtrodden.

God is speaking to His children when they come before Him, but do they listen? Do they respond in their heart to the message they hear from the preacher? Since they persist in their blind errors He will let them wander in their own delusions. This is judicial blinding of their heart, as hardening of the heart in Pharaoh's case.

But to the humble and sincere who "tremble at His Word", to those ostracised from high and haughty religious society, the Lord will appear to bless. Their enemies will be openly put to shame. How will the Lord do it?

"Hear the uproar from the city,
Hear that noise from the temple!
It is the sound of the Lord
Repaying His enemies all they deserve".

God uses the rebellion of men to mete out judgment, yea, even fightings inside the Church. "Surely the wrath of men shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain" (Ps 76:10).

MEMORISE: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:24).

THE REBIRTH OF ISRAEL AND GLOBAL JUDGMENT TO USHER IN NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

The climax of history will be the rebirth of God's people, when "all Israel shall be saved" at the second coming of Christ (Rom 11:26,27). Israel has been restored as a nation since 1948, but her salvation and rebirth will not come until her King and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, appears. Israel will become the first in the world, from whom the Gentile nations will receive blessing after blessing.

But Israel's rebirth cannot come but through fire and sword. This will devour all the unclean and polluted, such as "eat swines' flesh and the mouse". Before Israel is to be delivered by the coming of the Lord on the Mount of Olives, Zechariah tells us that two-thirds will be killed (Zech 13:8,9). For Israel today as a nation is far away from their God.

After Israel's deliverance from a global holocaust, she will be sent out as missionaries into all the world, to such far off places as Tarshish (Spain), Pul (Libya), Lud (Lydia, Asia Minor), Javan (Greece). Israel will go to the ends of the earth (the isles afar off) to tell those who have not heard of the Saviour.

As a result of this preaching of the Gospel to the remote tribes, many will be won to God. These will come on "swift beasts" in an endless stream to worship the Lord in Jerusalem (read Isa 2:1-4; Zech 14:9-21). Gentile converts will serve the Lord as Jewish converts. "for priests and for Levites". As worship is the mother of all virtues, it will eternally remain the chief occupation in the new heavens and new earth.

But, the "transgressors" will burn and suffer eternally in hell. What a solemn conclusion to a happy ending of God's salvation plan. What Isaiah brings to a climax by his 'prophescope' is reflected in John's concluding chapter of the Revelation. Reader, what is the position of your soul before God as you conclude the study of Isaiah, the Gospel Prophet?

THOUGHT: "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us ..." (Isa 25:9).

INTRODUCTION TO MICAH

Micah is a small book compared with Isaiah. Hence, Isaiah together with Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel which are big books are called Major Prophets. The rest of the prophets from Hosea to Malachi, twelve in number, and being comparatively short, are called Minor Prophets. So Micah is one of the Twelve Minor Prophets.

Micah prophesied during the long years of Isaiah's ministry. Micah's ministry stretched through the reigns of the three Judean kings: Jotham Ahaz and Hezekiah. To get a more detailed picture of the evil times in which he lived, review the introduction to Isaiah the Gospel Prophet. While Isaiah prophesied to kings and ambassadors in the court at Jerusalem, Micah the peasant who hails from Moresheth in the southwestern countryside of Judah spoke to the common people. He complemented the work of the city prophet.

Micah means "Who is like JAH (Jehovah)?" With authority from His Majesty on High, Micah the humble country boy could thunder against the sins of the nation, beginning with corrupt princes, priests and prophets (3:9-12). The most heinous social sin was the exploitation of the weak by the powerful (3:3). He sounded like Isaiah who attacked such abuses: "The princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither does the cause of the widow come to them" (Isa 1:23).

Though Micah was of a smaller calibre to Isaiah, he is immortalised by his famous prediction of Christ's birthplace in Bethlehem, David's City royal. Not Nazareth as was supposed by certain Jews of Jesus' day (Jn 7:40-43). Even to this day Christians are called by Jews *Notsuri*, i.e. of the sect of the Nazarene. So has a professor of history of the University of Singapore thought the Messiah was born in Nazareth until corrected by a deacon of Life B-P Church!

Micah's fearless denunciation of Judah's sins before King Hezekiah and the good king's submission to God's Word provided a precedent against the Jewish ecclesiastical leaders who tried to put Jeremiah to death (Jer. 26:18,19) during the last days of Jerusalem. Micah's forthright testimony against sin in high places given a century before did not lose its power in Jeremiah's day, not will it ever. How do we stand for the Truth?

A third quotation of Micah's words is by none other than our Lord when He commissioned His disciples (7:6), warning them of traitors from within one's own house. This emphasises the greater bond of

fellowship of the spiritual over the carnal.

Micah looks beyond the dark clouds of his day to that Day when the world would be ruled by the Prince of Peace from Jerusalem, when "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks ... neither shall they learn war anymore" (Micah 4:1-3 = Isaiah 2:2-4 almost word for word). Micah therefore confirms Isaiah's message on a golden millennium to come. Micah is a book for today especially in the light of Christ's soon Return to bring salvation and peace to this war-torn earth. Amen.

OUTLINE OF MICAH

1. THE SUPERScription : 1:1
2. MESSAGE OF DOOM TO SAMARIA : 1:2-8
3. MESSAGE OF DOOM TO JERUSALEM : 1:9-16
4. INDICTMENT AND DELIVERANCE : 2:1-13
5. PROFESSIONAL PRINCES, PRIESTS
AND PROPHETS : 3:1-12
6. A GOLDEN AGE TO COME AFTER
THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY : 4:1-13
7. THE ADVENT OF THE KING
OF KINGS : 5:1-15
8. REPENTANCE PREREQUISITE TO
RESTORATION : 6:1-7:10
9. THE RESTORATION : 7:11-20

THE SUPERScription

Superscription means that which is written above or on the outside. By this superscription to the messages the prophet has verbally delivered, which he now puts to writing, Micah gives us a clear picture of his person, his ministry, and the times in which he lived.

Micah calls himself the Morasthite. That is, he comes from the town of Moresheth in the southwestern part of Judah near the border to the Philistine territory. It is also called Moresheth-gath to pinpoint its location as near to Gath, a Philistine city. Can you find it on the map? As Moresheth-gath is mentioned but once in the Bible, in Micah alone, it must be an insignificant place. But God is no respecter of places, nor of persons. God can use you even if you come from the jungles of Borneo.

"In the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" circumscribes Micah's ministry within the longer one of Isaiah, whose ministry preceded Micah's by one king, viz; Uzziah.

We can be certain that he delivered his message in Samaria before the fall of this capital city of the Ten Northern Tribes of Israel, B.C. 722.

We are strengthened by Micah's boldness to speak to the highest authorities in both Samaria and Jerusalem. If he a nobody from some country farm had courage, under God, to testify to governors and kings, to withstand the hierarchy of false priests and prophets, let us be strong in our witness even to the leaders of our nation. There is a ministry to the poor, the common people. There is also a ministry to the rich and the powerful. Before God they are the same, of a lost mankind.

This reminds us of the Divine Commission to the apostle Paul: "For he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel. For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9:15,16).

Our Lord had earlier warned the disciples:

"And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved." (Matt 10:18,22).

PRAYER: Lord, help me to endure and suffer for Thy dear name's sake.
Amen.

MESSAGE OF DOOM TO SAMARIA

Though Micah belongs to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, he has a message from the Lord to Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He is so indignant at what is going on in Samaria that he calls to earth and heaven to witness against them. He calls upon the Lord God Himself who will pour out His pent-up wrath on a hypocritical nation. God will send, says the prophet, such terrible punishment as will leave the land utterly desolate. The description of the coming destruction is that of an earthquake, of a volcano and avalanche.(v.4).

Why such a holocaust? Israel is judged for her sin of apostasy from her monotheistic faith. Instead of worshipping Jehovah, the living and true God, Samaria has become a den for all kinds of graven images and idols. The importation of Baalism into Samaria since Ahab's reign has persisted like a cancerous growth to Micah's day. Neither can Judah escape this indictment. So Jerusalem gets a side-jab from the prophet at this point as well.

Idolatry is spiritual harlotry (v. 7). Judgment on these idols is sure to come in the pending Assyrian invasion. These idols unable to save their worshippers, much less themselves, will be taken by the Assyrian king Sargon. He says, "Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols? (Isaiah 10:11). The destruction of Samaria is further described as a heap of ruins (v. 6), though Jerusalem was spared until 150 years later.

Today, we might not have idols in the Protestant Churches (though there are plenty in the Roman Catholic Church), yet we are exhorted to keep ourselves from idols (I John 5:21). Covetousness, says the Apostle Paul, is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). It also has an image, and it is the \$ sign. A Church that looks to riches, and not the Lord God, commits idolatry.

In the light of the impending Assyrian invasion the prophet sees himself "stripped and naked", like a mourning refugee or captive (of Isa 20:2-4), but will his warning be seriously taken by his hearers? "But, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5).

So, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7).

PRAYER: Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.

 MESSAGE OF DOOM TO JERUSALEM

Having denounced Samaria in the strongest possible terms, Micah's prophescope now swings over to Judah and its capital city Jerusalem. But the invasion of Judah described here does not coincide with the Assyrian. It is something yet future. It took place 150 years later under the sway of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian hordes.

In this prophecy of a latter time, the prophet sees twelve Judean cities and townships in the vicinity of his home town, Moresheth, taken. A good number of these townships cannot be found on the map. Suffice us to identify the better known ones such as Gath and Lachish.

"Declare it not at Gath, weep not at all" (v. 10) is lament after David's mourning of King Saul (IISam 1:20), lest the Philistine enemies of Judah rejoice. As to Lachish, it is the most important of the cities enumerated. It was fortified by Rehoboam and was sought as a refuge by Amaziah from the conspiracy formed against him in Jerusalem. After the capture of its Holy City by Nebuchadnezzar, Lachish alone remained (with Azekah) of the defenced cities of Judah. It appears from its position as a border city to have been the channel for the introducing into the kingdom of Judah the idolatry set up by Jeroboam in Israel (Ellicott).

Now, on the names of each of these towns there is a word-play, for example, Aphrah (v. 10) rhymes with the Hebrew word *aphar* = dust. So to the people of Aphrah comes the prophet's taunt to roll in the *aphar* (dust). Then for Achzib there is the Hebrew word *achzab* = deceptive. So the people of Achzib are denounced to be a lie to the kings of Israel. By way of local illustration, Singapore's name was changed to Syonan during the Japanese occupation of World War II. As Singaporeans under the Japanese were restricted in their movements, we called Singapore a Bird Cage, since Syonan rhymes with *Chiolang*, which means Bird Cage in the Teochew dialect.

It is not necessary for us to go into the word-play in each name of the twelve towns. It is enough to know that such word-play is a form of effective rhetoric in the prophet's message.

The concluding verse (16) sees Judah going finally into captivity, naked like the bald head of vultures.

READ: Ps. 42, a psalm for those going into exile.

INDICTMENT AND DELIVERANCE

Micah having denounced both Samaria and Jerusalem for their idolatries now proceeds to indict them on other counts. To indict is to charge with crime formally or in writing. The crimes are exposed here for our admonition.

1. Plotting and conspiracy night and day (v.1).
2. Encroachment by force and fraud (v.2).

This reminds of our Lord's condemnation of the Jews in His day for devouring widows' houses and making long prayers to cover up (Mark 12:40).

To these devourers of the weak God answers with poetic justice. When the Assyrian captors come into the land will they not do the same to these wicked landlords who have swallowed up others? When they come there will be no measuring of area or payment of money (v.5). It will be a day of brutality over the brutal.

In vv.6 & 7 the scornful reply to the Prophet's threat: Don't prate to us with such idle talk. We will not be embarrassed. Jehovah won't be so impatient to do such things. Has He not promised to deal with Israel graciously, whose ways are upright?

Micah counters: "You strip the garments off the back of unsuspecting peaceful wayfarers like taking booty in war. You drive women away from their children. For a tiny thing you exact an exorbitant pledge" (v.v.8-10). Such demands are like the Shylockian pound of flesh (Shakespeare).

What a contrast is Micah's message with the false prophet's talk of wine and strong drink. Can a drunkard speak God's Word?

Despite the condemnations, the prophet sees a day when God the Good Shepherd will gather His children like the sheep of Bozrah (a sheep centre). The Messiah in the role of "the Breaker" (that butts open the door) will demolish every obstacle that the sheep might follow through. Jehovah will go before His flock to lead them to peace. What grace, what mercy, that cannot be manifested but by a loving Father. So does He deal with His wayward Church today.

SING: Just as I am without one plea.
But that Thy Blood was shed for me ...

PROFESSIONAL PRINCES, PRIESTS AND PROPHETS

Micah's indictment which begins with powerful landlords grasping lands and houses (2:2) and leading on to peeling garments off the backs of visitors to the land (2:8) now climaxes with the flesh of the people being eaten (v.v.3,5). Here we see the law of the jungle being enacted dripping red by tooth and claw. Who are these beasts of prey that eat up God's people?

First on the list are the false prophets. A false prophet need not be one that teaches heresy. A professional prophet, whose God is his belly (Phil 3:19) and says Calvin, "whose religion is his kitchen", is also a false prophet. We find plenty of them in Micah's day, in St. Paul's day and in our day. Upon such prophets or preachers in our day, God sends darkness while it should be day. "Ye shall not have a vision" (v.6) and they shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God" (v.7). No wonder there is no power from many a pulpit today. The reason behind is that gluttonous eating and drinking has brought drowsiness and drunkenness. As for Micah, he can testify of that pent-up divine power in him that cannot be contained. He must release it against the transgressions of the heads of the house of Jacob.

Next on the line are the princes who take bribes and the priests who will not perform their duties until they get paid. Similarly, the prophets "divine for money" (v.11). Hypocritically they claim the Lord to be among them. They rely on a make-believe security. They are victims of their own deception.

For the sins of the leaders of Israel, yea, even of Zion (Judah) retribution must come. The land will be devastated and deserted through the ravages of war. Let every Christian nation take note. Let Christians pray for their Government. "For kings and all that are in authority that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim 2:2) Amen.

THOUGHT: "Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough and they are shepherds that cannot understand; they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter" (Isaiah 56:11).

A GOLDEN AGE TO COME AFTER THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

One characteristic of Old Testament prophecy is that the prophet, while lamenting over the evils of his day, would invariably look forward to that day when restoration should come to this sin-cursed earth. Of particular prominence are the glowing terms by which that Golden Age is described in Micah. Micah 4:1-3 = Isaiah 2:2-4 almost word for word. Micah's description transcends even that in Isaiah with v.4: "But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree: and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it". This verse is reflective of the zenith of prosperity attained by Israel in the earlier part of Solomon's reign, which was a foreshadowing of the Greater Solomon in His millennial rule. Observes New Bible Commentary: "This indicates that the final world order will not be any kind of socialist or Marxist state ownership of all property, but every man will remain undisturbed in the enjoyment of his own personal property"(P. 756).

Before the Golden Age comes, Israel must go through many sufferings, even into exile after exile, when the Lord will come to their rescue and be their King. Before the final regathering, however, Judah must be taken into captivity by the Babylonians (v.10).

The prophet leaps forward into the distant future again where he sees many nations gathered against Mount Zion. God who is Israel's secret defence will equip Israel with "iron horns" and "brass (bronze) hoofs" (v13), with such powerful offensive and defensive weapons that will repel their invaders. The many wars Israel has won against her enemies since her independence 1948 are progressive fulfilments of this divine guarantee.

In view of the fact that regathered Israel today is fast fulfilling the Messianic prophecies, do you not realise how momentous are the days in which we live? The coming of the Messiah, even our Saviour Jesus Christ, is so near that it may take place any day now. Are you ready to meet Him? What have you done for His Kingdom?

SING: Prepare to meet thy God,
 The King of Kings is come
 Behold He comes with flaming sword!
 To judge the world.
 Behold He comes, with flaming sword,
 In righteousness, to judge the world.

 BY THE ADVENT OF THE KING OF KINGS

The prophet sees at the beginning of this chapter a national crisis in which the judge of Israel is smitten. Zedekiah the last Jewish king was thus humiliated by the Chaldeans (II Ki 24). Possibly v.1 was fulfilled when Aristobulus the Jewish king was defeated by Pompey in BC 63.

In contrast with this vanquished king, a new Jewish Ruler is seen to arise from the little town of Bethlehem (ancient name, Ephrathah, cf Gen 35:19; Ruth 1:1,2). This new ruler is no ordinary human being for His origin is from everlasting. Who is this other than Jesus the Babe of Bethlehem?

Since this Ruler is to save His own people, God will for the duration give up the Israelites for disciplinary judgments. The seed of the woman promised in Gen. 3:15 is to be born in travail (from the womb of the Virgin). (v.3).

Christ will now defend His people against their enemies, Assyria being the representative in Micah's time. And Christ will defend His people with seven shepherds and eight principal men who are the heroes of faith in sacred and Church history. As far as Church history is concerned, we must count from the apostles, and those who are raised in successive ages should surely include leaders like Athanasius, Augustine, Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, Knox, etc.

The end times appear in the remaining verses of this chapter. Assyria is symbolic of the area formerly held by the hostile world power. Nimrod was the first founder of Assyria.

The true believers of Israel will be a blessing to all mankind as refreshing showers upon the grass, as they disseminate the Gospel in that Day (v.7).

The victory of Israel over the Gentile powers will not come from the arm of flesh. All their horses and chariots (armoured cars and tanks today) and fortifications will not count in their victory through the power of God (v.8-11).

God's people will also be cleansed from all idols and heresy. The climax is reached when the wrath of God will be rained down upon a rebellious world, such as the world had never seen before.

SING: "Prepare to meet thy God – He comes to save His own!
Behold the Son of God our Lord sits on the throne.
From heaven he comes, the Son of God
In clouds of heaven to save His own.

REPENTANCE PREREQUISITE TO RESTORATION

This long section calling for repentance from their many sins is addressed both to Judah and Israel. While the mention of Omri and Ahab (6:16) had direct reference to Israel, nevertheless, through Athaliah the daughter Baalism was spread also to the Southern Kingdom.

The mountains and hills have witnessed God's mercies upon His people from the days of the Exodus to the present. So they are called to testify as the prophet remonstrates with his generation. Their apostasy in yielding to the wiles of Balak and Balaam is one ancient sin mentioned here against them – idolatry and fornication.

Sacrifices costing much money and expense cannot take away sin without repentance. Interestingly v.8 was chosen by Jimmy Carter at the time of his installation as President of the United States. And what is the use of giving to God on the one hand and cheating one's neighbour on the other (vv.11,12)? Therefore God will smite the hypocrites with famine and heavy losses in their land cultivation (Mal 3:8-10).

On behalf of true Israel, Micah further confesses her sins before God, while there is a mourning for fruitlessness in their productivity efforts.

Morality and integrity have so degenerated as to disappear from the scene. Crime and intrigue run rampant. Princes and judges are corrupt, and he who bribes well is covered up. The best specimen in the community is no better than a brier and a thorn hedge. The watchmen, i.e. the prophets, warn against their wickedness but in vain. No one can be trusted, not even one's wife. In the family there is strife between the older and younger generations so that a man's enemies are the men of his own house (7:6).

With this confession the prophet can look to God for salvation. Entrusting himself to God he can face his enemies and their ridicule.

MEMORISE: "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". (Isa. 1:8).

THE RESTORATION

Micah's preaching is herewith concluded with another glimpse of the end-times that lead to Christ's millennial rule on earth.

In that day when the walls of God's Kingdom will be built, its boundary will also be extended: *decree* in KJV is translated *boundary* in NIV. (cf Isa. 54:1-3). God's Kingdom on earth in Micah's time will be extended far beyond the borders of Palestine. Her widely scattered exiles from sea to sea will return. Converts from all over the world will join with believing Israel.

There will be a terrible destruction of the earth because of the deeds of her inhabitants. After the destruction of the rebellious world powers the Shepherd will take charge of Israel, now converted. (Israel today is in deep trouble because she still rejects Christ). Israel will have full enjoyment of her land, the good land of Bashan and Gilead as in olden days, and not be shut up in Carmel.

God will perform miracles to save Israel as He did in Moses's day. All the Gentile nations will be reduced to the dust before the manifestation of God's mighty power.

Remembering his name Micah, the prophet exults, "Who is a God like unto thee?" Not so much in respect of power, but rather of mercy. So the prophet declares his confidence in His compassion. God will "cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (7:19). God will do this because He is a covenant — keeping God, who has sworn to Abraham and Jacob. This is the gospel of the Kingdom, the everlasting gospel unto the end of days. Amen.

SING: Prepare to meet thy God:
All knees before Him bow!
The King of Kings, the Lord of Lords
Will save you now!
Repent, Believe; Give Christ your heart-
Before His throne all knees shall bow.

PRAYER: Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

In the days of
MICAHA

SYRIA

DAMASCUS □

SEA
OF
GALILEE

ISRAEL

□
SAMARIA

JERUSALEM

□
Bethlehem

Adullam

Gath ° Mareshah

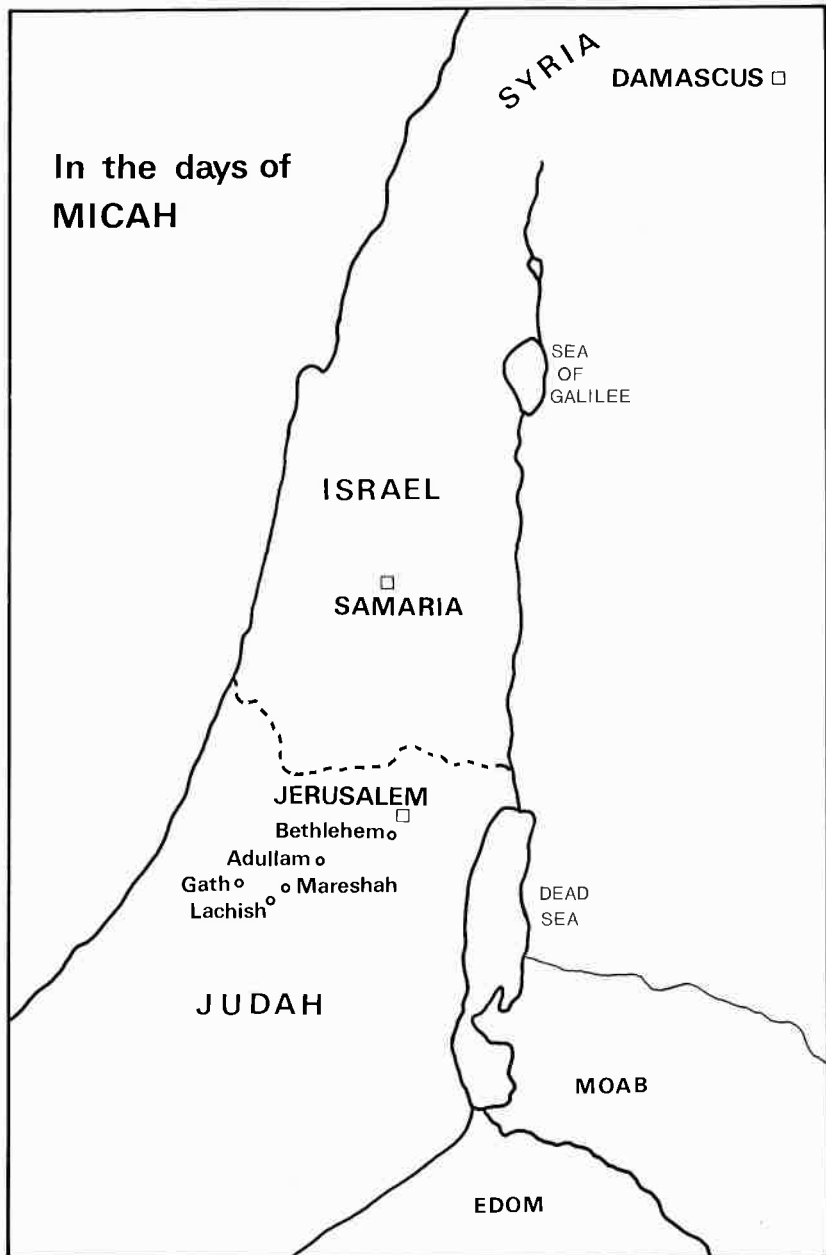
Lachish °

DEAD
SEA

JUDAH

MOAB

EDOM



This Applied Commentary on Isaiah and Micah is a follow-up of an Applied Commentary on John's Gospel and Epistles by the same author. As with John's Gospel and Epistles, it is the binding into one volume the RPG (Read, Pray and Grow) Daily Bible Reading Work-books written on Isaiah and Micah over a period of time. A more permanent record, this book is offered to the Christian public beyond the RPG reading circles.

The sixteen Prophetical Books of the Old Testament are four-fifths the length of the New Testament. Whereas the New Testament is familiar ground to many, the Prophets seem to be a closed territory. This is due to a lack of knowledge of their historical background, and of a proper perspective of what the Prophets see. By bringing both the historical background and the Prophets' vision into focus through this commentary, the Reader can now enjoy a clearer picture of God's salvation plan in the Prophetic Word what seemed before a jigsaw puzzle.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

- 1) An Anthology of Sermons and Verses**
- 2) Songs and Verses from the Holy Land**
- 3) Pioneering in Dayak Borneo by Jason Linn**
(Translation from Chinese)
- 4) An Abridgment of Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion Vol. 1, Book I & II**
- 5) Forty John Sung Revival Sermons Vol. 1 & 2**
(Translation from Chinese)
- 6) In John Sung's Steps —**
the Story of Lim Puay Hian
- 7) The Gospel of Life**